

Introduction

Against all authority
Anarchism and the literary imagination

The specter of anarchism has long haunted the troubled dreams of political authorities and economic elites. Anarchy, the philosophy that non-elites can effectively govern their own affairs in the absence of instituted leaders, has spooked state rulers of the capitalist and so-called socialist nations alike, who have devoted considerable resources to extinguish it. The belief that anarchism had been vanquished in the mid twentieth century proved to be mistaken. In the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first, the ghost of anarchy has recently enjoyed a stunning resurgence. Anarchism has provided much of the political inspiration for the alternative globalization movements that have emerged since the 1990s, particularly within the movements that have arisen in the liberal democracies of the global North. Alternative globalization activists, seeking alternatives to the failed projects of statist socialism and communism, have found in anarchism a political perspective that challenges capitalism, liberal democracy, and the traditional leftist movements alike.

At the same time the return of anarchism has also spurred an often violent backlash from instituted political and economic authorities who are fully aware of the potency of the anarchist challenge to states, capital, and the elite ideologies that justify their rule. The discourses of government spokespeople, police officers, corporate media, and business public relations documents have presented anarchists as nothing less than a threat to civilization itself. Mainstream media has depicted anarchists, particularly street protesters during meetings of global capital such as the World Trade Organization and International Monetary Fund, as hooligans, degenerates, rioters, and gangsters. These fevered depictions recall the language of the first “red scares” and suggest that

anarchists once again stand at the center of paranoiac fears within state capitalist moral panics.

Unfortunately the uniform chorus of condemnation of anarchy from various elites has served to obscure the actual perspectives and practices of a major social movement. It has also served to dismiss the interests and motives of thousands of political actors from a range of social and geographical backgrounds. While anarchism is presented by opponents as a destructive movement based on anger, proponents know it as a richly creative movement based on mutual aid and affinity. Even more, the diversity of anarchist interests and its holistic approach to social change is overlooked. Far from being a straightforward political movement, concerned with political issues narrowly conceived, anarchism has contributed to movements in literature, art, and culture more broadly. Yet anarchist engagements with creative movements and cultural production have largely been overlooked. Attention to anarchist contributions to creative work provides needed insight into anarchist movements and their perspectives on and contributions to broader social change. It also poses important challenges to dominant cultural traditions within state capitalist societies and offers a glimpse into a promising alternative for radically transformed social relationships against the hierarchical, unequal, and unjust structures that have long characterized statist and capitalist societies.

Against All Authority provides an opportunity to rethink anarchist ideas and initiatives. It offers something of a corrective to the limited portrayals of anarchy that have dominated for far too long. The book examines historical and contemporary engagements of anarchism and literary production. Anarchists have used literary production to express opposition to values and relations characterizing advanced capitalist (and socialist) societies while also expressing key aspects of the alternative values and institutions proposed within anarchism. Among favored themes are anarchist critiques of corporatization, inequality, and patriarchal relations as well as explorations of developing anarchist perspectives on revolution, ecology, sexuality, and mutual aid. These are inspired by and serve to inspire the anarchist imagination.

A central feature of anarchist perspectives is the belief that means and ends should correspond. Thus, in anarchist literature as in anarchist politics, a radical approach to form is as important as content. Anarchist literature joins other critical approaches to creative production in attempting to break down divisions between readers and writer, audience and artist, encouraging all to become active participants in shared creative processes. Engaging with creative anarchist endeavors, in which literary production

is part of a holistic approach to everyday resistance, provides insights into the dreams, desires and concerns of those who pursue positive social change. It also allows a greater understanding of alternative worldviews in the contemporary period. In anarchist movements the literary imagination plays a rich part, as glimpse into ongoing anarchist histories show.

Against hegemony: toward anarchy

The need for imaginative criticism is ever more pressing. Issues like industrial poisoning and nuclear threats take precedence, for many working people, over more immediate concerns for subsistence, such as poverty and the exploitation of labor, even of their own labor. For anarchist social critic, Paul Goodman (1994, 3): “This is significant because the great revolutionary motivation of physical pain and immediate distress in America, diminished; the biological dangers that are cried up require imagination to understand.” At the same time the forces of distress can create a sense of despair, defeatism or futility discouraging social change.

The ideological surround of state capitalism can be overwhelming, presenting a sense of capitalism as a natural, unchangeable system. The ideology of state capital as the only world, let alone the best of all possible worlds, reinforced in media, legal, educational, political, and economic discourses is hegemonic – it dominates views and understandings of the world and its structures (political, economic, environmental, social, and cultural). The power of this hegemony of state capitalism is such that it can become difficult for people to even imagine alternatives, let alone have the confidence to attempt to pursue the alternatives that they might envision or hope for.

At the present time there is, at least in the global North, no revolutionary spirit, no expression of radical counter-movements capable of broad social transformation (rather than protest movements). There is no organized counter-force that might realistically challenge states and capital, few of what I term “infrastructures of resistance” that might sustain struggles against states and capital over time and place (Shantz 2010a). Even less can there be said to be a “revolutionary culture” or even “radical culture” that infuses society as in previous periods of broad social upheaval and transformation.

For large numbers of people, detached from community, or even neighborhood, alienated and exploited, talk of change is more than hopeless, it is unsettling. Paul Goodman (1994, 5) suggests that where there is no realistic alternative, even the suggestion of social change can rouse anxiety. Anxiety further hampers imagination and initiative.

Moments of crisis evoke panicked responses but things quickly return to business as usual. Few are moved to change their conditions of life. The movements that spring up around moments of state capitalist spectacle, that become part of the spectacle, do not resonate more broadly with diverse cross-sections of the population. They do not stir the imagination or move the spirit. Neither do they provide lasting means of expression to incite, engage, or encourage the population(s) that they would seek, or claim to seek, to inspire.

Media and arts and letters become part of the bureaucratic administration of things (an irony in view of Engels who saw that as communism): standard commodities for private consumption. Created for profit, arts and letters become means for profit—either as objects themselves, or as commodities to aid in the circulation of capital (advertising). Concerns for profit and administration dominate taste, style, communication and education—the circulation of ideas most broadly. Practices and forms of discourse and intercourse that were previously rooted in community life, material needs, or spontaneous expressions of personal creativity have become products of multinational, billion dollar corporate conglomerates with something to sell.

Meaningful interpretations of human experience are eclipsed by considerations of markets, exchange and surplus value. In terms of the market, for Goodman:

Its moral justification is really a self-proving superstition; it 'solves' in its own style problems that it has created itself; its research is incestuously staffed from its own bureaucrats who work for their own aggrandizement and cannot see anything else. (Goodman 1994, 6)

These have become the new myths, the new religions.

Where there is no sense of real alternatives, of realistic possibilities for different ways of doing things in a way that sustains people in the longer term, anarchists have long noted, partly due to the conviction that under current circumstances, and given the current balance of forces, that a radical attempt at broad social change would end badly. As Goodman (*ibid.*, 5) suggests: "Any revolutionary action, it is deeply believed, must use the same methods and must come out with the same results as being part of a very similar machine." Here the incapacity of radical visions to rise beyond the failed experiments and disastrous models of previous, typi-

cally authoritarian, practice, weighs heavily on present, and future, expressions of revolutionary desire.

For Goodman, this is related to the radical imaginary:

Partly, it is that there is a lack of social imagination *of* alternatives to the way of life. As I have frequently argued, this lack of imagination, the sentiment that 'Nothing Can Be Done,' is self-causing and self-proving in the very conditions that the critics attack. (ibid., 4)

Social change requires a certain inspiration as much as an analysis of conditions.

Cracking state capitalist hegemony requires more than appeals to reason or the presentation of detailed analysis and evidence. Many people, perhaps most, already know that capitalism is a profoundly unjust social arrangement. For many anarchists, pure politics is never enough. Politics must inspire the passions. It must draw upon the imagination as well as the intellect. In the words of DIY anarchist Professor Calamity:

I don't trust political people who don't appreciate fiction. Too much of our politics, even anarchist politics, lacks imagination. The problems are so numbing in their complexity and scope that we *need* to be able to draw upon the most imaginative solutions possible to have any chance. I also believe that fiction tends to be more effective propaganda for the extreme left than Noam Chomskyesque critiques. (Quoted in Killjoy 2009, 74)

Fiction will always inspire practical politics in important ways. For Professor Calamity:

Fiction can speak to the heart, something that's much needed for anarchist struggles. We're talking about a radical change, not just in economic terms but also in how we relate to each other and the world. I would think fiction would be better at articulating this than non-fiction. It is not surprising to me that totalitarian regimes like the Nazis, Italian Fascists, Bolsheviks, etc. first ban (and then burn) fiction works as dangerous. Fiction has a strange power to move people and 'stick' with them. (ibid., 75)

For the great anarchist agitator and organizer, Emma Goldman, literature, poetry, and drama provide ways to reach new, otherwise inaccessible, audiences. They also provide engaging and exciting ways to speak with people beyond polemic and diatribe. Over time, Goldman lost faith in what she called "the wonder worker" – the spoken word, political speech, the soapbox – that had contributed so much to her own popularity and notoriety. Instead Goldman moved to emphasize the power of print, the mobilizing capacity of literature. Literature is a key part of the 'terrible

struggle of the thinking man and woman against political, social and moral conventions' (Goldman 1972, 111). In Goldman's view:

The very fact that most people attend meetings only if aroused by newspaper sensations, or because they expect to be amused, is proof that they really have no inner urge to learn. It is altogether different with the written mode of human expression. (ibid., 14)

For Goldman, literature matches the creative, inspiring, elevating basis of love. This provides the force for a new world itself (ibid., 167).

The question, for anarchists, is not how to achieve, maintain and administer power, as many leftists claim, but, rather, to awaken and inspire initiative—the real fount of power. As Goodman stresses:

Despite the prevalent superstition to the contrary, there could be alternative ways of modern life, and some of the critics propose them, but the point is for people to feel themselves differently than they do. (Goodman 1994, 7)

Anarchists seek to ignite the fires of initiative. Anarchists, stressing the free, direct, voluntary participation of people in the matters of decision that impact their lives—that people have the capacity to make themselves and their communities—always depend on the creativity, inventiveness and courage of human initiative. This is the force of, for example, do-it-yourself (DIY) in anarcho-punk literature, art and music. It also speaks to the ongoing connections between anarchism and literary production. For anarchists, the literary imagination has played a key part in this.

The truly anarchist literature means what it says and expects that it will make a difference (ibid., 60). Anarchist genres often seek, or succeed, to make something of community. There is a strong sense expressed in anarchist criticism that not only is this or that specific issue a problem, but, rather, the overall arrangement of social life. Anarchist criticism includes various forms—revolutionary, utopian, apocalyptic. The apocalyptic literature of primitivism, the poetic terrorism of postmodern anarchy—they offer, at least, an emotional call for insurrection.

Anarchism provides a vital alternative—a way of understanding the world that challenges the assertions of state capitalist hegemony while suggesting that things can be (and have been) done differently and better. At its best it provides realistic visions for a different world that might be realized in fact. Anarchists undermine aspects of state capitalist hegemony, acting, and writing in a corrosive manner against capitalist ideology. Anarchism encourages openness to new experiences and perspectives, experimentation with style and form.

Anarchy is order

One of the difficulties in properly understanding anarchism has been that both popular and academic portrayals of anarchism typically, rather badly, misrepresent anarchist movements and ideas. The most familiar image of anarchism is perhaps the black trench coat-wearing man of shadows holding a bomb. This symbol is presented in works of fiction such as *The Secret Agent* and *The Man Who Was Thursday* as well as in popular media accounts. It is one that has returned in the twenty-first century as anarchism has enjoyed a revival in the context of alternative globalization politics. Not merely a manifestation of public fear or moral panic, the anarchist as man-with-a-bomb has recently made a comeback in academic literature on terrorism since 9/11 (Gelvin 2008, 2010).

The image of the anarchist bomb thrower is closely associated with another, more academic, misrepresentation of anarchist thought. That is, as Lyman Tower Sargent (1983) notes, the misconception that anarchism is merely individualism or nihilism, the philosophy of the detached individual. In fact, most of anarchist thought has emphasized cooperation and communal or collective action against the detached individualism promoted by capitalist rhetoric.

For anarchists, society is not a simple grouping of individuals. Neither does anarchy suggest society will be unorganized. On the contrary, anarchists stress that most of social life, even in archaic societies, is built on voluntary relations of support and care in which neighbors look out for neighbors and people interact on the basis of mutually peaceful recognition. The most significant and influential theoretical works of anarchism, *Mutual Aid*, *State and Anarchy*, and *Anarchism in Action*, are all detailed analyses of the central place of cooperation in human societies and the significance of mutual aid and support in human development, individual and social.

In order to understand anarchism and the literary imagination it is necessary to outline some of the key themes and approaches in anarchist thought more broadly. One might begin with a rather poetic offering from the anarchist author John Henry MacKay who describes anarchy as follows:

ANARCHY

Ever reviled, accursed, ne'er understood,
 Thou art the grisly terror of our age.
 'Wreck of all order,' cry the multitude,
 'Art thou, and war and murder's endless rage.'
 O, let them cry. To them that ne'er have striven
 The truth that lies behind a word to find,
 To them the word's right meaning was not given.
 They shall continue blind among the blind.
 But thou, O word, so clear, so strong, so pure,
 Thou sayest all which I for goal have taken.
 I give thee to the future! Thine secure
 When each at least unto himself shall waken.
 Come it in sunshine? In the tempest's thrill?
 I cannot tell – but it the earth shall see!
 I am an Anarchist! Wherefore I will
 Not rule, and also ruled I will not be! (Quoted in Goldman 1972, 47)

The word “anarchy” comes from the ancient Greek term “anarchos” and means “without a ruler.” While ruling elites, not surprisingly, proclaim that the end of rule will inevitably lead to a descent into chaos and turmoil, anarchists maintain that external, authoritarian rule is unnecessary for the preservation of order. Rather than a descent into a Hobbesian war of all against all, a society without instituted government authority suggests to anarchists the very possibility for creative and peaceful human relations. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first to identify positively his theory as anarchist, neatly summarized the anarchist perspective in his famous slogan: “Anarchy is Order.”

Peter Kropotkin, the most significant anarchist theorist, offered the following influential definition of anarchism as:

the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government—harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. (Kropotkin 1910, 914)

Another definition is provided by individualist anarchist James J. Martin, who notes certain commonalities in anarchism, despite the overall diversity of anarchist thought. For Martin:

When anarchism in its several forms, including its theoretical statements and practical experiments, is analyzed structurally, it generally

separates into three broad areas of tactics and strategy: (a) a rejection of constituted authority as the source of social dynamism and equilibrium; (b) a refusal to collaborate with the existing order anywhere through participation in any program of reformism; (c) the promotion of a variety of noncoercive alternatives of quite clearly defined nature as a substitute. (Martin 1970, vii)

Anarchists base their analysis of social relations on the importance of voluntary rather than coercive interaction. For anarchists, coercion cannot provide the basis for freedom. Coercive interaction has only negative results over time. Coercion negatively impacts humans at the emotional and the behavioral levels. Real freedom can only be realized through voluntary relations and interactions. According to Lyman Tower Sargent: "Anarchism is a political philosophy contending that no one (individual or group) should hold coercive authority" (1983, 6). For anarchists, social problems result from the fact that people are not allowed to direct their own lives according to the needs of themselves and their communities. Too much time and energy are expended and lost in trying to control others (for authorities) and in trying to escape control by others (for subordinates). This is not merely an effect of political or economic power. It extends to other spheres of life, including personal relationships, the family, schools, and culture more broadly.

For anarchists, the regulatory and supervisory mechanisms of the state are especially suited to producing docile and dependent subjects. Through institutions like courts and prisons, but also social policies and ideological media, authorities extend the practices of ruling from control over bodies to influence over minds. Moral regulation provides a subtle means for nurturing repression and conformity. It can contribute to the development of relations of dependence rather than self-determination, as practices of the state increasingly come to be viewed as the only legitimate mechanisms for solving disputes or addressing social needs. For anarchists the "rule of law" administered through the institutions of the state is not the guarantor of freedom, but, rather, freedom's enemy, closing off alternative avenues for human interaction, creativity, and community while containing more and more people within its own bounds.

Anarchism is more than a rejection of authority, however. It also founds its politics on the recognition of the positive benefits of voluntary cooperation and mutual aid. Not a reactive position (against authority), anarchism is a positive theory (*for* mutuality and solidarity). In the absence of direct authority and power (state or police) people tend to get along, going about their affairs without interfering with or bothering others. Under such circumstances, broadly extended, society can thrive.

In times of crisis, social or natural, when it might be expected that people would be at their most self-serving and opportunistic, it turns out that people tend to come together, in the absence of the state, to look after one another and help one another out. Examples such as Hurricane Katrina and the British Petroleum oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico show this, as do numerous other examples.

As the anarchist theorist Colin Ward suggests:

Given a common need, a collection of people will, by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of chaos — this order being more durable than any kind of externally imposed order. (Ward 1966, 103)

People tend to stand by and take responsibility for decisions that they have been actively involved in arriving at. Even more, they tend to view these decisions as being more legitimate and far more reasonable than decisions that are imposed from outside. This sort of order cannot be coercive. Instead it is: “(1) voluntary, (2) functional, (3) temporary, and (4) small” (ibid., 101). This provides the basis for a radical, even revolutionary politics that is distinct from the statist, party-based politics of the authoritarian variants of socialism and communism.

Anarchism has developed an approach unique in revolutionary or leftist politics. While these politics have tended to emphasize the industrial or so-called productive spheres of life, anarchism has long focused on so-called domestic or non-industrial spheres. Mutual aid and care have always been at the center of anarchist theory and politics. Anarchists have taken radical analysis beyond the typical realms of politics (state) and economy (market) that have dominated radical movements on the left more broadly. Thus, very early on, anarchists have given serious attention to the family, sex, education, and relationships, as sites of strength and struggle.

Anarchism is marked by two primary overall tendencies. The first, and predominant, is collective or social anarchism. The second, a minority today, and within the history of anarchism, is philosophical or individualist anarchism with its emphasis on individual liberty and personal transformation. Social anarchism focuses on equality and social transformation through collective effort, including the possibility of revolutionary action. Philosophical anarchism places greater emphasis on individual freedom to act unfettered by the constraints of social mores and norms. Philosophical anarchism also differs from social anarchism in its distrust of social organization, including the mass organizing for radical or revolutionary social change preferred by socialists and social anarchists. It is philosophical anarchism, with its emphasis on personal innovation and creativity

that has inspired artists such as Eugene O'Neill, and James Joyce, though Joyce also engages with revolutionary syndicalism. Others, such as Ursula K. LeGuin, have been inspired by social anarchism and the theories of Peter Kropotkin.

There emerge productive tensions in the understandings of how anarchism might address the real world and/or the world of fiction. Is anarchy a call to literary and intellectual freedom or a vision of political organizing? Differences emerge over views of the role of art and literature and the responsibility of the artist (and/or activist). For many anarchists, writing is part of their political work. Many take an individual approach, producing and distributing their work in do-it-yourself networks outside mainstream publishing channels and commercial markets. Anarchist author Ursula K. LeGuin offers a brief description of the anarchist: "One who, choosing, accepts the responsibility of choice" (quoted in Killjoy 2009, 12). The most striking and memorable fiction has always been ungovernable, representing a sense of risk. And this too well describes anarchy.

Anarchism and the literary imagination

Anarchists have spoken to both literary creation and the connections between literature, literary production, and society and social change. Anarchist writings on literature, and indeed anarchist literature, have received much less attention and been the subject of much less discussion than has Marxist literary criticism, which has, indeed, become an established part of the academic canon in literary criticism. Similarly the anarchist aspects of literature (and anarchist literature itself), have been much less examined, analyzed, and debated than have developments such as socialist realism and other variants of Marxist or socialist literature.

Marxist critics, including Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton, have become well regarded and respected figures within the mainstream of literary criticism and their works key contributions to academic study. Even more, Marxist revolutionaries and activists, including most notably Lenin, Mao, Plekhanov, and Trotsky, have all been studied and discussed within academic and popular criticism, their works contributing to literary studies and literary theory over decades. The Marxist influences on well regarded and widely read authors as diverse as Bertolt Brecht, Jack

London, Victor Serge, and Ignacio Silone alike are well known and commented upon.

Such has certainly not been the case with anarchism, either at the level of literary creation or at the level of criticism and literary studies. There is no anarchist literary reading list and no consensus view on the subject of anarchist literature. Happily, however, there are beginning to emerge courses on anarchism and literature or anarchist literature. A shift is gradually taking place as a new generation of scholars, many awakened by the alternative globalization struggles of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, turns to anarchism as a perspective for understanding the world and as a force for positively changing it.

Anarchist interpretations of literature and anarchist literary criticism are spread through, and touch upon, a range of sources, academic and popular – those with limited circulation and those more broadly distributed. At the same time anarchist critics have not brought their perspectives together in more extensive volumes, as have Marxist and post-modern critics. As well, it might be said that while topics such as the state, economy, family, sexuality, prisons and punishment, ecology, and, even, psychology have all been central subjects of anarchist thought and discourse, literature has received less systematic or extended discussion within anarchist theory and analysis. This is curious given the influence that anarchist philosophy and practice have had on literary creation, including the works of major figures of literature. Anarchist sentiments, influences, and tendencies can be found in a range of writers and texts, from the explicitly anarchist to those who would not identify, or be identified, as anarchist. At the same time over the last century there have been important contributions by anarchists in critically rethinking literary creation. Indeed, recent scholarship notes the important part played by anarchist ideas in the development of literary modernism and postmodernism alike (Antliff, 2001; Shantz 2010b; Weir 1997).

For many of this emerging generation of scholars, the previous forms and expressions of radicalism that came to prominence among the academic left, particularly various forms of Marxism, are ill suited to offering inspiration or analysis for contemporary movements or struggles. For others, the radical criticisms of Marxism that emerged within critical theories and eventually post-structuralism and postmodernism are also found wanting, especially given their tendencies towards fatalism, defeatism, detached individualism, and obscurantism.

Anarchists, unlike many Marxists, have tended to stay away from notions of economic determinism or base-superstructure models of literature or literary production. Anarchists have stressed literature as part of

people's ways of understanding and acting upon, of changing, social relations. Experimentation in form and substance is valued as means by which people contest, challenge, supercede or destroy the old values, morals, and norms under state capitalist cultures, while developing new ways of relating, expressing, and viewing the world and people's place within it. Literature and culture, in addition to being made by political economy also remake political economy. Thus, while Marxist literature has tended to be dominated by socialist realism or "proletarian fiction," anarchist literature, notably, has perhaps disproportionately produced – and made real innovations in and contributions to – science fiction and speculative fiction.

Anarchists have often turned to the utopian novel as the means for expressing their visions of anarchist social relations and the form of possible worlds in which anarchy might be practiced. Anarchist author Paul Goodman notes the connection between science fiction or utopian literature and criticism. Utopian visions help criticism by offering an imaginable alternative. Why criticize if there is no way to imagine a different way of doing things? Goodman described himself as 'thinking up little expedients of how it could be otherwise':

I tend not to criticize, nor even to notice, until I can imagine something that would make more sense. My expedients are probably not workable in the form I conceive them, and I certainly do not know how to get them adopted – they are utopian literature – but they rescue me from the horror of metaphysical necessity, and I hope they are useful for my readers in the same way. (Goodman 1971, 236)

Partly this reflects the fact that anarchist societies have been realized in the modern era for only brief periods of time or within the context of small-scale experimental communities or intentional societies. At the same time it reflects the anarchist impulse toward creativity and a preference for imagining positive alternatives rather than (but not instead of) simply focusing on negative aspects of current social life.

This does not mean that anarchists abandon the task of, or dismiss the importance of, detailing and documenting social ills and injustices as part of broader processes of ending those ills and injustices. Anarchist literature does much in attacking social problems openly and clearly. Rather, it means that the emphasis of anarchist writers is on raising the imagination, inspiring new worlds, new ways of being, of raising the necessary questions about what might replace the mess of capitalism. Notably, too, rather than presenting the anarchist (or anarcho-syndicalist or socialist) future as a problem free utopia in which all contradictions and antagonisms have been resolved, anarchists honestly and unflinchingly, as in works like

LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, raise the problems confronting attempts at social transformation and the reconstruction of social life.

A key expression of the "scientific" aspirations of Marxist socialist theory is offered when Bertolt Brecht declares: "A Socialist Realist work of art lays bare the dialectical laws of movement of the social mechanism, whose revelation makes the mastery of man's fate easier" (1973, 13). Anarchists have been far less inclined to seek dialectical, or other, "laws" of social movement in art or literature. For anarchists, the mastery of people's fate is through human action and thought, not the workings of "social laws," the existence of which anarchists have been largely skeptical.

Similarly, while Marxists have viewed literary works as expressing "advances towards a continually stronger, bolder and more delicate humanity" (Craig 1975a, 13), anarchists have been less certain, always aware of the reverses and declines that can, and do, also emerge—particularly, it seems, following supposedly socialist revolutions. Anarchists have not followed Marxists in spending much time trying to devise a law of literary development (see Craig 1975b).

For anarchists the literary imagination is related to the social situation and changes in the situation or context will lead to changes in literature—but not in any direct or determined manner. Anarchist literature might be described in the manner used by the anarchist turned socialist Victor Serge in his description of the victimized poet Osip Mandelstam: "a subversive praise of the imagination, an affirmation of ungovernable thought" (1975, 437). Anarchism is the philosophy of ungovernability par excellence.

Anarchists share with some Marxists the concern with the human qualities embodied in the working classes and oppressed, their cultures, social relations, and social struggles. Anarchists emphasize working class language and speech, views, perspectives, and experiences. They draw upon the cultures of the working classes and oppressed. They defend against the imposition or naturalization of format and promote the vernacular and popular expressions, working class idioms and styles. Anarchists have stressed *how* one might write, how one might develop new forms of representation (beyond concerns for proper content).

Anarchists situate themselves within struggle (or are situated there by social relations). Their criticism is partisan and engaged. They are clear about their opposition to the current authoritarian order and do not take a detached, academic position. Instead they distinguish between those works that accept the existing conditions and those that seek to challenge them in content and form, style and substance. They prefer works that help people

in struggle understand struggles and perceive alternative orders to those works that simply entertain or confirm the current state of affairs.

The impacts of literature are difficult to quantify. Literature's effects are usually not immediate or tangible directly, although in times of social transformation, of course, these effects can be dramatic, playing into a widespread sense of hopefulness, change, and renewal. Literature can move us to action, trouble our conscience, raise new questions, or open new experiences. All of this can inspire us to change the world. At the same time, we must not expect too much from it. We cannot be disheartened or despair of the failure of literature to halt atrocities, as many writers did when confronted with the horrors of World War Two.

For anarchists, literature is a tool, and every tool can become a weapon – if you hold it right. The intention is not to provide *the* anarchist perspective on literature. Neither is it to speak to all varieties and forms of anarchist literature, much less to cover all authors, works, genres or periods of anarchist writing. The hope is that this work will provide an opening – allowing the reader to understand anarchism and anarchist approaches to literature, and to appreciate the richness and vitality of anarchism as a complex and diverse approach to life.

The Marxist literary critic David Craig, in his classic collection *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology*, found it acceptable to exclude Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Williams on the basis that “neither man has unambiguously avowed Marxism” (1975a, 23). At the same time both men, despite their contributions to Marxist theory, have the seeming disadvantage of having shown “demurrals at some Marxist axioms” (ibid., 23). Such nuanced relations to ideas is almost required of anarchist writers in their approach to anarchism. Anarchists thus tend to be more agnostic, less doctrinaire. They are certainly more open in terms of who is invited to be part of the club. Anarchists are mostly concerned with the separation of art and the artist into distinct, privileged categories within an unequal division of labor in which the creative expressions of regular folks are diminished, discouraged or eclipsed in favor of the works of “professional artists” who are positioned as experts who produce art as commodities.

Many might still be surprised at the notion that there is any anarchist literature, or anarchist contributions to literature. Readers who doubt the artistic or social significance of anarchist literature should read the works of Ursula K. LeGuin, or reread Joyce or revisit Soyinka. The present work might best be read alongside those works. Some shared point of discussion might help to move us beyond the general dismissal, contempt, panic, and misapprehension that often accompany any discussion of anarchism within statist societies – particularly in the current period of “age of ter-

ror" moral panic over anarchist direct actions and black bloc property destruction during political protests. *Against All Authority* invites and encourages such rereading. It offers its own rereading of these authors and more. It examines in detail various expressions of the literary imagination and literary production within anarchism.

Anarchist literary work remains diffuse and diverse, contradictory and distinct. Anarchist criticism is sporadic, disjointed, tentative, unsystematic. The present work is not intended to be authoritative or a fixed statement on anarchist literature or criticism. It is rather a beginning of a conversation, a starting point for future, further discussions.

There is no other comparable work available that examines anarchism and literature within the context of anarchist social movements. *Against All Authority* addresses a substantial gap in the literature both in modern literature, and overlooked connections with anarchist perspectives, and in political theory and theories of contemporary cultural movements. Hopefully it will prove of great interest for students of literature, politics, sociology, communication, and cultural studies as well as being of use to activists and members of community movements for whom anarchism represents a vital living movement.