

Mob Work: Anarchists in Grand Rapids is a four volume exploration of the history of anarchists in Grand Rapids, Michigan. While a mid-sized town with a reputation for conservative views, below the surface Grand Rapids has a history of radicalism that has largely gone unexplored. Part of that history includes the presence of anarchists active in a number of different ways since the 1880s. Anarchist activity has often connected to what anarchists have been doing in the larger U.S. context and as such this history situates Grand Rapids anarchists in larger national trends.

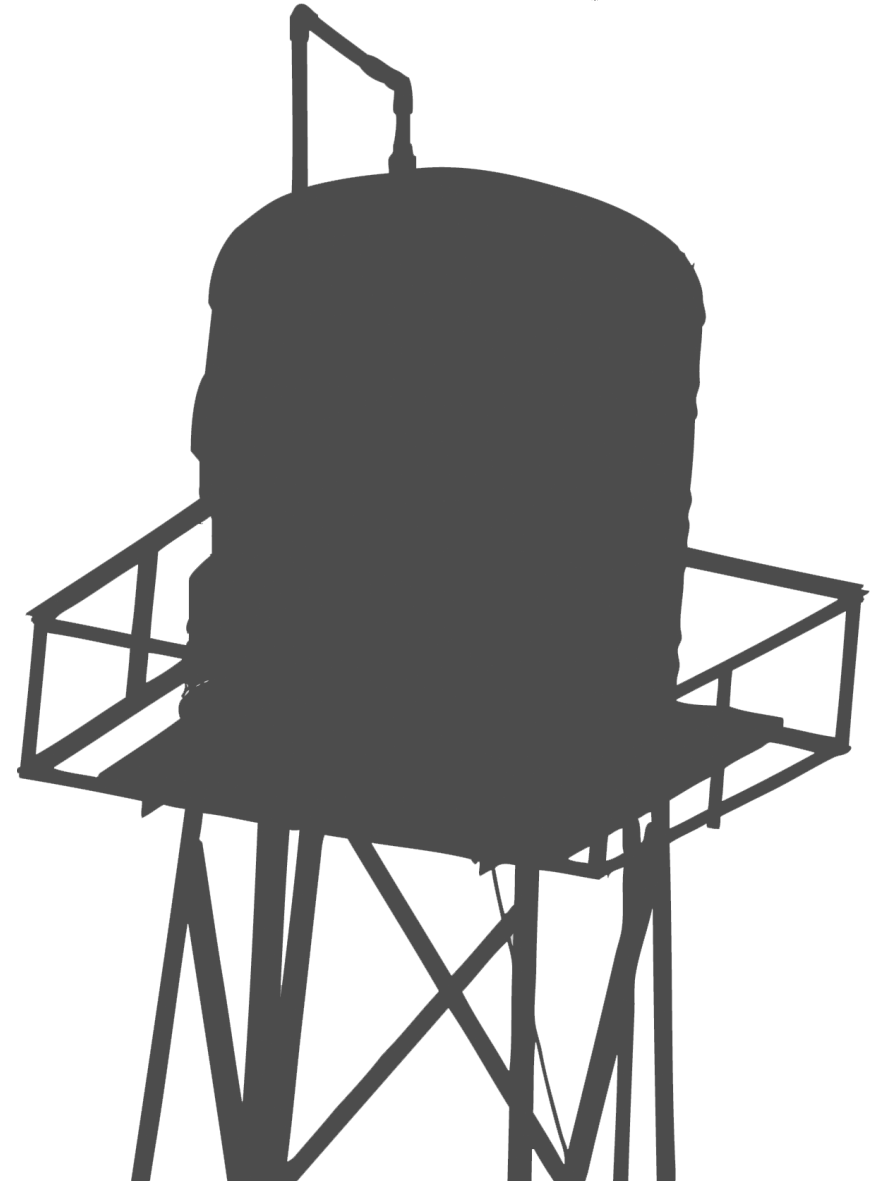
In this fourth volume of *Mob Work*, we offer an overview of anarchist activity in Grand Rapids through the 1980s to the 1990s. Anarchist efforts largely paralleled what was happening with anarchists across the country and as such, *Mob Work* begins with an overview of anarchist activity in the United States during the 1970s through the 1990s. After establishing this context, we go on to explore what was happening in Grand Rapids during the 1980s through the 1990s. As happened in many places, the local punk rock scenes offered a place for anarchist ideas to circulate and specifically anarchist projects grew out of that scene, including Food Not Bombs and the Anarchist Black Cross. At the same time, anarchist visibility increased, with street protests against the police and the Ku Klux Klan. Anarchists in Grand Rapids also undertook efforts to connect with anarchists across the state of Michigan and the United States.



*...from the occupied territory currently known as grand rapids, michigan
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*...in the eyes of the ruling class—the rich,
the church, the state, and all others who
get their security from our oppression—we
are still just a bunch of angry punks, thugs,
and cranks. We must be more than this...
we must smash the foundations of the
nightmare reality that has been created
by those before us.*

—Profane Existence



Anarchism and anarchy mean different things to different people and have meanings that differ depending on their context. Anarchism has a rich theoretical and historical tradition. For the most part, this publication assumes the reader has at least a basic understanding of anarchism. However, for those never exposed to the ideas, the following excerpt from Peter Gelderloos' *Anarchy Works* identifies the basic concepts in anarchism:

Autonomy and Horizontality: All people deserve the freedom to define and organize themselves on their own terms. Decision-making structures should be horizontal rather than vertical, so no one dominates anyone else; they should foster power to act freely rather than power over others. Anarchism opposes all coercive hierarchies, including capitalism, the state, white supremacy, and patriarchy.

Mutual Aid: People should help one another voluntarily; bonds of solidarity and generosity form a stronger social glue than the fear inspired by laws, borders, prisons, and armies. Mutual aid is neither a form of charity nor of zero-sum exchange; both giver and receiver are equal and interchangeable. Since neither holds power over the other, they increase their collective power by creating opportunities to work together.

Voluntary Association: People should be free to cooperate with whomever they want, however they see fit; likewise, they should be free to refuse any relationship or arrangement they do not judge to be in their interest. Everyone should be able to move freely, both physically and socially. Anarchists oppose borders of all kinds and involuntary categorization by citizenship, gender, or race.

Direct Action: It is more empowering and effective to accomplish goals directly than to rely on authorities or representatives. Free people do not request the changes they want to see in the world; they make those changes.

Throughout this publication, we explore various facets of anarchist history as it relates to Grand Rapids, Michigan and try to situate it within its larger historical context. The purpose is not to make a case for anarchy—that has been made better elsewhere by others far more eloquent than us.

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THE 1970s, 1980s, AND BEYOND

The 1970s has often been seen as a time when “the left” declined and “the right” made an ascendancy in national politics. It’s also been described as a decade of cynicism and confusion that followed the explosions of the 1960s. Far from simply marking the decline of an era, several important events of “the sixties” happened during the 1970s—for example Kent State, the Pentagon Papers, etc.—while various left-wing projects continued to evolve in various forms.¹ For anarchists, the period was important as various efforts were undertaken to build explicitly anarchist structures as a more defined version of anarchism emerged out of the 1960s.

Similarly, conventional wisdom on the 1980s is one of the continued ascendancy of the religious right, the dominance of Reagan, and more locally, the dominance of Christian Reformed Church and the DeVos family. While these were strong elements in the 1980s, there were various movements which succeeded in challenging the status quo of the Regan era, both locally and nationally. A strong nuclear freeze movement helped restrict Regan’s capacity to use nuclear weapons.² Direct action tactics were used to raise awareness about U.S. foreign policy in Central America, with groups staging a variety of actions and organizing trainings.³ Innovative tactics were used against apartheid in South Africa, including divestment and shantytowns on university campuses.⁴ In other cases, punk rock and alternative music scenes opened up new forms of resistance. These weren’t isolated to traditionally liberal areas; Michigan was among the states passing statewide referendums in favor of the nuclear freeze.⁵ Grand Rapids also changed its investment policy to prohibit loans to South African banks and corporations doing business in South Africa.⁶

Both in the 1970s and 1980s, anarchists continued to build on the gains of the 1960s and carved out a specifically anarchist space. New projects were launched, newspapers published, and gatherings held. The activity of this era paved the way for the modern anarchist space. This new space was oriented less towards the working class and more towards counter-cultural and oppositional forms. While the hippies gave way to the punks, the focus was similar. Anarchists also expanded the scope of their theory, advocating for consensus-based decision-making, women’s and queer liberation, and more. Anarchists continued to be involved in a range of projects, creating a somewhat fragmented space. The national changes that took place are important to consider as a preface for an account of what anarchists in Grand Rapids did for the last quarter of the twentieth century.

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New Models

In the 1970s, anarchists and anti-authoritarian groups were experimenting with models that would become influential in the subsequent decades. Anarchist methods of organizing took root in the anti-nuclear movement that emerged in the 1970s. In 1976, the Clamshell Alliance formed to oppose the construction of two nuclear reactors in Seabrook, New Hampshire.⁷ The Alliance was building on the successfully blocked construction of a nuclear plant in 1974 in Montague, Massachusetts.⁸ It organized using affinity groups, consensus decision-making, and direct action.⁹ Occupations regularly involved thousands of people who attempted to halt the construction of the reactors. Although the actions often played out as mass civil disobedience scenarios with hundreds of arrests, they simultaneously advocated an anarchist vision of egalitarian communities based on small groups.¹⁰

Anarchists also opened up debates about militancy and what resistance to Seabrook meant,¹¹ with some advocating for an escalation in tactics including the cutting of fences and other measures informed by European anti-nuclear resistance.¹² While some anarchists criticized the narrow definitions of nonviolence and the desire amongst many for “respectability,” non-violence continued to be the dominant approach.¹³ The anarchism of the anti-nuclear and related movements carried on well into the 1980s, mixing nonviolence, feminism, and spirituality.¹⁴ As the 1980s progressed, critiques of these approaches would emerge, both from within anarchist circles (by way of different tactical experiments) and in terms of the circulation of literature, most notably Ward Churchill’s *Pacifism as Pathology* which is rooted in a critique of the type of ritualized civil disobedience undertaken by this movement.¹⁵ Still, anarchists participated in these and other “non-violent” efforts, continually pushing against the limits and using direct action as a way to explain anarchist positions and contribute to ongoing struggles.¹⁶

A related group, Movement for a New Society fused anti-authoritarian values, direct action, communal living, and consensus decision-making processes. Movement for a New Society trained activists involved in the anti-nuclear struggles in direct action coordinated via decentralized affinity groups and spokes-councils.¹⁷ They helped to organize mass occupations and nonviolent resistance, while also working to spread these tactics across the country.¹⁸ Beyond actions, the group used consensus to coordinate its nationwide network of collectives and projects, mirroring practices that would be used by anarchists in the years to come.¹⁹ Additionally, the group’s focus on collective living, anti-oppression politics, network structures, and identity-based caucuses would also carry on into the future.²⁰ While never explicitly declaring themselves anarchists, Movement for a New Society honed the consensus decision-making methods that would become commonplace into the 2000s. By

the late 1990s and especially after Seattle, nearly all North American anarchist groups operated on some form of consensus, building on the development of the process over the previous two decades.²¹

Anarcha-Feminism and Queer Liberation

In the late 1960s, the many women involved in the political and counter-cultural spaces of resistance during “the sixties” began to organize against the male domination of these spaces. After years of dealing with domineering and abusive men, women began to organize amongst themselves in order to create environments where they could share their experiences and began to challenge male dominance. The core of these efforts were small “consciousness raising” groups in which women talked about and discussed their experiences. By the mid-1970s, feminist anarchists reflecting on these practices pointed out that the women’s movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s was essentially anarchist in terms of its theory, process, and practice.²² Growing out of the broader women’s movement, a specifically anarchist form of feminism emerged during this period which experimented with forms of organizing that would become commonplace in the anarchist space as a whole.

While male domination both as beneficiaries of a system of patriarchy as well as their majority involvement in anarchist projects has consistently been a problem, in the 1970s more direct ways to address the issue resulted in an upsurge in anarcha-feminist activity. Recognizing the role that women played in the anarchist movement historically, anarcha-feminists argued that the historical examples of anarchist women provided a strong source of inspiration for dealing with the problem in the present.²³ Anarcha-feminist texts first appeared in *Siren: A Journal of Anarcho-Feminism* which grew out of an anarcho-feminist study group formed in 1969.²⁴ In the early 1970s, anarcha-feminist groups formed across the country and new publications were produced.²⁵ In early 1973, *Siren* published an essay called “Blood of the Flower” that articulated an anarchist feminism that related itself specifically to anarchist ideas and practice, rather than focusing on the intuitive anarchism of many earlier pieces.²⁶ This was the first of many major essays that would be released in subsequent years where anarcha-feminists articulated ideas on organization and strategy. Another debate was over the best structure for the revolution, with some feminists arguing that the small groups of the consciousness-raising era were incompatible with anything more,²⁷ while others advocated the continued use of small, voluntarily associated groups that would come together on an ad-hoc basis.²⁸ Embodied within this debate was a larger question about anarchist strategy and whether or not it should be oriented towards mass movements and formal organization or a smaller, decentralized approach. Many in the anarcha-feminist space advocated for small groups that created a revolutionary culture by “discussing, planning, creating and making trouble.”²⁹ They raised concerns

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about the impersonal nature of movements and single-issue programs, arguing for a more comprehensive approach.³⁰

In the anarchy-feminist space, the decentralized approach won out. Much of the activity happened at the local level, with nationally distributed publications providing a space for further discussion. Anarchy-feminists formed *AnarchyFeminist Network Notes* in 1974 to connect and facilitate the process.³¹ The publishing responsibility rotated to different cities and different collectives in each issue, further emphasizing the decentralized nature of the anarchy-feminist project. In 1976, the newsletter became an expanded newsletter called *Anarchist Feminist Notes* that reflected a merger with another similar project and the continued growth of the larger anarchy-feminist space.³² This growth continued into 1978 with the first anarchy-feminist conference taking place in the Catskill Mountains.³³

As the 1970s turned into the 1980s, anarchy-feminist thought continued to have a larger relevance, with anarchy-feminists having a highly visible presence in the direct action movements of the period.³⁴ Anarchy-feminists were involved in the campaigns against nuclear power during the period, including the Clamshell Alliance on the east coast³⁵ and more explicitly anarchy-feminist groups such as the Abalone Alliance on the west coast.³⁶ These were experiments in pre-figurative politics through protest camps outside of nuclear power plants³⁷ where anarchy-feminist ideas of community and direct action were honed. Moreover, once again showing their ability to articulate innovative organizational forms, anarchy-feminists were among the early critics of the idea of converging on an area and simply blocking the gates of a nuclear power plant, instead recognizing the need for sustained local campaigns that were about more than just blockades.³⁸

Anarchy-feminists also were among those in the anarchist space who began to advance critiques of gender and made space for queer liberation. Following the Stonewall riots of 1969, a broad-based radical gay liberation movement took off across the country that advocated for total liberation of all oppressed peoples and that aimed to destroy traditional sex roles and the sex/gender system that locked them into narrowly defined roles.³⁹ The early movement had an anti-state, anti-church, and anti-capitalist orientation that shared much in common with the anarchist sex radicals of the early 1900s.⁴⁰ Following the general trend of “the movement” in the 1960s, the gay liberation movement had very strong anti-authoritarian impulses, as well both vague and explicit connections to anarchism. Anarchism was among the many influences on the movement, particularly within the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and their frequently used the chant, “2-4-6-8, smash the church, smash the state.”⁴¹ As portions of the gay liberation movement shifted towards assimilationist politics, specifically anarchist voices began to emerge as well, with publications

including *Gay Anarchist Tide*, *Gay Clone*, and *The Storm! A Journal for Free Spirits* articulating a queer anarchism.⁴² Anarchists were among those who have articulated a radical queer perspective over the years and engaged in militant actions.⁴³

Anarchist Print Media

As they carved out a space for their politics, anarchists increased their publishing efforts. Aside from providing anarchists with a place to reflect, strategize, and discuss, anarchist print projects provided a propaganda and networking function. Newspapers were a popular project, although self-published zines played an important role in circulating anarchist ideas in the 1980s and 1990s and with anarchism becoming the most visible political view expressed within the zine underground.⁴⁴ Many of these publications were rather ephemeral in nature, with limited circulations and short lifespans generally reflecting the short nature of most anarchist projects. An early newspaper was *The Match!* beginning in 1969 which publishes to this day, advocating a type of “ethical anarchism” and boasting no digital presence.⁴⁵ The newspaper also produced a series of agitational pamphlets early on.⁴⁶ In 1975, *Fifth Estate*—a struggling underground newspaper out of Detroit—was taken over by anti-authoritarians and anarchists and became an anti-authoritarian/anarchist publication.⁴⁷ Aside from covering ongoing anarchist activities, *Fifth Estate* began to articulate a perspective critical of the emerging technological society, eventually articulating what would become known as “primitivism” or “anarcho-primitivism.”⁴⁸ New issues of *Fifth Estate* still come out regularly. *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* formed in 1980, creating a non-ideological space to discuss anarchist activity.⁴⁹ It reviewed anarchist publications, covered anarchist theory, provided a contact network, and reprinted important works such as Raoul Vaneigem’s *Revolution of Everyday Life*. It still publishes, albeit on a less frequent schedule.



Aside from these long running publications, the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s were filled with anarchist print projects of shorter lifespans. *Open*

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61 Benjamin Shepard, “Play as World-making: From the Cockettes to the Germs, Gay Liberation to DIY Community Building,” in *The Hidden 1970s*, 186.

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76 Mike Hargis, “Notes on Anarchism in America, Part 2,” *Libertarian Labor Review*, #19, 1996, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070927154626/http://www.syndicalist.org/archives/llr14-24/22i.shtml>

77 *Love & Rage Member Handbook*, 17.

78 *Love & Rage Member Handbook*, 15.

79 *Love & Rage Member Handbook*, 14.

80 *Mob Action Against the State*.

81 “ACTIVE RESISTANCE: A Counter Convention, Chicago, August 21-31, 1996,” June 15, 1996, <http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/aut-op-sy/1996-07-05.061/msg00024.html>

42 Michael Bronski, "What Happened to Queer Anarchism?", September 16, 2011, <http://zcomm.org/zmagazine/what-happened-to-queer-anarchism-by-michael-bronski/>

43 Conrad, *Out of the Closets and into the Libraries: A Collection of Radical Queer Moments*, (Bangarang, n.d.).

44 Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, (London: Verso, 1997), 34.

45 "From The Pamphleteer of Tuesday, 7 June 2011", accessed September 23, 2013, http://www.wonderella.org/publications/pamphlets/publications_received.htm

46 Fred Woodworth, *Anarchism: What is it? Is it practical or utopian? Is government Necessary?*, (Tucson: The Match! Pamphlet Series, 1974).

47 Steve Millet, "Technology is Capital: *Fifth Estate's* critique of the Megamachine," in Jonathan Purkis and James Bowen, *Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in the Global Age*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 74-75.

48 Various Authors, *The Origins of Primitivism (1977-1988)*, accessed September 23, 2013, <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/various-authors-the-origins-of-primitivism-1977-1988>

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52 *Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation Member Handbook*, (New York: New York Local, 1997), 13.

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54 Jeff Ferrell, *Tearing Down the Streets: Adventures in Urban Anarchy*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 29.

55 Craig O'Hara, *The Philosophy of Punk*, (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1999), 71.

56 O'Hara, 87.

57 Profane Existence, *Making Punk a Threat Again! The Best Cuts, 1989-1993*, (Minneapolis: Loincloth Press, 1997), 10.

58 Emilie Hardman, "Before You Can Get Off Your Knees: Profane Existence and Anarcho-Punk as Social Movement," accessed September 25, 2013, http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/1/8/4/5/3/pages184536/p184536-1.php 13.

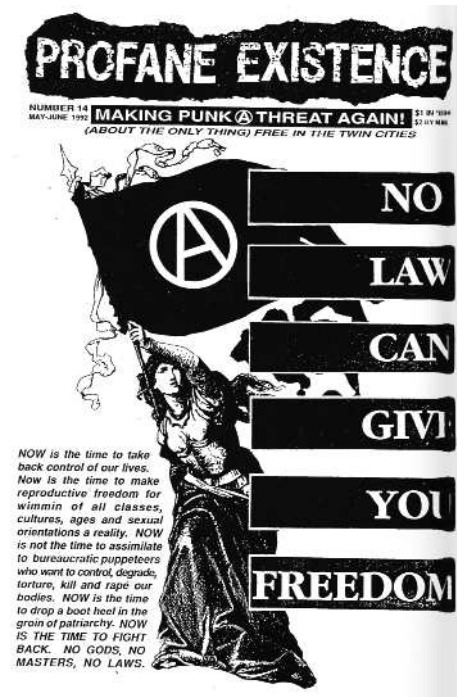
59 Duncombe, *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, (Verso, 1997), 117-120.

60 Jack Boulware and Silke Tudor, *Gimme Something Better: The Profound, Progressive, and Occasionally Pointless History of Bay Area Punk from Dead Kennedys to Green Day*, (New York:

Road was a journal published out of Vancouver beginning in 1976 that had a strong presence internationally.⁵⁰ Other publications in the late 1970s included *Anarcha-Feminist Notes*, *Emancipation*, *Soil and Liberty*, *Bayou La Rose*, and *Work and Play*.⁵¹ There were even discussions at anarchist gatherings like the Haymarket Remembered gathering in 1986 about banding together to create a major continental newspaper.⁵² Out of that discussion, two one-off publications were produced *RAGE!* for the 1988 Pentagon Blockade and *Writing on the Wall* for the 1989 San Francisco anarchist gathering.⁵³

Anarchism and Punk

In the late 1970s, punk emerged. Musically, aesthetically, and politically, punk challenged traditional conventions. Ignored by the mainstream, punks built their own cultural infrastructure: they created show spaces, started labels, created publications, and more. This cultural rebellion also took on political dimensions, with bands singing about the bleak political climate of the era and adopting more specifically anarchist messages. An early punk summarized it well when they declared: "Anarchy is the Key, Do-It-Yourself is the Melody."⁵⁴ Within the punk scene, anarchism is the most popular political belief, expressed in song lyrics, in zines, in record liner notes, etc.⁵⁵ There is a wide variety of "anarchist" beliefs, ranging from a more lifestyle-oriented approach advocating for personal changes to more specifically anarchist political activity such as organizing collectives and demonstrations.⁵⁶ Typical of the later approach were projects such as *Profane Existence*, a collective that published a widely distributed zine, released records, and tried to bridge the gap between punk and more specifically anarchist forms of organizing.⁵⁷ Even seemingly "non-political" acts within the punk scene often had a political element, with the challenging of social, cultural, and sexual norms, thus creating the foundation on which more explicit political projects could be built. Music was used as a tool, a means for identifying and educating about targets to be



attacked.⁵⁸ “Zines”—some created on photocopiers using cut and paste layouts and others more official looking—covered the emerging scene.⁵⁹ Important publications such as *MaximumRocknRoll* had strong left-wing bents to them and were generally hostile to reactionary bands, although as with all things punk, contradictions were easy to find.⁶⁰ The “alternate spaces” for shows and interaction were built on the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ideal and sought to create spaces that existed outside of capitalism.⁶¹

As the 1980s progressed into the 1990s, explicitly anarchist forms of punk and political engagement became more widespread. Punks participated in “War Chest Tour” demonstrations—such as those outside the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in 1984, disrupting traffic and corporate offices,⁶² and receiving considerable media attention.⁶³ At an anarchist gathering in 1989, punks would once again play a prominent role in street protests in San Francisco, with many dressed in all black using targeted property destruction against targets like The Gap.⁶⁴ In cities like San Francisco and New York



Punk Percussion Protest Flyer

City, punks got involved in squatting vacant buildings.⁶⁵ In Washington DC, radical punks formed a group called Positive Force DC that sought to encourage more political engagement within the punk scene. The group was largely informed by a sort of informal anarchism that reflected the type of anarchism popular within the punk scene. Aside from booking benefit shows and educational efforts, the group organized a series of “punk percussion protests” against the South African embassy, against the Gulf War, and in support of pro-choice protests.⁶⁶ During the early peak in its activity, Positive Force affinity groups had formed in a dozen cities across the United States.⁶⁷

Into the 1990s, political consciousness increased in many punk scenes, with the hardcore scene developing a definitely political bent,⁶⁸ clustered around zines such as *HeartAttaCk* and taking up issues such as animal liberation.⁶⁹ Some participants in the hardcore scene went on to commit militant actions in support of animals.⁷⁰ There was a spree of animal liberation-related vandalism that had ties to the hardcore scene.⁷¹ Other sub-scenes within the larger punk context also took punk in new directions. This was especially true of the “Riot Grrrl” scene that challenged the sexism within punk. A movement of women-centered

19 Cornell, *Oppose and Propose*, 47.

20 Cornell, *Oppose and Propose*, 55.

21 David Graeber, “Anarchism, Academia, and the Avant-Garde,” in Randall Amster, ed., *Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, (London: Routledge, 2009), 104.

22 Peggy Kornegger, “Anarchism: The Feminist Connection,” in Howard J. Elrich, ed., *Reinventing Anarchy, Again*, (Oakland: AK Press, 1996), 156-168.

23 Elaine Leeder, “Let Our Mothers Show the Way”, in *Reinventing Anarchy, Again*, 142-148.

24 Lindsay Grace Weber, “On the Edge of All Dichotomies: Anarch@-Feminist Thought, Process and Action, 1970-1983” (thesis, Wesleyan University, 2009), 60-62.

25 Weber, 71.

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27 Jo Freeman, “The Tyranny of Structurelessness,” in *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), 68.

28 Cathy Levine, in *Quiet Rumours*, “The Tyranny of Tyranny,” , 77.

29 Levine, 78.

30 Red Rosa and Black Maria, Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists, “Anarcha-Feminism: Two Statements,” , 16.

31 Weber, 100.

32 Weber, 106.

33 Weber, 108.

34 Weber, 133.

35 Weber, 144.

36 Weber, 148.

37 Weber, 158-159.

38 Weber, 162.

39 Jerimarie Liesegang, “Tyranny of the State and Trans Liberation,” in C.B. Daring et al., *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2013), 93-94.

40 Liesegang, 95.

41 Benjamin Shepard, “Bridging the Divide Between Queer Theory and Anarchism,” *Sexualities* 13, (2010): 513.

ENDNOTES

Note: *The endnotes continue from the previous volumes of this history, so shorthand references may refer to previously cited works.*

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2 Bradford Martin, *The Other Eighties: A Secret History of America in the Age of Regan*, (New York Hill & Wang, 2011), 23.

3 Martin, 40-41.

4 Martin, 45-46 and 56-57.

5 Martin, 19-20.

6 Sandy Boyer, “Divesting from Apartheid: A Summary of State and Municipal Action on South Africa,” March 1983, <http://kora.matrix.msu.edu/files/50/304/32-130-CB5-84-al.sff.document.acoa000587.pdf>

7 Phoebe Duvall, “Against the Bomb: Anarchism and the Nuclear Disarmament Movement,” May 10, 2010, <http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/classes/Anarchy/finalprojects/DuvallCND.html>

8 David Graeber, “The Shock of Victory,” *Rolling Thunder*, #5, Spring 2008, 14.

9 Duvall.

10 Epstein, “Anarchism and the Anti-Globalization Movement.”

11 Robert Surburg, *Beyond Vietnam: The Politics of Protest in Massachusetts, 1974-1990*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 81.

12 Surburg, 83.

13 Rudy Perkins, “Did Pacifists Block Militant Action?,” *Fifth Estate*, #285, August 1977, 5.

14 Barbara Epstein, “The Politics of Prefigurative Community: The Non-violent Direct Action Movement,” in Stephen Duncombe, ed., *Cultural Resistance Reader*, (London: Verso, 2002), 333-346.

15 Ward Churchill, *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 61-68.

16 Cindy Crabb, *Doris: An Anthology of Doris Zines from 1991-2001*, (Portland: Microcosm Publishing, 2005), 222.

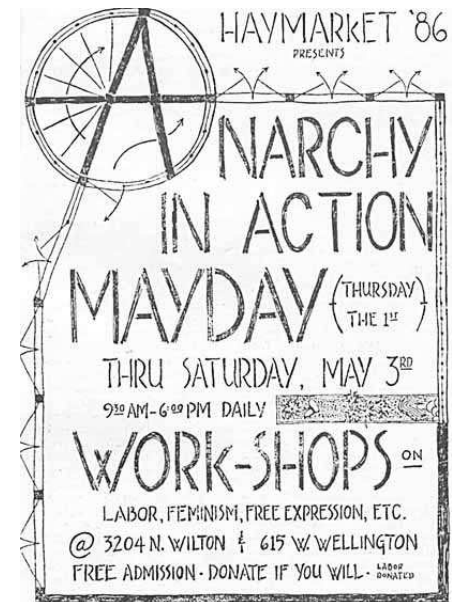
17 Andrew Cornell, *Oppose and Propose! Lessons from Movement for a New Society*, (AK Press, 2011), 36.

18 Cornell, *Oppose and Propose*, 37.

zines, bands, and activist groups formed by the mid-1990s, challenging the rest of the scene and creating a networked subculture. Moreover, Riot Grrl was closely intertwined with a culture of anarchist political action, with many participants participating in anti-government actions, clinical defense, Food Not Bombs, and other such projects.⁷² In the mid-1990s, anarchist punks formed an Anarcho-Punk Federation to network and connect anarchist punks. Their efforts included the publication of a newspaper called *Counterculture* and grew out of their previous experiences with the Anarchist Youth Federation and also the alienation they felt in organizing in non-punk anarchist spaces.⁷³

Continental Anarchist Gatherings

Beginning with the Haymarket Remembered gathering held in Chicago in 1986, anarchists embarked on a collective project of organizing yearly gatherings. These gatherings were to be specifically anarchist spaces where anarchists could come together to meet, network, exchange literature, and organize. The Chicago gathering was primarily organized by anarchists in Chicago, but also had input from anarchists across the country.⁷⁴ Workshops at the Chicago gathering included: “Building the Anarchist Movement,” “What is Anarchism?,” “Technology and Anti-Technology,” “Anarchism and Children,” “Gender Politics,” a discussion on “Punk and Anarchy,” and more, giving a good indication of where the movement was at. Two years later in Toronto, topics had expanded, with a number of workshops focusing on practical skills including facilitation, radio, “Working in Large Organizations,” and more.⁷⁵ Informed by involvement in the “No Business As Usual” Coalition and run-ins with authoritarian leftists such as the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), many anarchists were eager to carve out their own space. These gatherings were well-attended, with 250-300 in Minneapolis in 1987, 800 in Toronto in 1988, and 1,500 in San Francisco in 1989.⁷⁶ The gatherings always included “actions” at the end, with the 1989 gathering including an attempt at opening a squat,⁷⁷ a Warchest Tour in Toronto in 1988 that turned into a running battle with the police,⁷⁸ a Warchest



Haymarket Remembered Flyer

Tour at the Minneapolis gathering in 1987,⁷⁹ and one in Chicago. The Chicago event featured noisemakers, black flags, bandannas, and a “Fuck Authority” banner. Anarchists went on to disrupt businesses, spray paint slogans, and break a few windows.⁸⁰

These gatherings were taken up again in the mid-1990s with the Active Resistance conference and demonstrations in Chicago in 1996. Organized as a “counter-convention” to the Democratic National Convention (D.N.C.) taking place during the same week, Active Resistance’s announcement echoed the previous series of gatherings with a quote from the 1989 “Without Borders” conference.⁸¹ It promised “to provide space and time for conversations, planning meetings, workshops and caucuses on practical campaigns and projects.”⁸² 700 people responded to the call for the counter-convention, with numerous discussions taking place and a large demonstration of over 1,000 people.⁸³ Another Active Resistance gathering took place in Toronto in 1998.⁸⁴

Anarchist Street Protests

In the 1980s, anarchists began to have a street level presence. There was graffiti on the walls, publications circulated, flyers posted, and demonstrations organized. Following up on demonstrations against the major party political conventions in 1984, anarchists participated in a multi-tendency political group called “No Business As Usual” that organized disruptive “days of action” against the nuclear arms race.⁸⁵ The coalition of anarchist, authoritarian communist groups, and others eventually fell apart as anarchists were isolated and marginalized. In 1987, anarchists participated in a national effort to blockade the CIA’s headquarters in Washington DC in response to U.S. involvement in



Protest at the 1986 Haymarket Remembered Conference

Mouse covered the new movements, including their anarchist aspects. This was particularly noteworthy with favorable coverage of and participation in the 2001 protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in Quebec City.

Anarchist ideas began to manifest themselves in other venues as well. A short-lived zine called *Get Up!* featured anarchist symbols and described itself as “an anti-racist, anti-capitalist, pro-feminist, radically-oriented publication.”²²⁸ A one-off zine published at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in 2003 attacked the traditional left, advocating for an anarchist perspective heavily informed by the Situationist critique.²²⁹ Outside of print, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) formed a new Grand Rapids chapter.²³⁰ Documentaries that were generally favorable to anarchist perspectives were shown in town, including *Breaking the Bank* on the April 2000 protests against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, as well as the film *This Is What Democracy Looks Like*. As the early part of the decade continued, the shift in protest tactics ushered in by the anti-globalization movement seemed to take hold in Grand Rapids. Unpermitted and disruptive marches became more frequent, especially as the United States neared its invasion of Iraq. When President George W. Bush spoke in Grand Rapids in January of 2003, protestors broke through police lines and took over the streets, repeatedly defying police orders.²³¹ Whereas during previous eras of “anti-war” protest the narrative was often one of peace, dignity, and non-violence, the new era was in many ways characterized by a discussion about direct action, disruption, and the effectiveness of past tactics.²³²

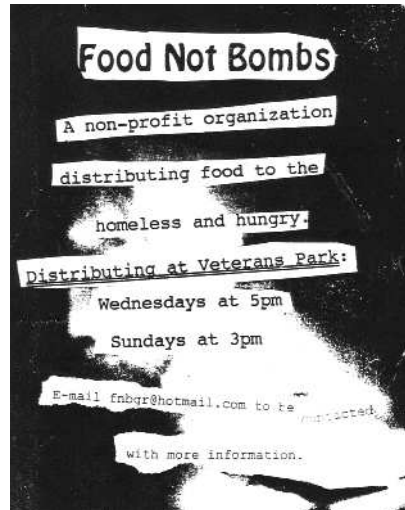
Conclusions

While there were few connections with the previous era of activity, by 2004 an even more specific anarchist political activity emerged in Grand Rapids. Once again this activity incorporated aspects of anarchist practice that came to prominence both nationally and locally. Anarchism emerged strongly in the West Michigan punk scene by about 2003, and currents from within that community would converge with other anarchist currents to create more visibility. In many cases, these activities mirrored what had been tried previously: distributing literature and other materials at punk shows, using punk as a forum to encourage political engagement, the development of anarchist infrastructure (Food Not Bombs, infoshops, etc.), and anarchist involvement in multi-tendency “activist” efforts. In part because these were the models that were available from elsewhere and because of the lack of continuity between eras, anarchists in Grand Rapids would in some ways repeat the same approaches from the past with little growth. There were no lessons to be shared or histories to learn from; anarchists were effectively charting their own course—something that could be both a gift and a curse.

entry.²²¹ The previously mentioned Michigan Anarchist Black Cross benefit was another example. ABC groups had spread across the country to support prisoners.²²² Critical Mass emerged on the west coast as an “anarchic” project that involved masses of bicyclists taking to the streets to protest “car culture” and demonstration in favor of bicycle rights. The bike rides had a decidedly anarchist bent, even if it wasn’t always explicit.²²³ The first Critical Mass bike ride took place in June of 2000 in Grand Rapids, organized by Media Mouse, itself a product of the post-Seattle wave of activism.²²⁴

Post-Seattle W.TO. Visibility

Following the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle, it seemed that a “new” social movement had sprung up almost overnight to confront globalization. While the movement had its roots in the previous decade of anarchist and anti-authoritarian struggle, it caught many by surprise. Deeply anarchistic and decentralized—and frequently specifically anarchist—the anti-globalization movement inspired a wave of activism across the country. In Grand Rapids, anti-WTO slogans were spray-painted on prominent bridges in Grand Rapids to coincide with the November 30, 1999 demonstrations, receiving news coverage alongside stories on the rioting in Seattle.²²⁵ Protests were organized, groups were formed, and new projects were started. These efforts largely emphasized anarchist means of organizing, mixing militant and disruptive forms of direct actions with a strong internal emphasis on confronting hierarchy and preserving autonomy.



Food Not Bombs Flyer from the Late 1990s

Media Mouse was a Grand Rapids area project inspired by the politics and practices that emerged in Seattle. Blending the knowledge of longtime local media activists with the emerging Indymedia sensibility, Media Mouse originally functioned as a general group taking on global trade agreements by providing alternative media and organizing local protests against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).²²⁶ Media Mouse placed itself in the context of the new movements, as articulated in an announcement stating its reasons for ceasing in 2009.²²⁷ In the intervening years, Media

Central America. Anarchists tried to use direct action to blockade the streets around the building, while other groups used more traditional forms of civil disobedience.⁸⁶ A year later, anarchists across the country would participate in militant demonstrations over the U.S. invasion of Honduras. At a blockade of the Pentagon later that year, anarchists engaged in “mobile tactics” that included burning tires, overturned concrete barricades, and the like.⁸⁷ Anarchists were also involved in Earth Day protests in 1990 aimed at shutting down Wall Street. Of the attempt to shut down Wall Street, one participant wrote, “there were baracades [sic] in the street burning, people running, getting thrown to the ground; flyers and banners and drums and slogans and a zillion cops in full riot gear...”⁸⁸ Anarchist street militancy—a fixture of contemporary portrayals of anarchists—had arrived.

In response to the Gulf War, there were massive demonstrations across the country, with anarchists playing major roles.⁸⁹ These included the first ever use of the black bloc at actions in Washington DC in January 1991.⁹⁰ Militant street confrontations would continue as the 1990s went on, with anarchists gaining valuable experience that would pave the way for the era of anti-globalization protests in the late 1990s/early 2000s. This was especially true of black blocs, which continued to be organized throughout the 1990s.⁹¹ During the mid-1990s, anarchists involved in Anti-Racist Action (ARA) used the black bloc tactic to militantly confronting and disrupting racist and fascist groups.⁹²

New York City: Squatting, Autonomous Spaces, Infrastructure, and New Approaches

In the 1980s and early 1990s in New York City, dozens of “squats” were opened on the Lower East Side.⁹³ Squatters took over abandoned buildings in the neighborhood and occupied them, in some cases fixing up the buildings, using them as is, or re-purposing them for new functions. During the period, there were overlapping groups of people with different ideologies, beliefs, lifestyles, and goals involved. These ranged from anarchists squatting for political purposes to those who were interested in squatting to secure a place to live, preferring a path to legalization over one of resistance. Of these groups, anarchists were quite prominent (with many associated with the emerging anarcho-punk subculture), giving the squatting movement a highly politicized edge.

Many saw the Lower East Side as an autonomous zone, with an anarchist community that was experimenting with new forms of living and building a new counter-culture.⁹⁴ Anarchists squatted buildings creating collective living situations, concert venues, art spaces, and other types of radical infrastructure, in some cases inspired by similar anarchist and autonomous squatting movements in Europe.⁹⁵ Others created gardens and free spaces designed to combat



Barricade in New York City

gentrification in the neighborhood.⁹⁶ Squatters organized services to protect themselves and to provide for their needs, organizing an “Eviction Watch” phone tree to mobilize in case of evictions and a communal kitchen to prepare food acquired from dumpster diving and donations.⁹⁷ Anarchists positioned themselves as a bulwark against gentrification on the Lower East Side, providing an early example of contemporary anarchist efforts aimed at gentrification. Anarchists smashed the front door of a notorious upscale condo development on numerous occasions⁹⁸ and covered the neighborhood in provocative anti-gentrification and pro-squatting posters.⁹⁹ In other cases, anarchists helped create a tent city in Tompkins Square Park and built alliances with homeless people.¹⁰⁰ Specifically anarchist

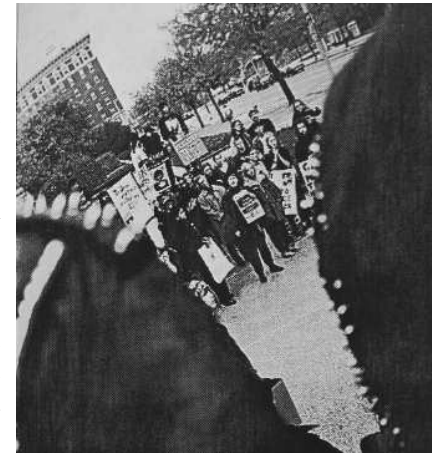
spaces were also opened, with a space called The Anarchist Switchboard (while lacking both a switchboard and a telephone), being a place where meetings were held and where anarchists cooked for other squatters.¹⁰¹ A more intentional space called Sabotage Books was later opened, with weekly meetings run on consensus and more specific political goals.¹⁰² Anarchists also organized a series of “Resist to Exist” concerts to bring outside anarchists into the struggle and to give a visible public rallying point.¹⁰³ Riots and confrontations with the police occurred on a semi-frequent basis, with burning barricades in the streets, property destruction, and the like. Of course, things weren’t perfect in the squats of New York City. Tensions existed between groups, sexism was rampant, and the scene was often male-dominated.¹⁰⁴ The squatting conflict has had lasting implications, with squatted spaces such as ABC No Rio becoming long-term centers of anarchist activity.¹⁰⁵ These experiments with anarchist infrastructure—bookstores, spaces, and eventually infoshops—would become some of the most frequently undertaken anarchist projects of the 1990s.

A Proliferation of Spaces: Anarchist Counter Institutions

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a series of anarchist projects were taken up: newspapers and magazines had renewed excitement, infoshops spread, and new organizations formed.¹⁰⁶ Especially following the Gulf War, anarchists opened a number of infoshops across the country as a means of creating a stronger anarchist presence with institutions that could sustain long-term organizing.¹⁰⁷ After the relatively strong but brief anarchist reaction to the Gulf War, infoshops were seen as a project to catalyze further activity and to give anarchists a day-to-day project to work on.¹⁰⁸ A brief description of an infoshop

bandannas and wearing black—held banners and signs with the anarchist symbol, including a large banner reading “Fight Police Terror” and a circle A.²¹² Chants of “Cops and Klan, Hand in Hand!” and “No Justice, No Peace” filled the streets. The rally was followed by a benefit show for long-term political prisoner Geronimo Ji Jaga Pratt.²¹³

These protests were organized by a group of anarchists in Grand Rapids who formed a chapter of the Anarchist Black Cross (ABC). On the national level, the Anarchist Black Cross was started in the United States in the 1980s, although its history can be traced back to the Russian Revolution.²¹⁴ The group had formed in response to the need for jail support after some members were arrested at a protest against Governor John Engler which was notable for the level of confrontation (an announcement for the protest advised “nonviolence is *not* necessarily to be expected from all who attend).²¹⁵ They met regularly at the Institute for Global Education (IGE) and held events including a forum on political prisoners in the United States.²¹⁶ The next year a smaller protest against police brutality once again took place, once again drawing many of its participants from the local punk scene. Local efforts were also undertaken to stop the execution of Mumia Abu-Jamal,²¹⁷ with protests in both 1995 and 1996.²¹⁸



Many of the anarchists involved in the Anarchist Black Cross got involved with other established leftist groups in Grand Rapids, including the Institute for Global Education, the Society for Economic Equality, and West Michigan For Animals.²¹⁹

Applying National Models Locally

As the 1990s progressed, visible manifestations of anarchism became more common in Grand Rapids. Influenced by what was happening elsewhere, projects undertaken by anarchists were occasionally experimented with here. Food Not Bombs existed at multiple points during the 1990s, often closely associated with the anarchist punk scene. The group served food to the homeless and hungry at Veterans Park two days a week during the late 1990s.²²⁰ At least one punk show was organized as a benefit for Food Not Bombs, with organizers of the show collecting money and a canned good in exchange for

Rodney King. Today we see Riverside sheriffs brutally beating Mexican immigrants, again caught on tape. In cities across the country, police kill unarmed people every month, yet the officers are rarely disciplined.

In Grand Rapids there have been numerous incidents where the police have shown their blatant racism and brutality against teh[sic] citizens. Two off-duty Grand Rapids police officers were witnessed harassing and beating a Black man in Kalamazoo, and six young people were quickly arrested and jailed for attempting to uphold their rights. None of these officers have been disciplined by Chief Hegarty!

Now is the time to demand the police departments of this country to stop their attack on their citizens. It is up to us to stop the epidemic of police abuse and violence! Let your voice be heard on October 22.”



Photos from *The Clock is Ticking*, An ARA Zine Out Of Lansing, Michigan

Around one-hundred protestors took over the streets of Grand Rapids during rush hour as part of an unpermitted march.²¹¹ Anarchists—many of them with

written in the mid-1990s stated:

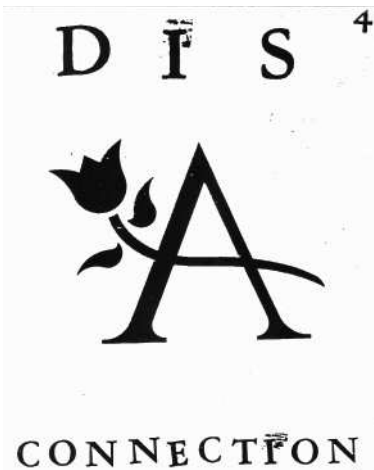
“An infoshop is a space where people involved with radical movements and countercultures can trade information, meet and network with other people & groups, and hold meetings and/or events. They often house “free schools” and educational workshops. Infoshops have existed in Europe for decades. The Spanish revolutionary infoshops of the 1930s, and the current European infoshops provided some of the inspiration for the newer North American infoshops.¹⁰⁹”

Infoshops frequently provided space for other projects to meet and host events while providing access points to anarchist and other radical politics.¹¹⁰ Infoshops tended to be relatively temporary, closing almost as often as they opened.¹¹¹ Some infoshops also provided connections with previous generations of anarchists. For example, The Wooden Shoe in Philadelphia was started by “libertarian socialists” who sought a long-term project to work on; it became specifically anarchist in the early 1980s.¹¹² Another infoshop that was perhaps more typical of the infoshops of the era was The Autonomous Zone—commonly called The A-Zone—in Chicago. It began in 1993, growing out of protests against the Gulf War and anarchists’ collective desire to have a space to organize beyond house meetings and parties.¹¹³ Reflecting interest in the project, many different groups met at The A-Zone and there were thirty to fifty people involved in the collective.¹¹⁴

Elsewhere, anarchists were involved in Food Not Bombs an activist project that grew out of the anti-nuclear protests of the early 1980s and morphed into a constellation of autonomous chapters that provided food for homeless and hungry people in cities across the United States, as well as serving food at protests and political events.¹¹⁵ Food Not Bombs was often viewed as a direct action whereby anarchists were able to demonstrate the practicality and effectiveness of their politics, while also giving them a day-to-day project to work on.¹¹⁶ Beyond Food Not Bombs and infoshops, anarchists took on a variety of other alternative institutions during the 1990s. The Midwest was home to several different projects, including pirate radio, housing collectives, bakeries, free schools, and others.¹¹⁷

As the 1990s went on, the Network of Anarchist Collectives was launched to connect many of these projects. The Network of Anarchist Collectives was designed to encourage collaboration between collectives and information/skill-sharing and even a speakers bureau.¹¹⁸ One of their efforts was the journal (*Dis*) *Connection* which functioned a “networking journal for anarchist collectives and counter-institutions,” with each issue containing a mix of updates on projects, how-to type articles, theoretical pieces, and strategic essays.¹¹⁹ For example, there were articles on organizing a lecture series,¹²⁰ a books to

prisoners project,¹²¹ a collective housing project like the Trumbullplex¹²², and a free skool¹²³—to highlight a few of the praxis oriented articles. Much of the base of the Network of Anarchist Collectives was in the Midwest, including projects in Michigan such as Trumbullplex and Active Transformation.¹²⁴ The Network also held various gatherings with the goal of bringing collectives together to network and collaborate.¹²⁵



New Directions in Defense of the Earth

In the mid to late 1980s, an increasing number of anarchists also started to participate in the Earth First! network.¹²⁶ Earth First! had formed in 1979 as a challenge to mainstream environmental groups, using a combination of media stunts and direct action to protest environmental destruction and to defend wild places. Earth First! was not an anarchist or even leftist group when it formed, seeing the environment as a primary if not exclusive concern.¹²⁷ However, by the time of the 1987 Earth First! yearly “Rendezvous” gathering, a distinctly anarchist faction called Alien Nation emerged that criticized the exclusively environmental approach, the flag-waving, and the misanthropic positions of some Earth First! members.¹²⁸ Anarchists in Earth First! also published a journal titled *Live Wild Or Die* that advocated for a more militant approach, glorifying sabotage and attacking the industrial system. Previously, Earth First! had led a workshop on “Anarchism and Ecology” at the Haymarket anarchist gathering in 1986.¹²⁹ The political differences led to a split in the group, where the non-anarchists who favored a strict approach to “environmental issues” left.¹³⁰ By the late 1990s, Earth First! was strongly associated with the anarchist space, with manifestations of anarchist politics—and especially anarcho-primitivism—appearing in campaigns such as the Minnehaha Free State.¹³¹

In the mid-1990s, the Earth Liberation Front (E.L.F.) emerged in North America. More an idea or ideology than a specific group, the E.L.F. sought to use economic sabotage to halt the destruction of the Earth. The group had “no command structure, no spokespersons, no office, just small groups working separately seeking vulnerable targets and practicing our craft.”¹³² The group is widely believed to have split off from Earth First! in England to pursue more confrontational forms of direct action, eventually inspiring individuals to take up the name in the United States.¹³³ The group’s ideology was clearly anti-capitalist, while many of its communiqués, targets, and organizing methods

By 1997 Anti-Racist Action chapters existed across Michigan.²⁰⁵ Lansing’s chapter published its own newsletter, *The Clock is Ticking*.²⁰⁶ One of the most notable confrontations took place in Ann Arbor in 1998 when anti-racist protestors ripped down a fence protecting the Ku Klux Klan, fought back against pacifist peace-keepers who tried to restrain them, and hurled projectiles at the Klan. Eventually the widows at city hall were also smashed.²⁰⁷ The state



Anti-Klan Protest in Ann Arbor

struck back with thirty-five warrants issued for anti-fascist organizers from across the state.²⁰⁸ Into 1999, ARA maintained a strong presence in Michigan, spread in part by the continued need for militant anti-racist actions and the ease through which one could form new chapters.²⁰⁹

Marching Against Police Brutality

In 1996, anarchists in Grand Rapids—organizing as the Michigan Anarchist Black Cross—held a protest against police brutality as part of “the national day of protest” held for the first time in 1996.²¹⁰ In Grand Rapids, organizers took the general context of police brutality and applied it to the specific situation in Grand Rapids, raising an issue that is largely ignored in Grand Rapids. An announcement for the rally read:

“Instead of protecting the public, police departments around the country are waging a campaign of violence and intimidation against people in our communities. Five years ago, we watched the televised beating of

schooling.”¹⁹²

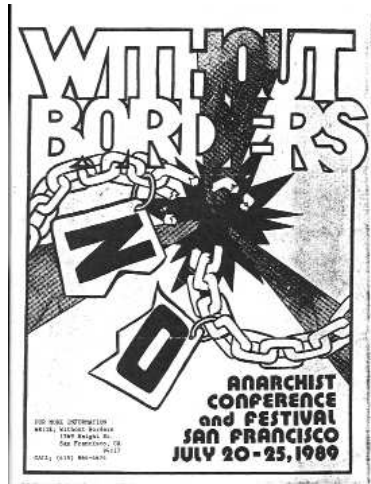
As would be expected, anarchists in Grand Rapids attended other gatherings in the region or even across the country, giving them a much needed connection to a larger circle of anarchists. Aside from the Circle Pines gathering, others recall attending the “Without Borders” anarchist gathering in San Francisco.¹⁹³ Along with traveling to gatherings, it is also worth noting that several anarchist and related gatherings took place in Michigan in the 1990s. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) hosted its 1992 annual conference in Michigan.¹⁹⁴

Love and Rage—an important anarchist federation in the 1990s—hosted its annual meeting in Lansing in 1997¹⁹⁵ (the group had long-term chapters in Lansing and Detroit¹⁹⁶).

Anti-Klan Activity

During the mid-1990s, there was a dramatic increase in activity by the Ku Klux Klan throughout Michigan and in the Midwest more generally. Rallies by the Ku Klux Klan happened across the state, often being met with militant confrontations.¹⁹⁷ Out of this resistance, anti-racist activists joined Anti-Racist Action (ARA) chapters and formed the Midwest Anti-Fascist Network to expand the fight beyond just street confrontations.¹⁹⁸ This work often focused on areas where liberal opponents of racism had no knowledge or interest, such as racist involvement in the punk rock subculture.¹⁹⁹

When the Ku Klux Klan held a rally in Grand Rapids on September 30, 1995, it was met by resistance similar to what was happening across the state. Multiple sources reported isolated confrontations at the rally, although no specific groups are mentioned.²⁰⁰ *The Grand Rapids Press* said that members of the crowd hurled eggs at the Klan and police officers, while insulting the police for protecting the Klan.²⁰¹ These confrontations, coupled with the presence of militant opposition elsewhere, showed that not everyone was ready to conform to liberal ideas of protest²⁰² and “free speech.”²⁰³ The presence of confrontation is consistent with reports of what was happening across the state as anarchists were increasingly coming together to use militant tactics to stop the Klan from meeting. Moreover, it echoed the growing belief that these rallies had to be confronted head-on rather than just ignored.²⁰⁴

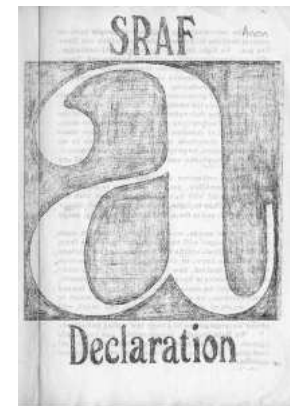


made clear its affinity with anarchism. Moreover, many anarchists have been among those publicly associated with the Earth Liberation Front (E.L.F.).¹³⁴

Formal Organization... or Not?

Coming out of the resurgence of interest in anarchism in the late 1960s, various efforts in the subsequent decades were undertaken to create either specific anarchist organizations or networks in which anarchists could share what they were doing and build from the experience of others or unite along common political goals.

An early experiment in creating an organization or network for the purpose of increasing communication and coordination amongst anarchists was the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. Begun in 1972, the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation was a loose-knit “synthesis” federation that brought together a number of different anarchist perspectives.¹³⁵ There were 18 groups at its founding.¹³⁶ The organization published classic pamphlets from anarchists such as Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Spooner as well as original material.¹³⁷ The group held occasional gatherings and facilitated communication amongst anarchists in the United States, most notably through the *S.R.A.F. Bulletin for Anarchist Agitators* which was a minimally edited discussion sheet, as well as the journal *Black Star*. In some cases, local groups also published their own material, such as the Seattle group’s *Revolutionary Anarchist*. The third issue was notable for its critiques of the left and the inclusion of anarcho-feminist writings.¹³⁸



SRAF Pamphlet

Other efforts included a “Continental Organizing and Communications Conference” in Des Moines in 1976 and the Anarchist Communist Federation which was formed in 1978.¹³⁹ The Anarchist Communist Federation emerged out of the Social Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. This group published the first “continental” anarchist newspaper, *The North American Anarchist*.¹⁴⁰ It lasted from 1978 to 1982, and had several affiliated collectives.¹⁴¹ The Anarchist Communist Federation’s newspaper outlived the federation, eventually changing its name to *Strike!* and publishing until 1986.¹⁴² The Workers Solidarity Alliance was also formed by anarcho-syndicalists out of attempts dating back to the mid-1970s to distinguish themselves from counter-cultural anarchists and to pursue a working-class form of anarchism oriented towards organized labor.¹⁴³

In the 1980s, networking formed around the newspaper *Mayday*,¹⁴⁴ growing out of the Minneapolis anarchist gathering in 1987.¹⁴⁵ Many of those anarchists involved in that project went on to form Love & Rage, a group that aimed for increased coordination in the anarchist movement. Love & Rage published a newspaper following its founding conference in 1989.¹⁴⁶ Originally constituted as a “network” with a structure designed to facilitate communication and the publication of a newspaper, by 1991 the organization developed a “tighter” organization and constituted itself as a “federation,” becoming known as The Love & Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation.¹⁴⁷ The group continued to meet until 1998 and did a lot to expand anarchist theory on race and “white skin privilege”.¹⁴⁸ While many of these forms were designed around adherence to very specific politics, other more informal efforts such as the Network of Anarchist Collectives carried on the approach of SRAF. Other efforts included organizing around prisons and prisoner support, with anarchists organizing autonomous groupings and even trying more formal types of networking, largely under the auspices of Raze the Walls! and the Anarchist Black Cross.¹⁴⁹

Into the 2000s

As the 1990s came to an end, many of the anarchist tendencies described within this history converged on Seattle to participate in an effort aimed at shutting down the World Trade Organization (W.T.O.) meeting. Anarchist interest in “globalization” had increased throughout the decade, in part spurred on by the Zapatista uprising of 1994 and their relatively decentralized approach to organizing and resistance.¹⁵⁰ In Seattle, the anarchist activity of the previous decade provided much of the basis for the successful shutdown of the trade summit. The shutdown was coordinated using affinity groups and spokescouncils. Anarchists who were familiar with building counter-institutions opened a squat to house those coming from out-of-town, anarchists involved with projects like Food Not Bombs provided food for protestors, anarchists who had developed skills with Earth First! helped to provide trainings¹⁵¹, and experiences with anarchist convergences such as Active Resistance in 1996 were helpful. Moreover, the militancy developed in environmental and anti-fascist struggles manifested itself in the black bloc actions that garnered anarchists significant attention. Seattle ushered in a spike in anarchist activity, with a series of anti-globalization convergences, projects forming, and increased popularity in ideas during the first portion of the 2000s.

(WTO)¹⁸⁴ and the origins of the Afghanistan War.¹⁸⁵ There were also reviews of pamphlets, newspapers, and publications like *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* and *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review*.

In the mid-1990s, *Discussion Bulletin* published a pamphlet titled “Notes on Anarchism” by Noam Chomsky, complete with Chomsky’s approval. In the introduction, Frank Girard wrote that Chomsky’s anarchism—with its interchangeable usage of “libertarian socialism”—was in line with the “politically ecumenical spirit” of the *Discussion Bulletin*.¹⁸⁶ Chomsky’s essay originally appeared as an introduction to Daniel Guerin’s *Anarchism*. In both Guerin and Chomsky’s explorations of anarchism there is a significant Marxist influence, which explains its appeal to the *Discussion Bulletin* crowd.¹⁸⁷

Discussion Bulletin stopped publishing in 2003, due to the belief that the Internet was filling the space once occupied by *Discussion Bulletin*. Frank Girard died a year later in 2004.

Anarchist Networking

Just outside of Grand Rapids, a conference took place at Circle Pines where anarchists and other radicals from across the country came to network. The “Midwest Radical Networking Conference” in 1994 spent a lot of time exploring consensus and group process.¹⁸⁸ It offered a focused discussion on process-oriented approaches to common problems in anarchist organizing.¹⁸⁹ At the time, the Midwest was home to many new experiments in alternative infrastructure, including infoshops and a wealth of other projects.¹⁹⁰ The conference built off discussions happening across the Midwest amongst those involved in counter-institutions. Some of these took place within the pages of the previously mentioned *(Dis)Connection*. As a co-operative camp with a long history of leftist associations, Circle Pines was an ideal location for anarchists that wanted to get away from their respective cities and work on projects.

Grand Rapids did not have any counter-institutions at the time, but the gathering provided an opportunity for anarchists in Grand Rapids to meet up with others in the region. The A-Zone in Chicago was one of the primary facilitators of the gathering. Among the projects at The A-Zone was a regular free school during the 1990s in which classes on a wide range of skills were organized and offered for free.¹⁹¹ Free schools proliferated in part because of their roots in the experiments of previous generations—the anarchist educational projects based on Francisco Ferrer in the United States and the alternative schools of the 1960—and because free schools were a popular project in anarchist circles. Owing connections made at the gathering, one anarchist from Grand Rapids co-facilitated a workshop at the A-Zone in Chicago in the mid-1990s on “anti-

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Discussion Bulletin Cover

encouraged people not to vote in elections.¹⁷⁸ In part because of his unorthodox views, Girard and the rest of the Grand Rapids branch of the SLP were expelled from the Party and he began publishing *Discussion Bulletin* in 1983.

Discussion Bulletin was a “libertarian socialist” publication. It rejected the Leninist concept of a “vanguard party” and once described itself as “...the element Lenin had in mind when he wrote *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*.”¹⁷⁹ *Discussion Bulletin* summarized its politics as serving:

“...the financially and politically independent forum of a relatively unknown sector of political thought that places the great divide in the “left”, not between anarchists and Marxists, but between capitalism’s statist leftwing of vanguardists and social democrats, and the real revolutionaries of our era: the non-market, anti-statist, libertarian socialists. They are organized in small groups of syndicalists, anarcho-communists, libertarian municipalists, world socialists, socialist industrial unionists, council communists, and left communists.

The perspective of these groups with their rejection of capitalism’s wage, market, and money system, as well as capitalist politics and capitalist unionism constitutes the only real alternative to capitalism in both its market and statist phases.

In the DB the often antagonistic groups that make up this sector can debate and discuss the issues that divide them, and gain some understanding of their history and future possibilities. Among the latter might be movement toward at least limited cooperation.”¹⁸⁰

Discussion Bulletin ran as an open forum with Girard doing minimal editing and formatting. It was a small photocopied publication with a no-frills layout.¹⁸¹ The publication came out once every two months for twenty years.¹⁸² Subscriptions were \$5 per year when it stopped publishing in 2003.¹⁸³

Topics ranged from obscure explorations into complex feuds within various political parties, debates over philosophy, tactics, and clashes over ideology. In addition, there were explorations into more current issues, including the role of anarchists in the 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization

ANARCHY IN GRAND RAPIDS: 1980-2000

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, anarchists had a presence in Grand Rapids. While this presence fluctuated—reflecting the turnover that exists within anarchist circles¹⁵²—it was there. Especially through punk rock, various groupings of anarchists were able to find each other and engage in shared projects. This happened in spite of Grand Rapids’ well-known conservative culture, but also in spite of the stranglehold that traditional leftist approaches had in the realm of “activism.” Approaches inherited from the 1960s anti-war movement dominated oppositional politics in Grand Rapids, often down to the involvement of specific individuals.¹⁵³ Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, “the left” in Grand Rapids continued to pursue what it was pursuing elsewhere: divestment from South Africa, opposition to U.S. involvement in Central America, and opposition to nuclear weapons. In many cases, anarchists participated in these various efforts, while in others, anarchists pursued their own distinct paths, whether by creating counter-cultural spaces of resistance or addressing areas ignored by others.

Punk Rock: A Place for Anarchist Ideas to Circulate

During the 1980s and 1990s, the local punk rock scene was one of the primary places where anarchist ideas circulated. As discussed elsewhere, anarchism and punk had a close relationship, with the subculture having both a broadly anti-authoritarian or anarchic practice, as well as specifically anarchist sub-scenes.

In Grand Rapids—as is the case in most places—there was no monolithic punk scene. Instead, there were a variety of different scenes that formed around specific venues, bands, genres, or even politics. Moreover,



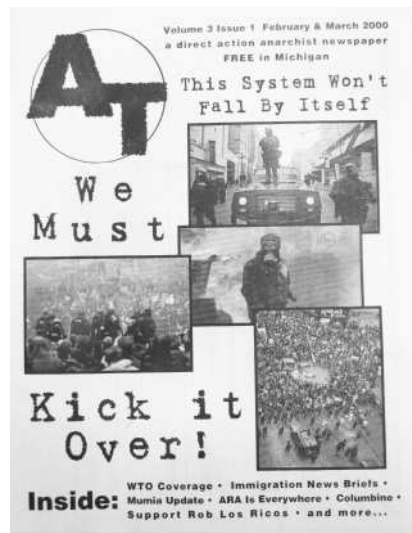
it's a scene characterized by immense turnover, so there are few punks who stay involved for any length of time. Consequently, anarchist currents within the punk scene would frequently repeat themselves over the years. Most often, anarchist ideas circulated via the music and lyrical content. Songs could provide political education while on stage banter might allow for education around a current event. In the 1980s, shows took place in the greater Grand Rapids area for a variety of bands sympathetic with anarchist ideas, including Crucifucks (out of Lansing),¹⁵⁴ Millions of Dead Cops (M.D.C.),¹⁵⁵ Filth, and Fifteen.¹⁵⁶ This trend would continue, with anarchist bands playing at The Enclave (a short-lived space on Division)¹⁵⁷ Internationally known anarcho-punk bands also played in Grand Rapids, including D.I.R.T.¹⁵⁸ at a space called Stone Soup. These were D.I.Y., self-organized affairs, taking place at rented halls and short-lived venues. In other cases, the aesthetics of the punk scene would have an anti-authoritarian edge, with one flyer that boldly declared: "America's dead... but free!"¹⁵⁹ or others that had the standard punk rock imagery of recycled scenes from past wars.¹⁶⁰



In the mid-1990s, a punk scene with specifically anarchist leanings emerged in Grand Rapids. Among these bands, System Collapse adopted the aesthetics of the anarcho-punk scene and were described as "grand rapids anarchistconvicts" on one show flyer.¹⁶¹ They also played a benefit for Food Not Bombs, appearing with Canadian bands Disagree and Ungovern Mental who released a record on the anarcho-punk label Profane Existence.¹⁶² Around the same time, the band System Analysis was active, with political lyrics and a demo

cassette encouraging people to fight against "racism, sexism, fascism, greed, power."¹⁶³ Society's Nuisance released a tape with political songs and a cover drawing of an anarchist punk.¹⁶⁴ Bands such as Reprisal sang anti-police and pro-animal liberation songs.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, this particular era of the also included punks becoming involved in more explicitly anarchist political efforts, such as Food Not Bombs and anti-police brutality protests in Grand Rapids.

Throughout the 1990s, anarchism would have visibility in the punk scene. Nationally known anarcho-



punk bands would continue to play shows in Grand Rapids, including Whorehouse of Representatives (on Profane Existence)¹⁶⁶ and The Pist.¹⁶⁷ *Active Transformation*, an anarchist newspaper out of Lansing that was distributed for free across Michigan could frequently be found at punk shows¹⁶⁸ as was literature more specifically directed at the punk scene from Crimethink and A.T.R.¹⁶⁹

In the 1980s

Anarchist ideas were also present in the remnants of "the movement" of the 1960s and 1970s. One example was the newspaper *Wake Up!*. *Wake Up!* was published by radical students at Grand Valley State College (GVSC) and owed much to the underground newspapers of the 1960s. It featured a newspaper format with cut and paste graphics that focused primarily on resistance to U.S. foreign policy, college policy, and the rightward turn in U.S. politics. The newspaper ran articles critical of capitalism¹⁷⁰ and was associated with "a cultural communal-anarchy commune."¹⁷¹ One author used the pen name "Emma Goldman." An issue from 1984 was printed at the IWW print shop in Grand Rapids.¹⁷² *Wake Up!* also promoted the Institute for Global Education (IGE) which formed after the American Friends Service Committee closed its storefront in Grand Rapids.¹⁷³ While primarily a peace and justice group, it would be an occasional meeting place for anarchists in the 1990s.

A more explicitly anarchist project was the group Autonomous Anonymous. Their slogan was "we have a one-step program," referring at once to anarchism's primary goal of abolishing the state and mocking the "12 Step Program" of Alcoholics Anonymous. For several years, they were listed in national publications as a local resource.¹⁷⁴ The project grew of the Society for Economic Equality (SEE) an organization that hosted meetings, debates, and eventually a television program. SEE was a "multi-tendency" group, with most of the older members being socialist and the younger members being anarchist.¹⁷⁵

Discussion Bulletin

In the 1990s and early 2000s, a Grand Rapids-based publication titled *Discussion Bulletin* was often be included on lists of anarchist publications.¹⁷⁶ It was an early effort that gave space for anarchist ideas to develop.

Discussion Bulletin was largely a one-person effort undertaken by Frank Girard. Girard was a long-time socialist who was active for a number of years in Grand Rapids. He joined the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) in the 1940s and ran for political office numerous times on their behalf.¹⁷⁷ Despite this, Girard ran on the position that if elected he would dismantle the state and actively