

Epilogue. Anarchism & Academia, Insurrection & Illegality: Age Old Tensions Revisited

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The North American Anarchist Studies Network (NAASN) has positioned itself within the continental anarchist milieu as a network of idea producers, activists, theorists, historians, critics, students and teachers. Some of us are entrenched in universities, others with independent writing and research endeavors, but the thread that runs throughout remains stable—anarchist studies. Whilst some of us identify chiefly as activists and others as academics, we are all anarchists. Borrowing from Barbara Epstein, David Graeber¹ writes in *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*² that *anarchism* has replaced Marxism as the discipline of critical scholarship, whilst lamenting the lack of anti-Statists within the academy. If Graeber's account is correct, and Marxist scholars are moving aside for a new generation of anarcho-academics, how does this assertion compare to counterpoints proclaimed by other portions of our movement that scorn our studious eye?

Since the anarchist movement is fluid, amorphous, and more of a 'network of networks' than anything else, it is sometimes hard to pinpoint where there borders start and end. What *are* the boundaries of our movement? Can Ted Kaczynski, Noam Chomsky, the Conspiracy of Fire Cells, and the NAASN membership ranks really exist within a singular label? Amongst this taxonomic challenge, one can easily locate numerous anarchist-linked individuals and projects that have explicitly "anti-academic" tendencies and thus exhibit categorical ideological cleavages. In their final communiqué entitled, "As With Christ, Bash Back! News Is Dead," the anarcho-Queer insurrectionary network diagrams its enemies, including "academics," as the anonymous author(s) write:

Death to Christianity. Death to religion. Death to all state and corporate infiltrators. Death to the turncoats. Death to academics.

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Death to rapists. Death to liberal provocateurs. Death to the collegiate co-opters of gendervariancy.³

This label of “academics” serves as a form of erasure, flattening all students, teachers, etc. into a mish mosh of homogeneity—of enemy status.

In the 2012 book, *Queer Ultra Violence* chronicling the activities of the Bash Back! network, the editors explicitly attack those that would lend an academic lens to their movement. In the book’s conclusion, the editors give examples of contemporary scholars focused on “anti-social” Queer theory writing:

Some idiot tries basing his thesis on the queer riots at the G20; Judith Butler delivers a speech at a conference at the New School about “queer anarchism”; Jack Halberstam seeks to valorize the negative and trace the anti-social turn; a class at the University of California is called “criminal queer” (yet the instructor denounces the activity of insurrectionaries on that very campus)—one after another queer academics line up to jump on the negativity bandwagon. Each appropriates the activity of insurgents toward the ends of strengthening their own careers. They take anti-social activity and use it to reproduce the Academy as a central engine of society itself. This is the ultimate treason.⁴

This attack on the Queer theorists, both named and unnamed, cites a form of opportunism, a cashing in on the product of struggle. Many are quick to link such appropriations as a recuperation of anarchism, but not all references to social war are equal. While one can quickly point to the recuperative value of AXE body spray’s “Anarchy Is Here” advertising campaign⁵ or Kanye West & Jay-Z’s “No Church In The Wild”⁶ music video, a conference paper analyzing an emergent social movement serves a very different function.

Animal Liberation Front prisoner of war Walter Bond (aka Abdul Haqq) has expressed contempt for animal liberation scholars and anarchist-academics on numerous occasions, including during his rail against Derrick Jensen’s book *End Game*, writing:

I seem to have lost my patience with a great number of the mouthpieces in this ‘movement’, It’s gotten to the point where everyone with a laptop and an opinion about Animal Liberation, Earth Liberation or Human Liberation thinks that everything they

have to say is professionally valid...to all those that make a living from their ivory towers and have found a lucrative payday sounding good and doing nothing, you are nothing but a flash in the pan, here today gone tomorrow. May you choke on every penny that your privilege, position and posturing have afforded you.⁷

In other essays Bond repeats this manner of attack. In a November 2011 statement of solidarity and support for the Informal Anarchist Federation, Bond attacked what he called “armchair generals and keyboard commandos...soothsayers, flatterers and hobbyists” stating:

For far too long, theoretical, philosophical, heartless, gutless cowards have pretended to be the standard bearers of liberation. But liberation is not a book or a speaking engagement...No scribe, scribbler, voicebox or bag of wind is a commander of anything outside of opinions and pieces of paper...Anarchism means “no more government” not “welcome to my bookstore”!⁸

Last Spring, these sorts of reactionary inter-movement threats reached my doorstep as well when a group of self-described insurrectionary anarchists threatened to attack me, announcing their plans in a series of Facebook posts. Despite my status as a non-participant in the world of the Book, I learned that their threats were based on a [entirely false retelling of a] paper I presented at NAASN 2012 in Puerto Rico, on the injection of an animal liberation discourse into Queer, insurrectionary politics.

The comments made by Bond, the anonymous authors of *Bash Back!*, and the editors of *Queer Ultra Violence* imply that individual academics have *adopted* anarchism as a strategy to advance themselves. This assertion is not novel or new nor is it resigned to anarchists. In the May 2012 essay “The Colonization of OccupyOakland,” authored anonymously by Anarchist Anti-Defamation Caucus of the Anti-Bureaucratic Bloc, the author(s) write:

The privileged leftist intelligentsia (the most prominent being Marxist professors and grad students) continue to insinuate themselves into the mix by using currently fashionable anti-authoritarian terminology as a cover for their grandstanding and careerism.⁹

As NAASN is made up of students, grad students, professors and independents concerned with anarchism, this is a relevant accusation for all of us, though the labeling of those concerned with a scholarly approach to leftist politics as the “intelligentsia” misses the mark.

While of course there *are* those that use controversial content to supplement novel contributions, they are a flash-in-the-pan minority and not representative of our larger milieu. More commonly, NAASN members and other lefty academics are *activists* with some employment role within institutionalized education. In one sense, the critique would be more accurate if it focused on the privilege afforded to those holding postgraduate degrees since this formalized marking affords one certain benefits. However, this mark of privilege is less about the recipients being *of privilege* when entering school, and more about the benefits of the title of B.A., M.A., Ph.D., and so on.

Many prominent anarchist-aligned-academics and leftist thinkers *are* tenured professors—Noam Chomsky, David Graeber, Slavoj Žižek included—and many activists stopped their own formalized educations upon completing high school. For some, this has created oppositional identities that are self-entrenching. The “activists” see the degree-holders as ivory tower, armchair revolutionaries, and the “academics” see the non-degree-holders as the uninformed foot soldiers of a movement *they* advance ideologically. This dialectic has led to tensions within the movement and serves to hinder coalitional dialogue and inter-movement solidarity. NAASN attempts to bridge these different modes of resistance: academia and activist, theorist and action-ist. As the presenters at NAASN demonstrate, critical scholarship is not a project exclusively undertaken by the academics, but rather a dialogue between the ivory tower, the pre-tower student, clandestine communiqué writers, and others left unnamed. Furthermore, while many professors and academics are removed from the day-to-day organizational tasks of flyer making and street marching, a great number of anarchist-academics have deep roots in anti-capitalist and anti-Statist movements of a variety of sorts. Hold this assertion up to individual biographies and it is more often than not true.

Accusations of activists becoming members of the upper crust intelligentsia fail to take note of the repercussions directed against such public figures advocating for, and speaking in favor of revolutionary aims. In his book *Threatening Anthropology*,¹⁰ David Price outlines the history of such repression directed at academics throughout the Red Scare where pro-revolution and pro-labor advocates were marked by surveillance, denial of tenure, and ghettoization as “socialists” and

“communists.” Throughout his investigation of outspoken anthropologists, Price asserts, “Although the political affiliations of these anthropologists were varied, the extent to which they behaved as activists by speaking out against social injustice largely determined how they were treated by the FBI and a variety of loyalty boards.¹¹” Though it awards one privilege to hold an advanced degree, when that degree is used to defend our movements, that “career” is often marked by isolation, tokenism and juridical repercussions. The cases abound.

In 1993, Rick Scarce, Professor of sociology at Skidmore College was indicted and jailed by a federal grand jury for refusing to provide information regarding an Animal Liberation Front raid. In 2009, David Pellow, Professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota was harassed by the FBI for his knowledge of similar “crimes.” Scott DeMuth, a graduate student Pellow supervised, was also indicted by a federal grand jury that demanded the names of activists he interviewed during his studies. When DeMuth refused to cooperate, he was accused of conspiring to violate the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act and jailed. In his prosecution, Assistant US State Attorney Clifford Cronk stated:

[DeMuth’s] writings, literature, and conduct suggest that he is an anarchist and associated with the ALF movement. Therefore, he is a domestic terrorist...As such, he poses a serious of risk of danger to those he opposes and to law enforcement as well as a risk of flight to avoid prosecution.¹²

These cases are simply a few explicitly connected to actions of the Animal Liberation Front—a clandestine, anarchist-aligned movement. To cite a few more, Ignacio Chapela was denied tenure at the University of California for his position opposing biotech company Novartis, and Ward Churchill was investigated and wrongly fired (and then reinstated) by the University of Colorado for comments he made rhetorically linking the 9/11 attacks to US foreign policy.

While anarchist activists should feel empowered and encouraged to call out oppressive actions and coercive privilege wherever they see it, it must be acknowledged that in some cases, academics act as allies not enemies. Throughout all of the broad critiques of “academia”, one current remains stable, the antagonistic attitude expressed by ‘the subject’ towards ‘the observer.’ Despite the fact that the ‘observers’ in these cases are anarchists, animal liberationists and other anti-authoritarian leftists, there will always be those that remain skeptical. While our movement of movements has historically been mired in

misrepresentation, libelous attack and slanderous condemnation, the time has never been more apt for a closer linkage between the anarcho-bomb tossers and the anarcho-book reviewers.

In the time between NAASN 2 and NAASN 3, the anarchist world has continued to explode and diversify within a startling display of front-page headlines. From acts of insurrectionary violence spanning continents, to participatory decision making in Occupied plazas, anarchists have witnessed a resurgence in visibility and tenacity. In movements and attacks across Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Finland, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Spain, the UK and the United States, clandestine anarchist activists have broken windows, set fires, scrawled messages, caused explosions, and bravely fought police and soldiers in frequent acts of rebellion. The brave and incendiary actions of the Informal Anarchist Federation, Conspiracy of Fire Cells, Animal and Earth Liberation Fronts, and many others have reignited anarchist politics with a new fervor of bombs, fires and militant resistance. While these cells and networks attack capital and the State, explaining their approaches and critiques through communiqués and flyers, a space has opened up for anarchist-academics, from professors to students, to either use their voice to defend, explain, and contextualize these actions, or conversely, use their position to distance themselves and create further cleavages.

These insurrectionary movements of attack have also produced their own rhetoric expressing bits of revulsion towards academics and theorists within our ranks. In May 2012, the Olga Cell of the Informal Anarchist Federation-International Revolutionary Front, shot and injured Roberto Adinolfi, the “chief executive” at Italian nuclear company Ansaldo Nucleare. In their communiqué taking responsibility for the shooting, the Olga Cell stated:

To you anarchists who accuse us of being unrealistic, adventurist, suicidal, provocative, martyrs, we say that with your “social” struggle, with your citizenism you work for the reinforcement of democracy...We are sure one day you will have the last word on us, as in the past you have had with your last experience of armed struggle. In a few years you will write a good book on our story, criticizing our errors and our shortcomings; from the heights of your “coherency” nothing is revolutionary enough, but no one, not even you, will be able to take away the pleasure that today we have fully realized and lived, here and now, our revolution.¹³

This once again shows the scorn towards those of us who write, agitate, theorize and record the histories of struggle—the violent tension between the ‘doers of history’ and the ‘viewers of history.’ Of course one can understand these frustrations.

The “academy” in whatever form it takes, is a hierarchical, authoritarian institution, an extreme bureaucracy, and a systematized co-opter. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault famously called schools an “apparatus of uninterrupted examination ... [administering a] constantly repeated ritual of power.”¹⁴ The function of institutions of higher education is to bring new ideas and theories of understandings from the amorphous cloud of knowledge production to the desks (and desktops) of the students. We as university educators are tasked with teaching the concepts of the day to our students, and then subsequently evaluating them, and ranking them to ensure they have properly absorbed the material. Radical notions become commonplace and those who parrot advance rapidly. It has been commonly understood for some time that these institutions are built with a clear intentionality. Early education trains children to arrive on time, obey instruction, submit to evaluation, compete with one another for position, and be assigned to various segments of society based on the judgment of an authority figure. Those who oblige the system advance onwards to university, and those that resist are tracked elsewhere—the ‘job market’, the military, unemployment, jail, etc.

It is not difficult to understand an anti-authoritarian’s objection. For some, there exists a hierarchy within a hierarchy—not all ‘anarchist-academics’ are bad, just some, and as a matter of judgment, it is a question of *subject distance*. Those of us that defend eco-saboteurs in court, and those noted to be harbingers of movements (e.g., Graeber’s role in Occupy), are given an acknowledged pass. Is this because our proximity to ‘true anarchists’ grants us some level of legitimacy? Maybe such a tension is historically grounded, ever present and unavoidable, but allow me to suggest that a more symbiotic relationship can exist between the clandestine cells of attack, and the public figureheads of the revolutionary academy.

Let there be no mistaking, for many of us, we stand in solidarity. Ours is not a position from which to critique, accuse, and “have the last word,” as noted by the Olga Cell. Instead, we attempt to use our privileged positions to advance the same struggles we observe. We teach the politics of insurrection and rebellion. We contextualize the attacks for a wider audience that would never read a claim of responsibility. We speak at conferences, write articles, and discuss with our students the

tactics, strategies and politics of revolution. In the realm of cops, soldiers, politicians, bankers, bureaucrats, polluters, hunters, fascists, and the like—*WE* are not the enemy. “We” in this case does not include all employees of colleges and universities, but rather distinguishes those who work in service of radical social change and those that simply speak on it.

In 1907, the pages of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman’s anarchist journal *Mother Earth* featured an article written by Voltairine de Cleyre discussing Leon Czolgosz’s assassination of US President William McKinley. The piece, entitled “McKinley’s Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint,” served to contextualize a particularly misconstrued act of political violence for a wider audience, and to extoll the reader in the borders of a contemporarily relevant anarchist critique. It did not seek to apologize for Czolgosz, but to explicate. It did not seek to ‘explain away,’ but rather to make the action speak *louder*. In her article, de Cleyre adopts the act of anti-Statist violence as a platform to further attack the State, proclaiming:

To those who wish to know what the Anarchists have to say, these words are addressed. We have to say that *not Anarchism, but the state of society which creates men of power and greed and the victims of power and greed*, is responsible for the death of both McKinley and Czolgosz. Anarchism has this much to do with assassination, that as it teaches the possibility of a society in which the needs of life may be fully supplied for all...it follows that there are occasionally those who translate their dissatisfaction into a definite act of reprisal against the society which is crushing them and their fellows. Assassination of persons representing the ruling power is such an act of reprisal...*The hells of capitalism create the desperate; the desperate act,—desperately!*¹⁵

Throughout the essay, de Cleyre engages in a powerful rhetorical act. She does not distinguish the ‘good anarchist’ from the ‘bad anarchist’ as is often done when individuals are captured by the State and accused of terrorism and other such nonsense. She instead used the momentary attention of the populace to contextualize and develop the violence of the attack into a further confronting of State power. She uses her words to further shout against the policies of McKinley including his acts of war in the Philippines, his “pursuance of the capitalist policy of Imperialism,” and the furtherance of waged slavery.

This is what we should seek to return to in our age of grand juries, terrorism indictments, agent provocateurs, clandestine infiltration and divide and conquer strategies designed to isolate those choosing to attack. In these times, we as students and teachers of anarchism, must use our voices, to not only develop our theories and critiques, but also to provide a nuanced and contextual play-by-play for those around us. We must act as the conduit for their messages of struggle, insurrection, and explosive, revolutionary attack.

So let us join together from our .edu email addresses and say: “Solidarity means attack, from the pages to the streets!”

NOTES

¹ Graeber addressed some intersecting concerns relating to anarchism’s critical place in “the academy” in his essay entitled “Anarchism, academia, and the avant-garde” contained in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*, eds. Randall Amster, et al. (Routledge, 2009), pp.103-112.

² David Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, 1st ed. (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004), p. 2, http://www.prickly-paradigm.com/sites/default/files/Graeber_PPP_14_0.pdf.

³ The Ghosts of Bash Back! News, “As With Christ, Bash Back! News Is Dead” (BB! News via Anarchistnews.org, January 27, 2011), <http://www.anarchistnews.org/?q=node/13625>.

⁴ Tegan Eanelli and Fray Baroque, eds., *Queer Ultraviolence: a Bash Back! Anthology* (San Francisco, CA: Ardent Press, 2012), Conclusion, <http://ardentpress.org/bashback/from-conclusion/>.

⁵ Axe Body Spray, *Anarchy Is Here*, Commercial, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5W6TKnh8Sc&feature>.

⁶ Romain Gavras, *No Church In The Wild*, Music Video (Roc-A-Fella Records, LLC, 2012), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJt7gNi3Nr4&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

⁷ Abdul Haqq, “End Lame: A Brief Rant Inspired by My Reading of the Book ‘ENDGAME’ by Derrick Jensen” (Support Walter, June 6, 2012), <http://supportwalter.org/SW/index.php/2012/06/06/end-lame/>.

⁸ Walter Bond, “A Letter of Solidarity with the Informal Anarchist Federation by Walter Bond, A.L.F Prisoner of War (USA)” (325.nostate.net, November 3, 2011), <http://325.nostate.net/?p=3419>.

⁹ Anarchist Anti-Defamation Caucus of the Anti-Bureaucratic Bloc, “The Colonization of OccupyOakland” (Anarchistnews.org, May 1, 2012), <http://anarchistnews.org/content/colonization-occupyoakland-0>.

¹⁰ David H. Price, *Threatening Anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI’s Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists* (Duke University Press Books, 2004).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹² “Accused Spence Lab Burglar to Stay in Jail, for Now” (ABC 9 KCRG, November 25, 2009), <http://www.kcrg.com/news/local/74218727.html>.

¹³ Olga Cell: Informal Anarchist Federation/International Revolutionary Front, “Italy: Claim of Responsibility for the Armed Attack Against Roberto Adinolfi of Ansaldo Nuclear (corrected)” (culmine.noblogs.org via waronsociety.noblogs.org/, May 14, 2012), <http://waronsociety.noblogs.org/?p=4610>.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 186.

¹⁵ Voltairine de Cleyre, “McKinley’s Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint,” in *Anarchy!: An Anthology of Emma Goldman’s Mother Earth*, ed. Peter Glassgold (Counterpoint Press, 2001), pp. 23–24.