

**University of Alberta**

**Radical Politics in a Conservative Capital:  
Anarchist Theorizing and Organizing in Edmonton**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts**

**Department of Sociology**

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Spring 2014  
Edmonton, Alberta

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## **Abstract**

This thesis will investigate anarchism as a political philosophy and a social movement in Edmonton, Alberta. This will involve analyzing the ways local anarchists have interpreted anarchist theory as well as ways they have publicly advanced anarchism and participated in projects which practice anarchist values. This study will utilize ten semi-structured interviews with local self-identified anarchists regarding the approaches through which they have negotiated the numerous, and sometimes contradictory, anarchist theories, including the ways this influences their beliefs and actions. The interviewees' narratives will be supplemented with the history of the development of anarchism in Edmonton, which will consist of studying local anarchist groups' activities and purposes, as well as describing public events and literature printed in the city. Utilizing social movement theory, this study will determine if the anarchists in Edmonton constitute a sustained social movement.

Keywords: anarchism, Edmonton, social movements, prefigurative politics, activism

## **Acknowledgements**

Writing is a collective process. First I would like to thank my thesis committee for their guidance: Dr. Sourayan Mookerjea (supervisor); Dr. Trevor Harrison (internal member) and Dr. Kathleen Lowrey (external member), for their constructive input and support.

This thesis would not be possible without the interviewees and their perspectives and experiences which provided the substance of my research. Each interviewee enhanced my effort to map out the anarchist movement in Edmonton. I would specifically like to thank Eugene Plawiuk and Malcolm Archibald for being interviewed and agreeing to have their contributions publically recognized. I would like to thank the groups I have directly interacted with, including the Edmonton branch of the Industrial Workers of the World, Thoughtcrime Ink, Black Cat Press and the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair collective. I also acknowledge that the individuals I have spoken with at anarchist bookfairs, workshops and demonstrations have helped shaped this project.

I would also like to thank my proofreading team, which consisted of my parents, Robert and Judith, and my partner, Erin, whom I particularly want to thank for being the first to listen and critique my ideas and drafts.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Anarchist theories and practices have been taken up in a variety of different places around the world, though they are often understudied in local contexts. This lack of academic research on anarchism includes anarchist projects in Alberta, Canada. Most people in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, are unaware of the local anarchist organizations; nonetheless, there is a considerable amount of anarchist activity in the city. In addition to individuals who identify with and advocate anarchism, there are anarchist groups, public events and numerous outlets for the production and distribution of anarchist literature in Edmonton and across Canada.

Anarchism has become increasingly influential for social movements (Graeber, 2002). “Few social movements in North America have enjoyed as strong a revival in the twenty-first century as anarchism has experienced” (Shantz, 2010, p.1). In the past two decades anarchism has experienced a resurgence, which I will demonstrate has also occurred in Edmonton. The first Edmonton anarchist groups formed in the 1970s, but the expansion of local anarchist activity coincided with the rise of the alter-globalization movement in the 1990s, which can largely be seen as a response to the implementation of neoliberal politics. To date, there has not been an academic study of anarchism in Edmonton, and I am familiar with only two works which discuss anarchism in Edmonton.<sup>1</sup> Even at the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, which attracts approximately one thousand people and over a dozen groups selling anarchist inspired material, there has been no literature specifically concerning anarchism in Edmonton. Additionally, the

University of Alberta's print and online libraries, as well as the Edmonton Public Library, do not have any material concerning anarchism in Edmonton.

### **Alberta and Canada in Context**

At first anarchism in Alberta may seem surprising. Alberta can be portrayed as the most conservative province in Canada. The Government of Alberta has been consecutively ruled by a majority Progressive Conservative Party for over four decades. No other provincial government in the country has held such solid political dominance. Albertan political parties on the centre and on the left are largely unorganized, unlike other provinces where these parties are governing. At the time of writing, there is only one non-conservative Member of Parliament in Alberta. The development of the tar sands in Northern Alberta has likely created political inertia, where the incomes and tax revenues are higher than the per capita Canadian average, ensuring security from social discontent. The Alberta government receives more revenue from the tar sands than from taxpayers; subsequently Alberta has the lowest taxes in Canada, making Albertans content with authoritarian policies and also resulting in one of the lowest voter turn-outs in North America (Nikiforuk, 2008). Nonetheless, Edmonton can be viewed as an island of liberalism in Alberta, since the majority of non-conservative MLAs, and the only non-conservative MP, represent the city.<sup>2</sup>

When considering Canadian radical protest movements, it is likely that provinces other than Alberta come to mind. The 2012 Quebec student strike witnessed one of the largest protests in Canadian history, wherein students protested tuition hikes making education less accessible. These protests had a

substantial amount of anarchist influence in terms of the emphasis on direct action and the demand for free education, something over two dozen countries offer.

Anarchists in the mass media are often portrayed as violent protesters, exemplified by several large Canadian demonstrations. The 2010 G20 protests in Toronto witnessed tens of thousands of protesters. The police response resulted in the largest mass arrest in Canadian history, although the vast majority were released without charges. The Toronto police chief blamed violent anarchists for the destruction of property during the protests (CBC News, 2010, June 26). The April 2000 Quebec City Carnival against Capitalism also attracted tens of thousands of protesters, including many anarchists. This event opposed the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, in which 34 heads of state from the Americas met, and the protests succeeded in delaying and shortening official meetings. As David Graeber (2009) reported, the city surrounding the summit site was a chemical cloud for two days with tear and smoke gas. These protests are in contrast to Alberta, which has not had demonstrations of this scale nor degree of militant tactics. The one minor exception was the 2002 G8 protests in Kananaskis and Calgary, which attracted several thousand protesters, which is the only time I am aware that black bloc tactics have been used in Alberta.

#### *Edmonton's Early Anarchist Encounters*

The first record of an anarchist visiting Edmonton was Peter Kropotkin in 1898 (Kropotkin, 1898). The railroad had recently been extended to Edmonton, which was incorporated as a town earlier that decade; although it was established more than a century prior as a trading post for the Hudson's Bay Company.

Albeit, prior to the expansion of the Canadian state and European settlement, the land surrounding Edmonton was occupied by indigenous First Nations for at least 8000 years (Edmonton Public Library, n.d.). When Kropotkin visited, the Canadian state was giving out free homesteads around Edmonton (Kropotkin, 1898), in an effort to attract Europeans to the Prairie Provinces to counter the rights of First Nations to the territory (Day, 2000).

The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a radical solidarity union, was active in Western Canada at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, promoting radical organizing and popular education. This included organizing unskilled and transient workers in Edmonton, and holding numerous marches and rallies that attracted one thousand participants during the 1913-1914 depression (Chubb, 2012; Schulze, 1990). During this time, the IWW organized protests, meetings, marches and sit-ins in Edmonton (Edmonton Public Library, n.d.). The IWW in Edmonton first became active in 1912 when they supported striking sewer construction workers (Edmonton Public Library, n.d.). In an effort to halt the IWW, the police arrested the secretary of the Edmonton IWW, and charged him with vagrancy (Caragata, 1979), which was a tactic used against multiple Edmonton IWW members during that period (McCormack, 1991). The City of Edmonton was prepared to order in the militia, but the workers agreed to the city's terms before this occurred (Edmonton Public Library, n.d.). Nonetheless, this resulted in the IWW gaining a local reputation as a radical labor union.

An example of direct action during this time in Edmonton occurred in December 1913, when nearly four hundred unskilled and recently unemployed workers, organized by the IWW, stormed an upscale Methodist church during a Sunday sermon and refused to leave until they were given shelter (Chubb, 2012; Schulze, 1990). In February 1914, after the Edmonton IWW had been agitating railroad workers to use direct action, the police “raided the IWW hall and evicted two hundred jobless men who had been living there” (McCormack, 1991, p. 111). However, the IWW in Edmonton and Calgary consisted mainly of Marxists and it appears that Canadian IWW members were unaware of the anarchist influences in their tactics and in the founding of the IWW (Chubb, 2012).

The Canadian government banned the IWW under the War Measures Act in 1918, with membership, or even owning an IWW pin or literature, punishable with a maximum of five years in prison (Chubb, 2012). Canada deported hundreds of foreign-born dissidents during the Red Scare (History of Rights, n.d.), removing key organizers in the radical labor movement. The One Big Union, the reformist breakaway group from the IWW, organized the Edmonton General Strike of 1919 in conjunction with the Winnipeg General Strike. The Edmonton General Strike lasted one month and largely brought local production to a standstill (Plawiuk, 1994).

In 1927, Emma Goldman, a classical anarchist and feminist, spent a week in Edmonton. She presented over a dozen lectures on a variety of topics, including anarchism, to an array of audiences, including University of Alberta professors, Jewish groups, a women’s club and labor meetings (Goldman, 1931/1970). At one

of her lectures she spoke to an audience of 1500 (Plawiuk, 2007). Even though Goldman was a radical, she was allowed to speak in Edmonton because she was critical of the Soviet Union (Moritz & Moritz, 2001). Goldman first lectured in Alberta when she visited Calgary in 1907, lecturing on “Some Misconceptions of Anarchism,” though her impression of Calgary was negative (Switzer, 2007). Over Goldman’s lifetime she spent four years in Canada, and was influential in introducing May Day as the workers’ holiday in Canada (Moritz & Moritz, 2001).

By the end of the 1930s classical anarchism and labor militancy were largely silenced (Amster et al., 2009; Chubb, 2012; Woodcock, 1962). During the 1960s and 1970s anarchism was again taken up, largely by the student and anti-war movements (Graeber, 2010), though anarchists were also active in numerous other movements. During this period, for the first time in decades, classical anarchist literature was republished in North America (Woodcock & Avakumović, 1990) and commentaries and histories on anarchism started to appear.

### **Purpose of Research**

This study investigates the ways individuals in Edmonton have locally theorized and practiced anarchism. This includes ways individuals have negotiated anarchist theory, particularly in response to the recent interventions in contemporary anarchist theory which breaks from classical anarchism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This also involves ways anarchists in Edmonton have engaged in practicing or promoting anarchism, including individual and collective efforts.

In total, I interviewed ten local anarchists about their personal perspectives on anarchism, using their narratives to outline different groups in which they have been involved. In this way, I was able to investigate the composition of local anarchist theories while also documenting various forms of organizing and educational activities. I do not intend to generalize my findings to all anarchists in the city, nor was I seeking the interviewees to be spokespersons for the movement. Instead, I aimed to provide a sample of the ways people individually understand, experience, espouse and practice anarchism.

My research questions are: In what ways do individuals in Edmonton interpret and negotiate anarchist theory and how important is theory and action? In what ways have local anarchists promoted or practiced anarchism? Can the anarchist community in Edmonton be considered a social movement, or is it lacking a sustained basis? The first two questions are descriptive while the third question is analytical, using social movement theory to determine if the anarchists in Edmonton can be validly understood as a movement. Asking if there is an anarchist movement in Edmonton is a relevant question in social movement literature because it indicates if anarchists have a consequential local impact and are effectively influencing ordinary people in Edmonton. Chapter 4 addresses the first research question, Chapter 5 addresses the second question and Chapter 6 analyzes the final research question. In answering these questions I will outline the local repertoire of action available to anarchists in Edmonton. I will use the individual narratives to understand how individuals negotiate anarchist theory, while relating it to broader social contexts of anarchist activities in Edmonton. I

am particularly interested in anarchists who have engaged in organizing anarchist groups or events, because this provides examples of prefiguration, defined in Chapter 2, and also traces an underground history that is not documented in the academic literature concerning anarchism and direct action in Edmonton.

The study of anarchism contributes to various sociological areas of research, including social movements, globalization, social theory and social structures. Just as liberalism and Marxism are accepted as points of reference in academia, anarchism offers theoretical insights (Amster et al., 2009). Studying anarchism will contribute to these bodies of thought, while also contributing to the literature which studies the limits of liberal representative parliamentary democracy and capitalism. My research is not designed to be a polemic or a defense of anarchism, but instead a sociological investigation into local anarchist theorizing and organizing. All political perspectives merit scholarly attention. Anarchism, both as a political philosophy and a social movement, merits the attention of social scientists, including the ways it is locally experienced. Studying marginalized political theories and practices facilitates an understanding of ways to resist the hegemony of dominant social and political discourses while creating new possibilities for politics. Academics and the general public should be concerned when dominant ideologies exclusively inform public opinion, while other ideologies are preemptively excluded.

My research will have practical outcomes for three groups of people; academics, the local anarchist community and the general public. Firstly, my thesis will extend the documentation of the local history of radical political

theorizing and practice. I will be furthering the academic study of anarchist practices in local contexts, which in Canada is limited and focuses on cities larger than Edmonton. Secondly, my research will be beneficial for the anarchist community in Edmonton because it will give voice to their ideas and activities. It will also provide an informative and positive account of the movement, helping to disperse negative connotations of anarchism as advocating chaos in the public sphere. Additionally, the interviewees may find it helpful to clarify their own perspectives and affirm their role of promoting anarchist ideas. Thirdly, my research will contribute to dismissing the misperceptions and distortions of anarchist theory and practice in the general public and in popular culture. It will also provide examples of ways people in the community can engage in mutual aid and local groups.

This chapter has introduced the scope and purpose of this research study, as well as described early anarchist influenced activity in Edmonton, prior to the interviewees' narratives concerning anarchist projects, which starts in the 1970s. The following chapter is the literature review, which investigates anarchist theory, including anarchist principles and practices, as well as contemporary traditions and debates. The third chapter discusses the methods and rationale used to research anarchism in Edmonton, primarily semi-structured interviews, as well as the ethical considerations of this study and my status as an insider and outsider to the research subject. The findings section is divided into two chapters. Chapter 4 expounds on the ways the interviewees' have theoretically interpreted anarchism as well as the ways they have promoted and practiced anarchism. Chapter 5

chronicles the history of anarchist projects in Edmonton, including their purpose and tactics. Chapter 6 is the analysis of the research, which determines if the anarchist community in Edmonton can justifiably be considered a social movement. The final chapter is the conclusion, which details ways researchers could further study anarchism in Edmonton.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review: Anarchist Theory and Practice in Context**

### **Anarchism as a Political Philosophy**

As a political philosophy anarchism is a dynamic theory which emphasizes spontaneity, making it difficult to label it as a single ideology. Anarchism is a theory that, by definition, rejects dogmatic formulas for society (Goldman, 1917/1969), resulting in a range of interpretations. Emma Goldman (1917/1969), a classical anarchist and feminist, denied that anarchism is an ideology; however, some contemporary anarchists regard anarchism as a distinct ideology (Curran, 2007; Gordon, 2005; Suissa, 2010). Unlike other ideologies, anarchism lacks theoretical consistency (Curran, 2007; Suissa, 2010). David Graeber (2009), an American anarchist and anthropologist, asserts that anarchism is not a doctrine, but rather, “It’s a movement, a relationship, a process of purification, inspiration, and experimentation” (p. 216). The anti-canonical nature of anarchism, meaning that it does not refer to a single set of anarchist theorists, complicates the ability to conclusively define anarchism (Suissa, 2009).

Anarchists tend to be against a single Anarchist High Theory, instead recognizing the diversity of anarchist perspectives (Grubačić & Graeber, 2004). The accepted set of anarchist theorists and practitioners depend on the particular anarchist tradition. Anarchism is compatible with many things, overlapping with varying anarchist perspectives and the broader traditions of left-wing politics and struggles for autonomy.<sup>3</sup> Two main anarchist tendencies can be distinguished as social anarchism, which extols collectivity and solidarity, and individual anarchism, which promotes individual freedom and creativity (Woodcock, 1962).

Anarchy is a sentiment shared in many times and places, particularly where communities are self-organized and stateless (Barclay, 1996; Barclay, 1997), whereas anarchism as a political philosophy arose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some anarchist academics have noted that contemporary anarchists lack ideological purity (Epstein, 2001; Mueller, 2003). This means that even though people identify as anarchists, they may not be familiar with classical or contemporary anarchist theory and that anarchism is more of a sensibility (Epstein, 2001). Instead of theoretical adherence to ideology, anarchists are often more interested in practicing anarchism; thus, there is a tendency within the anarchist movement to emphasize practice over theoretical nuance:

...[I]f anarchism is anything today... it is not a set of dogmas and principles, but a set of practices and actions within which certain principles manifest themselves. Anarchism is not primarily about what is written, but about what is done... (Mueller, 2003, p. 123).

Graeber (2002) suggests that the emphasis on anarchist action, particularly implementing anarchist principles, is its ideology. Graeber (2011) asserts that anarchism can be viewed as an ethics of practice: “it means nothing to say you are an anarchist unless you are doing something” (p. 106). Judith Suissa (2009) observes that anarchists have a different relationship to theory from Marxists, because anarchism does not have an authoritative canon. Graeber (2009) maintains, “Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy; anarchism, an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice” (2009, p. 211).

The distinction between anarchism and libertarianism is imprecise. Peter Marshall (2008) argues that “all anarchists are libertarians, [but] not all libertarians are anarchists” (p. xiii). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, libertarianism referred to leftwing political ideas, particularly anarchist theories, but since the 1950s, especially during the 1980s, libertarianism became popular in a rightwing context (Sapon & Robino, 2009). Some theorists have distinguished between leftwing and rightwing libertarianism, in which the leftwing includes the majority of anarchist traditions, as well as Marxist and socialist theories, while the rightwing includes anarcho-capitalism and some elements of individualist anarchism (Kinna, 2005; Sapon & Robino, 2009). Libertarians are opposed to a centralized state, though rightwing libertarians support an unregulated capitalist free-market with an emphasis on private property (Kinna, 2005; Marshall, 2008), whereas leftwing libertarians reject capitalist market relations, including private property, and instead support common property managed by the collective or the community. Rightwing libertarians also view inequality caused from a free-market as justified (Kinna, 2005), valuing competition over egalitarianism and mutuality. Most anarchist theorists have rejected capitalism, which will be further discussed in the section regarding anarchist principles.

Anarchism is both a critique of existing society and a belief in an alternative future social order which promotes equality and mutual aid (Woodcock, 1962). Similarly, Uri Gordon (2005) asserts that anarchist action employs a “dual strategy of confrontation to delegitimise the system and grassroots alternative-building from below” (p. 60). Therefore anarchism is both a

vision and a form of action which seeks to create that vision. Anarchism is not the absence of institutions or organizations; instead it questions our social organizations and seeks to provide alternative forms of social relationships and organizations (Milstein, 2010). Likewise, as two anarchist sociologists iterate, “Anarchism provides a framework for practicing, learning about, and exploring new forms of social relationships” (Williams & Shantz, 2011, p. 12).

There are broad and refined definitions of anarchism. Dana Williams and Jeff Shantz (2011) propose that anarchist forms of organization can include almost any group “as long as it is not hierarchically imposed by some external authority” (p. 12). Additionally, Sébastien Faure (as cited by Woodcock, 1962) defined anarchists as anyone who renounces and struggles against authority. A more refined definition of anarchism is Richard Day’s (2005) assertion that anarchists are people who explicitly self-identify as such, whereas, groups or tactics may be anarchistic if they embody anarchist principles. Gordon (2008) argues that it is risky to ascribe the anarchist label to people or groups who do not identify with it, and that studying anarchism as a political culture, which refers to “doing politics,” prevents academic reifications of the anarchist movement, since it “doesn’t imply theoretical unity, ideological conformity, or linear movement structures” (p. 14). Gordon maintains that there are three types of anarchism. First, anarchism may refer to the contemporary social movement, second, a political culture and third, a collection of ideas. Anarchism, as a social movement, relates to individuals and groups which engage in prefigurative politics, which is described in the following section, and as a collection of ideas it refers to

anarchist theory. Political culture considers anarchistic groups, such as Occupy Wall Street, as practicing and embodying anarchism because of their shared political actions, forms of organizing, cultural expression and political language, while acknowledging that they may not be explicitly anarchist.

Graeber (2009) also categorizes anarchism as three distinct ideas:

“Anarchism is the mutual exchange between inspirational visions, anti-authoritarian attitudes, and egalitarian practices” (p. 221-222). Therefore anarchism can be a vision, an attitude or a set of practices. According to Graeber, anarchism as a vision refers to people who explicitly identify with anarchism, which is the conventional definition of anarchism. Anarchism as an attitude pertains to people who oppose government and forms of hierarchy. In this regard there have always been anarchists since there are numerous historical examples of anti-authoritarianism. Nonetheless, this attitude may be largely inchoate and does not imply an awareness of anarchism. Anarchism as a set of practices refers to living in ordered anarchism, which includes “institutions, habits, and practices” (Graeber, 2009, p. 215). Graeber maintains that anarchism is the movement between these three categories.

### *Anarchist Principles*

Anarchism at its core is a political and social philosophy which promotes a highly organized and thoroughly ethical society based on cooperation, mutual aid and decentralization (Chomsky, 2005; Goldman, 1917/1969; Kropotkin, 1902/1998; Woodcock, 1962). Primary principles and normative values of anarchism include resistance to arbitrary power, anti-capitalism, anti-statism,

prefiguration, mutual aid, direct action and direct democracy of economic and political affairs.

As a political philosophy anarchism does not deny authority or order, as is commonly portrayed in the media and in popular culture; rather, anarchists are always critical of authority (Graeber, 2002). Anarchists insist “upon dismantling, critiquing, and challenging illegitimate authority” (DeLeon & Love, 2009, p. 160). Power relationships, especially domination and hierarchy, need to be questioned and should only be tolerated if sufficiently justified (Chomsky, 2005). Harold Barclay (2005a) asserts that, “The aim of anarchism is to create a society based upon voluntary co-operation, to minimize power or, in other words, to diffuse power maximally so that it is equalized” (p. 116). Besides this critique of irrational authority and unjustified power, there are various core anarchist principles.

Anarchist theorists have argued that representative democracies fail to offer substantive social benefits for the general public because the economy is not democratically organized. This means that public decision-making is precluded from the economic spheres of social life, with the rulers of capital largely crafting economic and social policies for their own interests and de facto acting as private tyrannies (Chomsky, 2005; Kropotkin, 1885/1992). In contrast to representative democracy, anarchists often encourage direct democracy. Andrej Grubačić (2004), an anarchist sociologist, asserts that anarchism requires three basic beliefs: anti-capitalism, anti-statism and prefigurative politics. Anarchists are opposed to capitalism because it is seen as inherently exploitative, creating

inequality and needless suffering. Randall Amster (2012) asserts that capitalism is “a system of exploitation, domination and coercion” which dehumanizes and denaturalizes (p. 15). Capitalist democracies, both in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, have often opposed self-determination and democracy elsewhere, subverting democratically elected governments in favor of dictatorships which ensure the interests of multinational corporations and western nation-states (Chomsky, 2007). Anarchists are also opposed to private property because it is seen as maintaining class privilege and inequality (Amster, 2009).

Anarchists are either apolitical or anti-political, meaning they do not want to take over the state but instead seek to abolish it (Woodcock, 1962). From this perspective, political parties are interested in maintaining their own power rather than representing the general public. By contrast, the purpose of anarchism is to avoid leading others and instead developing self-organization and direct democracy. “According to anarchists, the State rests upon illegitimate authority and should be dismantled and remade according to more localized and autonomous free associations centered upon social justice, nonviolence, shared responsibility, and mutual aid” (DeLeon, 2010, p. 7). Williams and Shantz (2011) assert that the nation-state is so embedded in everyday thinking that people generally “conflate the notion of society with notions of nation or nation-state” (p. 11). The authors argue that the state is used as a means of class control and that the State is violent while anarchism is non-violent.

Prefiguration refers to practicing anarchist values in one’s immediate social life and community, providing a possibility for an alternative for the future

in the present (Graeber, 2002; Milstein, 2010; Mueller, 2003). Gordon (2008) defines prefigurative politics as “the realization of expression of anarchist values in the movement’s own activities and structures” (p. 3). Prefiguration is important because it emphasizes an active engagement in making alternative structures and institutions which challenge current ones; thereby providing not only a critique of society but also offering possibilities for change. Prefiguration directly relates to direct action, though they are not interchangeable since direct action can include actions which do not represent prefiguring a desirable future alternative.

George Woodcock (1962), a Canadian anarchist theorist, iterated that anarchism is theory of direct action. Direct action is a political practice which rejects appealing to the state for implementing social change (Franks, 2011). Williams and Shantz (2011) argue that direct action is more empowering and efficient, noting “[p]eople typically do not channel their behavior through intermediaries, especially political elites. People self-organize themselves all the time to immediately address their collective needs and desires” (p. 24). Direct action and other anarchist practices aim at “exposing, de-legitimizing and dismantling mechanisms of rule while winning ever-larger spaces of autonomy and participatory management within it” (Grubačić & Graeber, 2004, p. 4). Direct action includes collective initiatives challenging the state’s legitimacy, such as strikes, occupying factories and picket lines blocking “scabs” (Graeber, 2009, p. 205). It also includes forms of community-building, including free schools and libraries, independent and local media outlets and organizations which practice mutual aid and decentralization (Day, 2005; Shantz, 2010). Gordon (2008) notes

that there are negative and positive forms of direct action; for instance, examples of negative direct action are sabotage and disruption while positive direct action involves social relationships free of hierarchy and domination.

The classical anarchist Peter Kropotkin (1902/1998) was largely responsible for popularizing mutual aid as a core anarchist principle. Kropotkin attested that evolution was as much a result of cooperation and mutual aid as it was of competition. Mutual aid is the concept of helping others in a non-coercive manner without an expectation of personal gain (Williams & Shantz, 2011). It can also be expressed as a free economy which shares products with others in mutual benefit (Amster, 2012). Mutual aid assumes that there is a certain degree of sociability in humans, “where sustaining a society is good for everyone, not just certain individuals” (Williams & Shantz, 2011, p. 25). Mutual aid extols solidarity by sharing human needs through non-hierarchical organizations in which the distribution of goods occurs without profit incentives. As Amster (2012) observes, “This sense of mutualism is sometimes expressed as solidarity, affinity, or community; in all cases, there is a fundamental recognition that people need each other to survive and flourish” (p. 9).

Decentralization is a key anarchist principle because it is an alternative to hierarchical structures. Williams and Shantz (2011) provide a succinct definition for decentralization, which “refers to the social relationships and organization lacking a centralized mechanism, structure, or authority, while not precluding coordination, cooperation, or communication” (p. 27). Anarchists seek a “decentralized and self-regulating society consisting of a federation of voluntary

associations of free and equal individuals” (Marshall, 2008, p. 3). There are a variety of principles which relate to decentralization, including horizontal, participatory and autonomous politics, as well as the concepts of direct democracy and self-organization. Amster (2012) argues that decentralism allows anarchism to remain dynamic and spontaneous, challenging even its own principles, preventing anarchism from becoming a repressive universalizing meta-narrative.

Anarchist theorists emphasize different anarchist principles, though they are frequently interconnected and represent many of the basic principles already outlined. For example, Amster (2012) has postulated nine anarchist principles, though he notes that anarchism is not uniform and that anarchists will create their own principles; these principles are anti-authoritarianism, voluntarism, mutualism, autonomism, egalitarianism, naturalism, anti-capitalism, dynamism, pragmatism, utopianism and decentralism. Graeber (2009) identifies “self-organization, voluntary association, mutual aid, [and] the opposition to all forms of coercive authority” (p. 212) as basic principles of anarchism.

### *Classical and Contemporary Anarchist Theory*

Anarchism is regularly dated as being formally articulated in 1840 by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (Woodcock, 1962). Proudhon was the first theorist to self-identify as an anarchist as a positive ideal, defining many characteristics of anarchist theory. Proudhon was anti-political and as a former member of the French parliament was disillusioned with the inability to legislate social change. Proudhon was opposed to private property, and is famous for articulating that “Property is Theft,” though by this he meant unearned property, or accumulated

property used to exploit the labor of others without any productive contribution (Amster, 2009; Woodcock, 1962). However many contemporary anarchists have criticized Proudhon's reactionary elements; for instance, Graeber (2009) notes that Proudhon rejected strikes because he saw it as a form of coercion and Day (2005) critiques Proudhon for believing in the perfectibility of humans and universal progression. Coinciding with the development of anarchism, several modern ideologies began to appear in the 1840s including socialism and communism (Robbins, 2008).

Michael Bakunin was an early anarchist whose main contribution was not theoretical but instead constructing anarchism as a social movement. Bakunin was a man of action and participated in numerous revolutionary struggles, though he was prone to forming secret organizations and fabricating their membership (Woodcock, 1962). Bakunin's major theoretical contribution was the distinction between a social and political revolution (Day, 2005). Political revolutions merely change the people controlling the state, which maintains the hierarchical power structure, while social revolutions change the ways people relate to one another, enabling revolutionary social change. Bakunin was a member of the First International and was one of the first to identify Karl Marx's authoritarian conceptualization of socialism (Woodcock, 1962). Bakunin's main limitation was his millennial vision of the totalizing revolution which would end all inequality (Day, 2005).

Kropotkin was another classical anarchist involved with popularizing anarchism. He broke with Bakunin's totalizing revolution and was important for

making anarchism an ethical theory (Day, 2005). Goldman was important for popularizing anarchism in North America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was considered one of the most dangerous women in America by the long-running FBI director J. Edgar Hoover (Marshall, 2008). Goldman recognized that bourgeois culture could be used to subvert capitalism and promote radical ideas, through cultural expressions such as theatre drama, music and literature (Moritz & Moritz, 2001). She was important for advocating women's rights while also arguing that winning women's right to vote would not change the repressive state structure (Goldman, 1917/1969).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian and Spanish Revolutions were important historical moments of anarchist activity. During the Russian Revolution there were numerous anarchists involved in supporting and then opposing the socialist government, including Goldman and Alexander Berkman. The Russian Revolution however turned out to be a political, not a social, revolution; the Bolshevik government banned and imprisoned anarchists and other dissidents, signaling the death of the revolution by the repression of non-party ideas (Berkman, 1922/1989). Nestor Makhno organized an anarchist army numbering thousands of members largely composed of peasants during the Russian Revolution (Woodcock, 1962). The Spanish Revolution witnessed the largest base of anarchist action, which included millions of people living in collectivized communities and communes where farms and factories were organized by those working on them (Woodcock, 1962). Some anarchist

commentators view the 1939 fascist victory in Spain resulted in the end of the period of classical anarchism (Amster et al., 2009).

Contemporary anarchists have an ambiguous relationship with these classical anarchists and the history of anarchism. Some anarchists refer to classical anarchist ideas and actions as a point of reference for their perspectives, while others are unaware of these century old anarchists. Some contemporary anarchist theorists have sought to deconstruct or de-centre anarchist theory (Wilson, 2007). For instance, Day, in *Gramsci is Dead* (2005), has deconstructed and critiqued classical anarchist theory, identifying the universalizing and essentializing beliefs of Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. This includes recognizing that power relationships cannot be completely dismantled and that there is no centre of power, meaning that power is not from one point but flows through all points (Day, 2005).

Numerous academics have noted an epistemological break in anarchism, with some identifying a new type of anarchist (Curran, 2007; Gordon, 2008; Graeber, 2002). Gordon (2008) argues that there has been “something of a paradigm shift in anarchism” (p. 6). He asserts, “[C]ontemporary anarchism is only in small part a direct continuation of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century anarchist movements...” (p. 5). Instead, the background of contemporary anarchism is based in the radical new social movements of the 1960s. Gordon (2008) also asserts that there has been a shift from the classical anarchist view of the state and capital as primary sources of power to the contemporary anarchist critique of all forms of domination. Additionally, Grubačić (2004) notes an

“escape from tradition” in contemporary anarchism (p. 37-38), in which many anarchist activists are not readily familiar with classical anarchism, or even the New Left anarchists of the 1960s and 1970s.

Graeber (2002) briefly identifies the change in anarchist attitudes by distinguishing between small-a anarchists and capital-A anarchists. Capital-A anarchists generally identify with “the traditional political culture of the anarchist movement established before the Second World War” (Gordon, 2008, p. 25). They often have formal structures with elected officials, decisions are usually made through debating and then voting and they emphasize workplace organizing, anti-war actions and publishing their ideas (Gordon, 2008). Small-a anarchists do not identify with specific anarchist traditions, such as anarcho-syndicalism, green anarchism or individualism (Graeber, 2009), but instead are “non-card carrying radicals in the anti-globalization movement...” (Curran, 2007, p. 8) who emphasize informal organizing and the consensus model of decision-making (Gordon, 2008). Small-a anarchists tend to organize around issues of ecology, identity politics and experimental communities (Gordon, 2008).

Other anarchist theorists have conceptualized this epistemological break within the discourse of post-anarchism, challenging the classical anarchist reliance on essentialist and naturalist claims (Curran, 2007; Day, 2005; May, 1994; Newman, 2005; Rouselle & Evren, 2011; Wilson, 2007). Post-anarchism is a range of anarchist theories which is largely informed by post-structuralism. It accepts anarchist values, but questions the basis of classical anarchist theories, which propose essentialist notions of society as inherently good, universal ideas

like freedom and equality and an objective human nature. Post-anarchism also problematizes the classical anarchist emphasis on repressive power and the centrality of the state. However, this post-anarchist intervention is a considerably contested issue in the broader contemporary anarchist literature. For instance, Suissa (2010) argues that post-anarchists have inaccurately stereotyped classical anarchist theory; for example, arguing that Kropotkin recognized human nature is not essential but contextual and that he did not believe human nature is naively altruistic, acknowledging a human drive for domination.

There has been a variety of theoretical interventions by contemporary anarchists, repositioning anarchist beliefs of revolution and reform. Noam Chomsky (2005) suggests that it is dangerous to adhere to an ideology without simultaneously addressing the actual situation in one's society. Chomsky departs from traditional anarchist theory with his innovation of the distinction between goals and visions, and how these relate to each other. Chomsky argues that a vision refers to the way a future society should be organized, where people might live harmoniously. Goals are immediate decisions and actions that are available to people, which have real human consequences. Chomsky asserts that visions should inform goals, yet they should only be partial guides, as goals and visions are frequently in conflict. He affirms that his vision fits within the anarchist tradition, in part because he agrees that the state is an illegitimate and coercive position of power which should be dismantled. Yet to do so contemporarily, without challenging other positions of power, would assist the trend of neoliberalism, further subjecting people to market principles and the exploitation

of the wage system (Chomsky, 2005). Thus, the removal of the state, due to the current structure of corporate and financial power, would be detrimental because the state presently guarantees the protection of elementary rights of workers and citizens. As an anarchist, Chomsky's goal is to temporarily defend some state institutions, while opening them up for public participation and evaluation, while his long-term vision is a highly moral and organized society without a centralized hierarchical authority. Chomsky's position is in contrast to many classical anarchists who vehemently renounced using state assistance.

Shantz (2009) supports the theory of "social insertion," which proposes that anarchists should not concentrate on building anarchist organizations or reverting to counter-culturalism. Instead, Shantz asserts, anarchists should become involved in social movements and local rank-and-file community and working-class organizations. He argues anarchists should be interested in implementing anarchist values beyond solely anarchists and activists, seeking to include the general public in community-building projects. Similarly, Day (2005) has criticized anarchists that are only willing to work on revolutionary struggles, arguing that reforms can be important. Day argues that the dichotomy between revolution and reform is not constructive, abandoning the concept of revolution and instead supporting experimental projects which implement radical social change in which individuals and communities practice prefigurative politics in the present.

## **Social Movements and Forms of Anarchist Organizations**

### *Social Movement Theory*

Social movements are important because they can provide democratic participation and social change. Movements are outside of, and challenge, the “established power structure” (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 5). Movements involve formal and informal organizations which produce culture, collective identities and political campaigns (Staggenborg, 2008). There are a variety of social movements, with different goals, tactics and ideologies. William Carroll (1997) observes that the Canadian study of social movements is not as universalizing as it is in the US, noting that Canadian social movement researchers are more interested in “constructing idiographic accounts rather than nomothetic explanations” (p. 2). Therefore, there is greater emphasis in Canada concerning movement activities and the ways they are expressed locally rather than theoretical constructs or generalizations about social movements. Similarly, other Canadian researchers have chronicled “first-hand accounts of experiences and analyses of some social movements in Canada” (Findlay, Cunningham, & Silva, 1988, p. 16).

This study does not utilize a single social movement theory but instead is informed by all the perspectives. Carroll (1997) suggests that a synthesis of theories enhances the understanding of social movements. Political process theory offers insights into the political environment in which social movements are situated. New social movement theory is relevant because it has studied the change in social movements since the 1960’s and the demand for more

democratic organizations which are separate from Old Left parties and tactics (Carroll, 1997). Importantly, movements are not just political, but also operate in the social and economic spheres (Staggenborg, 2008). Resource mobilization theory has practical implications for the assets anarchists have to mobilize participation. The way these theories apply to the anarchist community in Edmonton will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The concept of collective identity is important for social movement participants, as it connects individuals with similar beliefs and produces action. Staggenborg (2008) defines collective identity as a “sense of shared experiences and values that connect individuals to movements” (p. 21). In the case of anarchism, the anarchist movement collectively identifies with anarchist theory, history, practices and/or members, though interpretations can be diverse. Events such as the anarchist bookfair, anarchist study groups and grassroots organizations practicing anarchist principles, generate a collective anarchist identity with their participants. The Industrial Workers of the World also promote a collective identity of working-class solidarity and solidarity unionism. Staggenborg (2008) defines collective action frames as “interpretations of issues and events that inspire and legitimate collective action... [which c]onstruct cultural meaning, frame issues to identify injustices, attribute blame, propose solutions, and motivate collective action” (p. 18). There are coalitions with anarchists who have framed issues with broader movements, including for peace, anti-corporate globalization, social justice and the environment.

### *The Anarchist Movement*

Contemporary anarchists are present amongst the newest social movements (Day, 2005). Williams and Shantz (2011) assert that there are anarchist currents in many social movements. Anarchists have been involved in various movements, including struggles for autonomy (Ward, 2011), alter-globalization (Currin, 2007; Epstein, 2001), anti-authoritarianism (Gordon, 2005), and environmentalism (Bookchin, 1984; Currin, 2007). Graeber (2002) notes that in many ways anarchism has replaced Marxism in influencing social movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Gordon (2008) asserts the anarchist movement is a “network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations” (p. 14). Informal social movement organizations, of which the majority of anarchists projects can be considered, “have fewer established procedures, rules and membership requirements” than formal organizations (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 32). Decentralized and informal structures also tend to encourage tactical innovation and direct action (Staggenborg, 2008). The model of the anarchist movement has been described as a rhizome, which refers to “a structure based on principles of connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and non-linearity” (Gordon, 2008, p. 15). Anarchist social movement organizations and tactics are often modular, meaning they can be “easily transported to many locales and situations, rather than being tied to local communities and rituals” (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 4). Modular tactics used by anarchist projects in Edmonton include the Anarchist Bookfair, the Anarchist Reading Circle, the Anarchist Black Cross, Food not Bombs, the Free

School, Reclaim the Streets, No One is Illegal, Radical Cheerleaders and Occupy. These groups have autonomously operated in many North American cities and can be easily replicated in new places. These groups can also be considered banners, which are “a convenient label for a certain goal or type of political activity” which may operate in networks that communicate with other autonomous groups using the same name or tactics (Gordon, 2008, p. 15).

Anarchism is both a “form of organization and a commitment to egalitarianism” (Epstein, 2001, p. 1). Anarchist organizations are self-organized, autonomous and non-hierarchical. There are a variety of anarchist organizational forms, including affinity groups, collectives and coalitions. Anarchist groups are generally not interested in recruitment, instead their “objective is horizontal expansion and enhanced ‘connectivity’ among diverse movements, within flexible and decentralised information structures that allow for maximal coordination and communication” (Gordon, 2008, p. 15). Affinity groups are an example of anarchism in practice (Day, 2005). This is because “the decision-making process... is egalitarian, participatory, deliberative and consensual” (Dupuis-Déri, 2010, p. 40). An affinity group is an autonomous ad hoc project, generally consisting of between five and twenty people who share the same goals and visions and organize for a specific purpose (Day, 2005; Dupuis-Déri, 2010; Gordon, 2008). Collectives are more permanent anarchist groups, which also have a small face to face membership (Gordon, 2008). Coalitions are a collection of individuals or groups which support a specific cause, though they may not share the same collective identity.

Gordon (2008) describes the micro, meso and macro levels of the anarchist movement. On the macro level, the architecture of anarchism consists of networks, rhizomes and banners. The micro level commonly consists of affinity groups and collectives. The majority of anarchist activity occurs on the “meso level of local networks, typically in one city” (p. 16). This includes “[o]rganising everyday activities like stalls, leafleting, small demonstrations, screenings and benefit events, as well as direct action...” (Gordon, 2008, p. 16)

A repertoire of anarchist action endorses a do-it-yourself perspective of direct action (Gordon, 2008). Day identifies a variety of non-branded tactics associated with anarchist action, consisting of dropping out, subverting, impeding and prefiguring alternatives to existing institutions. The tactic of dropping-out of existing institutions extols circumventing work and is largely associated with surrealism, situationism, anarcho-primitivism and lifestyle anarchism. Tactics of this kind may include squatting, “creating community gardens, bike workshops, free art classes and other initiatives” (Day, 2005, p. 21). The subversion of existing institutions involves using aesthetics to parody capitalist culture, such as *détournement*, which has also been described as culture jamming, which takes “an image, message, or artifact lifted out of context to create a new subversive meaning” (Gordon, 2008, p. 22). This involves altering advertisements, such as billboards, and street theatre, such as Reclaim the Streets (RTS) which offers street parties while blocking roads (Day, 2005). RTS is also an example of impeding existing institutions, though this tactic also includes economic sabotage and property destruction, as well as protecting environmental sites from

exploitation and destruction. Prefiguring alternatives, defined earlier in the chapter, includes creating non-hierarchical and stateless groups which provide social services, including affinity groups and cooperatives.

Shantz (2010) has proposed the concept of infrastructures of resistance to analyze the relevance of communities and resources available to anarchists. Infrastructures of resistance are radical milieus which consist of a shared collective memory, analysis, communication and action. Shantz suggests they are formal and informal institutions which “might include community centers, housing and shelter, food shares... community media, free schools, bookstores, cafés, taverns and clubs” (p. 4). The framework of infrastructures of resistance will help to illustrate the practices of anarchists in Edmonton and the network of resources available to them. The following chapter will discuss the methods utilized to study the meso-level of the anarchist community in Edmonton.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter addresses the methods used in this study to investigate anarchist theorizing and organizing in Edmonton. The first section discusses the rationale for and use of semi-structured interviews. The second section describes the interview process, including recruitment and interview format. The third section examines ethical considerations, including the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The fourth section discusses the use of document analysis method. The final section analyzes the researcher's insider/outsider status for this study.

The primary method used was semi-structured interviews with local anarchists. Document analysis was also selected to collect information about local anarchist projects and events. Conducting interviews of movement participants is a standard method for researching social movements, particularly for understanding the motives and identities of participants, as well as learning about the types of activities and the organizational structure of movements (Blee & Taylor, 2002). The manner in which I designed the interview questions achieved both objectives: Chapter 4 discusses the interviewees' perspectives of anarchism and types of activities in which they have engaged, while Chapter 5 discusses groups in Edmonton that have explicitly or implicitly practiced anarchism and their organizational structures.

## Methods

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate interview method for this study because they allow the interviewees to direct the interview dialogue according to his or her experiences and understanding of anarchism. Researching social movements with semi-structured interviews emphasizes the interviewees' point of view, allowing them to discuss their experiences and the meaning they ascribed to participating in the movement (Blee & Taylor, 2002). Interviews can generate data about groups which are not extensively documented; Kathleen Blee and Verta Taylor (2002) suggest that semi-structured interviews are "...particularly useful in research on loosely organized, short-lived, or thinly documented social movements..." (p. 93). Anarchist projects in Edmonton frequently fit this description.

Surveys and questionnaires, which are types of structured interviews, are not practical for researching anarchism because anarchists do not represent a large percentage of the general population and random sampling would likely garner very few respondents (Williams, 2009). Additionally, structured questions would preclude the interviewees from discussing topics not included as questions, likely neglecting relevant information that could be obtained from a semi-structured style. Unstructured interviews would be impractical because it could generate a large amount of information which may not be pertinent to the study, making the research process unnecessarily long by transcribing and analyzing the interview transcript.

Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in the interview guide and in the direction of the interview. Semi-structured interviews use open-ended questions with “probes seeking detail and description...” (Roulston, 2010, p. 15). I used an interview guide with a list of potential questions that could be asked, depending on the interviewees’ particular knowledge and background, while using probes to obtain more detail when needed. As Tim Rapley (2004) recommends for qualitative research, I have gathered “contrasting and complementary talk on the theme or issue” (p. 18), letting the interviewees decide what they thought was important. This allowed the comparison between the interviewees regarding their perspectives and activities.

The interview questions were broken into four sections. The first inquired about the interviewees’ interpretation of anarchism and their opinion of classical and contemporary anarchist theory. The second section discussed anarchism in Edmonton and if the interviewees believed there is an anarchist movement in the city. The third section asked about the interviewees’ participation in anarchist and activist groups and their efforts to promote or practice anarchism, including examples of direct action in which they have participated. This section varied the most because the questions depended on the interviewees’ involvement in different groups. The final section asked brief biographical questions, including approximate age and how long they have identified as an anarchist. Before and during the interview, I encouraged the interviewees to discuss topics they thought were important which I had not mentioned.

The interview style employed was a combination of life history and key informant interviewing. There are aspects of life history interviewing because I am interested in individual experiences, actions and identities of local anarchists. Additionally, I asked questions concerning their personal narrative of their involvement in the movement over time. As Blee and Taylor (2002) observe, “The informant her/himself often is the subject of study, in addition to serving as an observer and narrator of the past” (p. 103). However, I did not conduct life history interviews over an extended period of time, nor are the interviewees’ biographies chronologically arranged in the order of life events, traits which Kristin Roulston (2010) states are characteristic of life history interviewing. The subject of study was also at the group level, as I am interested in documenting anarchist projects in Edmonton, which conflicts with the interviewees as the central subject. The key informant interviewing style is present because I have recruited key local anarchist organizers and have used their knowledge to obtain insider information of the anarchist movement. This style of interviewing seeks information about the interviewees’ involvement in social movements and their organizational structure and tactics (Blee & Taylor, 2002).

#### *Interview Process*

I interviewed ten anarchists in Edmonton. The interview was recorded with an audio device, enabling it to be transcribed and coded. The length of the interview was on average two hours, though they ranged from one to six hours. Nine of the interviewees are men and only one is a woman, resulting in a lack of gender variation which is a limitation of the research. I approached two other

female anarchists, but they declined being interviewed. Additionally, using snowball sampling, two interviewees contacted several female anarchists to see if they would be interested in being interviewed but they did not respond. It is probable that the gender ratio of the anarchist movement is predominately male, but it is not as extreme as suggested from this study.

I first interviewed four anarchists in the autumn of 2011 for a graduate course on qualitative methods during the first semester of my Master's program. These interviews have a different focus from those conducted specifically for this study, with the former focusing on ways anarchism is represented in the public and in the media, as well as ways anarchism influenced the interviewees' personal lives. These interviews are included because two of the interviewees provided insight into someone who is new to anarchism and someone who is not a key local anarchist organizer, which contrasts with the later interviews. The other two interviewees were interviewed again in 2012 specifically for this study because of their involvement in organizing anarchist groups in the city. Each of the four original interviewees provided consent for their interviews to be used in this study. The other six interviewees were specifically recruited for this study and these interviews were conducted between October 2012 and April 2013.

I primarily employed theoretical sampling, seeking key anarchist organizers in Edmonton or individuals who had previously been active in the movement. Blee and Taylor (2002) note that recruitment depends on the interviewees' relationship to the movement being researched, as well as their level of knowledge and willingness to communicate. I selected interviewees who have

a history of raising awareness about anarchism through public education, direct action or activism. I used the 2011 and 2012 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfairs to recruit interviewees. After this, I utilized snowball sampling to recruit four interviewees as well as meeting several interviewees through anarchist and activist groups in Edmonton.

I do not want to characterize the interviewees as spokespersons for the anarchist movement but rather as participants in it. The description of the interviewees' perspectives and activities should not be assumed to be representative or generalizable to all anarchists in Edmonton. Recruitment for semi-structured interviews is based on "...particular experiences in social movements, such as different levels of activism or participation in different factions of a movement, rather than because their experiences are representative of the larger population" (Blee & Taylor, 2002, p. 100). The interview dialogue does not represent the interviewee's true self but is instead a co-construction of both the interviewer and the interviewee (Rapley, 2004).

### *Ethics*

Participation in the study was completely voluntary. Prior to the interview, the interviewees were informed about the purpose and reasons for conducting this study through the consent form and information letter. I anticipate that this research will cause minimal harm to the interviewees. The only potential harm is that complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. This is because individuals familiar with some of the small groups discussed could be identified by the fact that there are only a few members. This is problematic because most of the

interviewees did not want to be personally identified, though they consented to be interviewed regardless of this possibility. Some of the interviewees were concerned about being negatively treated if co-workers discovered that they identify with a radical political philosophy. Confidentiality of the interviewees was maintained by safeguarding the research material. I encrypted electronic research files on a password protected computer and flash drive. Paper research notes and the flash drive are stored in a locked filing cabinet.

After providing informed written consent, the interviewees decided if they preferred to have their contributions to the research and identities directly acknowledged and publicly available or if they wanted to be anonymous. In the latter case, a pseudonym was assigned and direct personal identifiers were removed during the transcription of the interview. Additionally, I did not record the interviewee's name in the transcript or in any research notes. For the interviewees who waived their right to anonymity, I followed their directions concerning the ways they granted permission to be directly acknowledged. Two interviewees, Eugene Plawiuk and Malcolm Archibald, waived their right to anonymity.

The interviewees were asked if they wanted a copy of their interview transcript, enabling them the opportunity to review their interview and elaborate on or remove any information they provided. This ensured the interviewees were comfortable with any personal or organizational information which may be disseminated in the research findings. The majority of the interviewees chose this option; however, none of the interviewees changed their information, though

several interviewees asked for their narratives not to be portrayed as overly critical of comrades when they discussed group dynamics of anarchist organizing. Consent is an ongoing process; therefore, the interviewees had the right to withdraw consent during or after the interview without explanation, in which case their information would not be included in my research. The interviewees had approximately two months after the interview to withdraw consent, allowing them time to decide after reading their interview transcript; albeit, none of the interviewees withdrew consent.

### *Documentary Evidence*

I utilized document analysis to detail the anarchist groups and activities in Edmonton. Electronic texts are increasingly being used by social researchers (Esterberg, 2002). Organizations, particularly relatively recent ones, often leave behind records of relevant information concerning their operations (Clemens & Hughes, 2002). The document analysis method was particularly useful in cases where I did not interview any participants of the groups discussed in Chapter 5. Anonymity was maintained because I excluded all personal information concerning the sources. I have included material that is publically available on the internet about groups as well as material which I acquired at public events which were accessible to the general public. These documents are mostly primary sources which are either direct accounts or produced by the groups under discussion. I did not include any information from the Edmonton Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) listserv or from their branch meeting minutes. There is a concern of authenticity regarding records used for this method; for

instance, organizations may present information which portrays them favorably or exclude information which indicates internal conflict (Clemens & Hughes, 2002). I avoided this by only describing their organizational structure and activities, while verifying information with interviewees or secondary sources whenever possible.

### **Insider-Outsider Status**

My positionality to the research has varied, depending on the context. During different situations and different times my position has been an insider or an outsider. There are advantages and limitations of being an insider or an outsider to a group being studied. Insider status may potentially grant access to movements which otherwise would be uncomfortable with being represented by outsiders, since being an insider may promote “trust and rapport necessary for collecting sound data” (Blee & Taylor, 2002, p. 97). For instance, some anarchists are critical of the contemporary “security culture” and are concerned with police infiltration and judicial prosecution, making access to movement participants difficult (Foote, 2009). In contrast, outsiders may be able to recognize taken-for-granted assumptions of social movement participants which may not be noticeable for an insider; furthermore, aligning with one group may result in being rejected access to different movement factions (Blee and Taylor, 2002).

As a researcher studying the anarchist movement in Edmonton, I am an observer and therefore an outsider to the study subject. Initially, I was an outsider because I had recently moved to Edmonton and did not know any local anarchists nor had I previously participated in any anarchist events. Yet, I was an insider in

so far as I was familiar with anarchist theory and history and sympathized with anarchist principles. I had joined the IWW while living in Lethbridge, Alberta in 2010 but soon became inactive as I was not in contact with any IWW members. I rejoined the IWW in early 2012, after confirming with my supervisor that it would not be a conflict of interest to be researching a group in which I am a member. I was elected Literature Secretary of the Edmonton IWW branch in January 2013; however, I stepped down because I moved away from Edmonton in July 2013. My continued research from 2011 to 2013 has also rendered me an insider to certain anarchist circles. At the first Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair I attended I was a complete outsider, but by the following year I was much more of an insider. Yet, in new anarchist communities I was again an outsider; for instance, during the 2012 Saskatoon Anarchist Bookfair I was informed by an interviewee that some of the attendees thought I was potentially a police informant.

#### **Chapter 4: Anarchist Theorizing: Interviewees' Perspectives**

“I think it is really important to challenge your beliefs on things. And I think that is essentially a huge part of anarchism... it's important to know your tradition, but it's also important not to be bound by your tradition.” Eric

The anarchist movement is considerably diverse, with various interpretations and ways of practicing anarchism. This heterogeneity is also true for the anarchist community in Edmonton. For instance, some of the interviewees strongly identified with classical anarchism, while others have largely abandoned the century old texts. Malcolm Archibald and Phinneas Gage considered classical anarchism more pertinent than contemporary anarchist theory; whereas others, such as Eric and Jake, were not interested in studying classical anarchist theory. Some interviewees demonstrated elaborate anarchist perspectives, such as Blaine, Eugene Plawiuk and Rob, while others, such as Thomas and Claire, did not have extensive theoretical frameworks and anarchism was more of an attitude or sensibility. There are a variety of causes which anarchists in Edmonton are involved with, including the alter-globalization, labor, student, feminist, environmental, LGB, decolonization, grassroots media and anti-war movements.

In total, I interviewed ten self-identified anarchists in Edmonton regarding their knowledge of, and experiences with, the anarchist movement. They have identified as anarchists from between 1 and 44 years. The average age of the interviewees was mid 30s, ranging from late 20s to late 60s. The interviewees were likely more educated than the average anarchist population as they had all

attained some post-secondary education. Seven interviewees completed bachelor's degrees, one earned a masters' degree, while others had trades diplomas.

The interviewees' interpretations of anarchism were dynamic and their political identities were fluid, meshing with the spontaneity and free association encouraged by anarchist theory. Eric's quote reflects an affirmation of the anarchist tradition, yet at the same time it is not a dogmatic adherence. Jake argued that, "A lot of political organizations fall into the problem of imposing a map on the terrain; whereas the success of anarchist organizations is that the map is built the more you explore the terrain." Therefore, anarchist theory and practice can be modified for different contexts or preferences. All the interviewees identified anarchist principles which they promote and practice, including non-hierarchical social relationships, self-organization and direct or participatory democracy. Many of the interviewees indicated that workers should control the means of production, instead of allowing capitalists the ability to determine public interests for private profit.

This chapter will introduce the interviewees' perspectives and personal history on anarchism. This will include the ways they have defined and practiced anarchism. The interviewees' biographies are arranged chronologically by the date of the interview. The interviewees' participation and their roles in anarchist and activist groups will be discussed, though the groups will be examined in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will also revisit the interviewees' perspectives within specific themes and issues in the analysis section.

## **Interviewees' Background and Perspectives**

### *Thomas*

I met Thomas at the 2011 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair where he had volunteered to table the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) literature material. I interviewed him later that month. Over the next few months Thomas was instrumental in encouraging me to rejoin the IWW. At the time of the interview, Thomas had identified as an anarchist for approximately one year and had been a member of the IWW for two years.

Thomas defined anarchism as fundamentally anti-hierarchical and as a way to organize society that is horizontal, voluntary and equal. He asserted that anarchism seeks to resist and dismantle forms of hierarchy, such as patriarchy, racism and class, which would substantially increase social justice. Thomas articulated that anarchism encourages self-management and the empowerment of people to manage their own affairs. An important aspect of anarchism for Thomas is being able to provide basic human needs, such as food and shelter, without creating private profit or privilege. Thomas elaborated by saying anarchism is “not just about being free from oppression but about having all your basic needs met, so we can be free and equal.”

Thomas identified with the syndicalist tradition of anarchism, which extols workers' control of the means of production and workers' councils, where workplaces are organized non-hierarchically and the workers manage the decision-making. He argued that “anarchism is a working-class movement” and he considered lifestyle anarchism to be an offshoot of anarchist theory. Thomas

learned about anarcho-syndicalism through reading about the Spanish Civil War and noted that Noam Chomsky and George Orwell were influential for his understanding of anarchism. Chomsky is an anarcho-syndicalist and Orwell wrote about his participation in the Spanish Civil War and the ways anarchists had collectivized communities and production. Thomas equally identified as an anarchist and as a socialist, arguing that he is a socialist in the original sense of the word, “meaning that the workers own the means of production... One of the main purposes of socialism is to ensure that everyone has their basic needs met.” Yet he was hesitant to identify as a socialist because the contemporary context of socialism is dominated with state politics, asserting that it is “hierarchical and I don’t think it will actually meet everybody’s basic needs.”

Thomas commented that he does not always like others to know he is an anarchist, particularly at his workplace. He does not like to “pigeon-hole” himself with the anarchist label:

But at the same time it’s kinda liberating to finally say, “Yes, I do believe the central tenets of this mindset and I’m part of a tradition which is, you know, fairly long and had a lot of effect on the world.”

This sentiment reflects a sense of collective identity with the anarchist movement. Some of Thomas’ friends were staunch no-voting anarchists who viewed voting as legitimizing the current system, though Thomas did not necessarily agree with that. He believed that voting is disempowering and that it does not create social change, but a progressive government would be better for the general public than the Conservative Party.

Thomas noted that his understanding of anarchism comes more from experience rather than a strong theoretical background. He was introduced to anarchism through friends who were anarchists. Thomas joined the IWW because he felt unions were a strong force in society for improving workplaces, but found that the traditional unions he belonged to had major limitations because they were not participatory or egalitarian and were in fact authoritarian. Thomas noted that the IWW influenced his understanding of anarchism, not just theoretically, but also:

On a practical level, people from the IWW that I know have been the strongest influence. They encouraged me to actually develop my ideas and develop my skills and share my skills with others as well. It's not enough just to have a theoretical understanding... We're developing skills and abilities with the people around us, which is ultimately what anarchism is, you have to empower each individual so that they won't be taken advantage of, to have these skills to live life to the fullest...

Thomas has been involved with several workplace direct actions and is a member of his trade union. He has attended demonstrations such as May Day and protested the planning of the Keystone XL Pipeline several years ago. Thomas noted that activism in his community has negative connotations, viewing activists as protesting single issue causes, promoting minor changes and lacking a long-term basis.

*Claire*

I interviewed Claire in November 2011, at which time she had identified as an anarchist for five years. She asserted that, “Anarchism could be a lot of things—anarchism isn’t one thing.” She explained that there is a lot of overlap between anarchist traditions and she identified with multiple perspectives, particularly with anarcho-communism and anarcho-syndicalism, though theoretical labels were not very important to her.

Claire did not consider herself to be a radical person. In reference to misperceptions of anarchism, she commented:

People think that we’re all artists and bohemians, that we are free spirits and engage in free love and all kinds of other things, and I think if anyone knew how responsible anarchism demands you to be, they wouldn’t be nearly as interested in it.

This reflects the difference between what Claire understands is anarchism and the beliefs of the general public, which are typically stereotypical and negative. Claire articulated that anarchism is a radical form of responsibility, involving individuals consciously reflecting on the impact of their actions on others. She viewed anarchism as anti-hierarchical and opposing all forms of oppression and exploitation. She also considered anarchism as necessarily anti-capitalist because workers should control the means of production. Claire expressed a sense of collective identity with the anarchist tradition:

As someone who feels herself as a part of a long historical tradition, people, comrades have fought and died, literally, for the word anarchist

and the things that people believe about that, and the word communist as well. For me, it's a sign of respect for the historical struggle that I belong to, that I use those words rather than any others.

Claire also considered herself a socialist. She commented, "I believe I'm a true socialist, but then again so does everyone else who calls themselves a socialist." At her work she says she is a socialist because the word is friendlier for people and less likely to be misinterpreted. Elsewhere, she usually calls herself an anarchist because socialism does not indicate her complete rejection of the capitalist system, since there are a variety of socialist traditions that believe in reform but not in revolution. She affirmed that, "Anarchism is a guiding philosophy that influences every part of my life."

Claire's understanding of anarchism involved distributing basic human needs without the purpose of generating private profit, naming food, water, shelter and comfort as basic needs. Claire was critical of the current system which deprives people of these needs, arguing that capitalism is not built for humans. Nonetheless, she maintained that, "As anarchists we can't dismiss the function of government because sooner or later we are hoping to replace it." There are certain roles that governments handle which will still need to be fulfilled, including a public decision-making body and the coordination of distribution. Claire often votes in elections but did not think it actually changes socioeconomic arrangements; however, she felt that there would be an immediate difference between a Conservative and a New Democrat government.

She was introduced to anarchism through anarchists she knew in Edmonton as well as through the IWW. Claire had read anarchist literature, such as Peter Kropotkin, Michael Bakunin and Emma Goldman, but was not as interested in anarchist theory as she was “influenced by people’s experiences of class struggle through labor organization.” This included Martin Glaberman, CLR James and Selma James. She was also very influenced by the Italian autonomous feminists, such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Giovanna Dalla Costa and Leopoldina Fortunati.

Before identifying as an anarchist Claire had tried to organize co-workers at her job as a server to improving their working conditions. Although she was fired, she found the struggle empowering. Claire was then involved with the International Socialist Organization in Edmonton but was disappointed with an unsuccessful campaign in which she worked to free a prisoner. Soon after, she joined the IWW and found affinity with their tactics and the way they envisioned the workplace organized by workers. Claire has helped organize the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, presented at various IWW workshops and was a member of the Workers’ Solidarity Alliance. Claire has engaged in multiple workplace direct actions. Besides that, “I do things that I think all or most of the people involved in the movement do; I protest, I write articles, I speak at demonstrations and panel discussions and rallies.”

#### *Fabian Graves*

I met Fabian Graves at the 2011 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, where he was tabling for Thoughtcrime Ink, which he co-founded in 2006. In the last

several years Fabian has been one of the main organizers of the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair and he has volunteered there for the past eight years. I interviewed Fabian in November 2011 and again in November 2012. He identified as an anarchist since 2005.

Fabian viewed anarchism as fundamentally anti-hierarchical, commenting “basically anarchism for me is a free society without hierarchy, to the greatest extent you can make that happen.” This includes dismantling, as much as possible, “hierarchy, especially with bosses, capitalists, patriarchy, racism, ableism, stuff like that... in the economic structure and in the social structure.” Fabian believed there should not be a class system, since the accumulation of capital is based on the exploitation of workers. Fabian identified direct action, self-organization and autonomy as core anarchist principles. He articulated that people should judge their actions on whether or not they empower others.

Fabian has a non-sectarian approach to anarchism. He considers non-anarchist groups comrades, such as anti-authoritarian Marxists, council communists and libertarian socialists. For Fabian, “it’s basically pro-organization or anti-organization. Anyone who is pro-organization and against hierarchy, I’m definitely going to work with those people. But even people who are anti-organizational, I’ll still work with on certain issues.” Pro-organizational anarchists refers to those who participate in anarchist and community groups as a way to practice anarchism; whereas anti-organizational anarchists have a more individualist approach and are interested in living an anarchist lifestyle and engaging in individual actions, generally without participating in organizations.

The anarchist tradition with which Fabian identified the most is anarcho-syndicalism, but for him it is a label of convenience. Fabian stated that, “I consider myself an anarcho-syndicalist but I identify with anarcho-communism and libertarian socialism.” He explained that he prefers to consider himself an anarcho-syndicalist because the anarcho-communist label is vague and can include anti-organizational anarchists, whereas anarcho-syndicalism is necessarily pro-organizational. Fabian argued that libertarian socialism is often attached to high academic theory, which he did not consider necessary for understanding or practicing anarchism. Fabian reflected that, “I like anarcho-syndicalism because it never had a theoretician that I can think of that wasn’t based within the working class.”

In Fabian’s opinion, anarchism is a perfectly practical way of organizing society, more so than other political philosophies. He argued that the current system of capitalist democracy is impractical, because it is an “entrenching hierarchy that is completely unaccountable... It’s practical for making some people really rich” while impoverishing others. Fabian asserted that, “Liberals make things worse, they empower the status quo, they give people a false belief in change when there is no change” through their framework and tactics. Instead, social change occurs at a grassroots level through direct action by people at the bottom. Fabian maintained that the only power that the political system has “is the power that we give them.” Fabian was not against strategic voting but considered voting a powerless activity, where socialist or progressive parties only have power if a grassroots movement is behind them.

Fabian was introduced to anarchism through friends. He initially avoided anarchist theory because he expected it to be difficult to understand, but he found many classical anarchists accessible, such as Alexander Berkman and Kropotkin. Fabian prints some classic anarchist literature through Thoughtcrime Ink. He noted that classical anarchist theorists were not saints, arguing that a lot of organizers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had a difference in their normative values and their personal lives. For instance, some classical anarchists neglected their families. This idea reflects the sentiment that classical anarchism should not be considered the final statement of conceptualizing anarchism.

Contemporary anarchist theory was not particularly important for Fabian and he was instead largely influenced by anarchist friends. A book which influenced his becoming an anarchist was Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (1980/2003), which is a critical account of US imperialism and militarism. Fabian also prints some contemporary anarchist writing through Thoughtcrime Ink and opined that, "The anarchist works worth watching today are the smaller essays, blogs, pamphlets and stuff like that being produced." Fabian disliked academic high theory, which he considered mental masturbation.

In the past Fabian called himself an activist until an anarchist argument appeared several years ago against activism, which viewed activists as a group separate from other people. Fabian asserted that, "We're not professionals; we're workers like anybody else." Fabian has attended approximately fifty marches in the past decade, but "it doesn't really mean anything. Anybody can go to a march." Issues he has supported include anti-war, anti-racist and anti-

globalization protests as well as union picket lines. Most of his time goes into Thoughtcrime Ink, handling the majority of the work in the collective. He has also been a key organizer of the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. Fabian joined the IWW in 2005, because he saw unions as a potentially powerful sociopolitical force, but the trade union he belonged to was disappointing and he wanted to participate in a democratically run union. Fabian has been writing an introductory text about anarchism, but is unsure if it will be published.

### *Blaine*

I interviewed Blaine in November 2011 and December 2012. Blaine identified as an anarchist for ten years. He is the only original organizer still involved with the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair collective and was a member of the Anarchist Reading Circle. He is also a member of the IWW and the founder of Black Books Distribution, which was a hobby.

Blaine articulated that, “Anarchism is a philosophy of personal responsibility and community responsibility.” Blaine’s understanding of anarchism emphasized accountability, solidarity and mutuality. He also considered the direct democracy of economic and political decisions an essential element of anarchism. In his opinion, “Representative democracy is essentially oligarchic by nature and it does not give most people a real voice in political decisions in their lives. It generally already favors those who already have standing in society.”

Blaine argued that anarchism is the libertarian version of socialism. He asserted anarchism is “a libertarian socialist philosophy in the sense that it

emphasizes human agency and the importance of allowing people the voice to make decisions that affect them.” Anarchists view socialism as unable to achieve the type of society they envision, “unless people have a direct grassroots participation in decision-making.” Blaine noted that anarchist principles include federalism, the right of the individual to political participation and the need to avoid power structures. As Blaine put it:

[A] core principle of anarchism is the avoidance of building up informal or formal networks of individual power or the power of the elites. Anarchism is very much about making sure power is diffused in society or within an organization.

As an anarchist, Blaine chooses not to work in a managerial position and believes hiring and firing responsibilities should not be delegated to any individuals, maintaining that, “I don’t believe in being an employer or even a manager.” Instead, these tasks should collectively decided by workers.

Blaine considered classical anarchist theory to be a solid framework, but he recognized that there are problems with it. Blaine noted:

I think the ideals are noble ideals; however, I also think there are some things that we have to shed from the classical anarchists. We really need to stop looking at society in that millennial way which I think the classical anarchists did.

Blaine is referring to deterministic elements in classical anarchist theory, where there was an assumption that anarchism would inevitably defeat capitalism.

Blaine was particularly influenced by reading Kropotkin, including his *Conquest*

*of Bread* (1892/2007), when he was first learning about anarchism. He also read work by Paul Goodman. Blaine appreciated Bakunin's critique of the red bureaucracy as well as "the tyranny of the men of science," which does not refer to scientific knowledge of the world, "but as a ruling class that applies the rules of science to increase its own control over workers and over the society they live in." Blaine was first introduced to anarchism through a high school teacher who was a Christian anarchist, though it was almost a decade later before he started reading anarchist material. Blaine considered his interest in anarchism a result of multiple factors: "people I knew, reading, experience in life... I think that for a lot of us experience plays a big role... So there's no one place where I experienced those ideas or came upon those ideas."

In terms of contemporary anarchists, Blaine has been influenced through anarchists he has personally known, such as Allan Antliff and Eugene Plawiuk. Blaine noted that, "many of my comrades that I have met through work with the bookfair or the IWW have exerted a very profound impact on my thoughts." Blaine was critical of contemporary anarchist theory which is anti-humanist or primitivist. Blaine also considered the working-class crucial for organizing society, unlike some anarchist contemporary theory which has renounced the working-class.

Blaine was critical of the notion of the propaganda of the deed, "because it lays open the ability for the media to slander the rest of the anarchist movement." He has done a lot of solidarity work on picket lines and propaganda work with the IWW. Blaine has written articles, run various book tables and spoken at several

panels about anarchism. Additionally, Blaine noted, “I lived in a housing co-op and participated on the board for decision-making which I think is anarchist even if it’s not specifically political.” Like many anarchists, he has supported May Day rallies, student protests and anti-war demonstrations.

### *Phinneas Gage*

I met Phinneas Gage through the Edmonton IWW and interviewed him in October 2012. Phinneas identified as an anarchist for 13 years and has been a member of the IWW for over 10 years. Before becoming interested in anarchist politics, Phinneas was active in the anti-globalization and student movements. Several of the interviewees referred to Phinneas as an inspiration for their politics, because of Phinneas’ role in the IWW and his commitment to workplace democracy.

Phinneas’ definition of anarchism “goes back to the Ancient Greek, which means without a social hierarchy.” For Phinneas, core anarchist principles are mutual aid and direct democracy, as opposed to representative democracy. His conceptualization of anarchism “derives from a certain understanding of human nature advanced by Kropotkin and a certain politics based on initiative in people doing things for themselves.” Unlike the previous interviewees, Phinneas identified much more with classical anarchist theory than contemporary anarchism. He asserted that, “When I say anarchism I mean the libertarian wing of the First International and the movement that came out of that.” The First International, which ran in the 1860s and 1870s and included Karl Marx and Bakunin, and had a strong working-class basis. For Phinneas, the First

International was a high point of anarchism and internationalism, and he proposed that, “I would go so far as to say that the vast majority of what has happened for anarchism after 1939 is not nearly as good.” Anarchism at that time was:

...[T]he ideological expression of radicalized communities... like the anarchism of the IWA [International Workers Association], the First International, the Jura Federation, the Makhnovshchina, the CNT-FAI [English translation: National Confederation of Labour and Iberian Anarchist Federation], all of these were organizational expressions of a certain mass base constituency.

These groups had many thousands of participants and the CNT-FAI had millions.

Phinneas is “broadly speaking” an anarcho-syndicalist. This is because he viewed the economy as one of the central driving forces in society and politics, “not that it can be reduced down to solely economics but for strategic reasons the workplace is very important and it determines a lot of how our society and our culture works.” Participating in anarchist organizations is not important for Phinneas and instead he is interested in people who are self-organizing. Phinneas maintained, “My priority has always been to radicalize workers and build something on the job.” Phinneas has not been involved with an anarchist organization, besides the short-lived Workers Solidarity Alliance in Edmonton. Nonetheless, he considered that the two unions to which he belongs to have strong anarchist elements, one is a public sector union with numerous anarchist members and the other is the IWW.

Phinneas was introduced to anarchist theory through reading about anarchism online and later discovered anarchist friends. He asserted that, “The single biggest place that the contemporary anarchist movement has influenced me” is Libcom.org, short for Libertarian Communist, an anarchist website with a library, message board and forum. He also recalled being interested in anarchism through The Clash song, *Spanish Bombs*, which is about the Spanish Civil War. He noted that reading Kropotkin’s “*Mutual Aid* had a tremendous influence on me ...when I was twenty years old... It really informed my reading and subsequent interest, certainly an intellectual interest.”

Phinneas was involved in the early anti-globalization movement, mostly “in organizing demos around Edmonton.” He recollected protesting Alberta’s Bill 11 in 2000 while still in high school, opposing the privatization of healthcare. Phinneas was involved with the Student Workers’ Action Group (SWAG) for about a year before joining the IWW in the early 2000s. Phinneas has held several secretarial roles within the IWW branch and has supported many strikes. He has presented workshops and presentations about anarchism, including at the anarchist bookfair. Phinneas worked for Black Cat Press, an Edmonton anarchist publisher, for a short time when he was between jobs. He has also engaged in direct action, including a march on the boss and a general strike. Phinneas, like several anarchists in Edmonton, travelled to Quebec to support, and learn from, the 2012 student strikes.

*Eric*

I met Eric at the 2011 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair and subsequently through the Edmonton IWW. I interviewed him in November 2012. Eric identified as an anarchist for approximately eight years and has been involved with numerous anarchist and community groups which have practiced a variety of tactics. He was involved in the anti-globalization and socialist movements before identifying with anarchism.

Eric defined anarchism as a social relationship or organization “without a state and without naturally occurring hierarchy.” For Eric, anarchism is autonomous collectivism, where various self-organized groups mutually cooperate in decision-making, while living in harmony with the earth. Eric argued that anarchism is sensible because it is more practical to work cooperatively with individuals and collectives outside of the state than to adhere to government or business regulations in order to meet people’s needs. This sentiment reflects the emphasis of direct action and the do-it-yourself ethic of anarchist theory. Eric identified key anarchist principles as horizontal organization, autonomy, anti-capitalism, anti-statism and anti-oppression. He considered anti-opposition and inter-sectionality, which analyzes various forms of oppression which individuals encounter, as key components of contemporary anarchism. Eric viewed capitalism as fetishizing commerce, encouraging the concentration of capital, which creates a small unaccountable elite and a large group of wage slaves.

Eric did not identify with a specific anarchist tradition. Instead, he was influenced by a variety of radical theories, including anarchist communism,

syndicalism, council communism and libertarian Marxism. The syndicalist tradition has influenced Eric's understanding in tactics and organizing. Eric argued that, "I don't believe an anarchist society is possible without strong social organization. It's horizontal, but it needs structure." He explained that structure does not infer a state, capitalism, or other forms of authoritarianism. Instead, anarchist structure "creates an area where we can be accountable to one another and where we can make proper collective decisions while also maintaining our autonomy." Eric rejected contemporary anarchist theorists who no longer view the working-class as a revolutionary agent in society, such as Murray Bookchin in his later years. In regard to the electoral ballot, Eric is an abstentionist, which is the traditional anarchist attitude, but he understands the argument for voting.

Eric was not particularly interested in anarchist theory, commenting that anarchist interpretations of anarchism was not very important for him and was instead interested in ways to practice anarchist values and challenge oppression. Eric had read more historical accounts about classical anarchist theorists than books written by classical anarchists. He was more interested in their place in history and their activities than specific theoretical nuances. Eric was first introduced to anarchism through literature, including Goldman, but it was only after befriending anarchists that he became interested in practicing anarchism. Eric was influenced from reading Rudolf Rocker's (1938/2004) analysis of anarcho-syndicalism and Berkman's (1925/1989) critique of the Bolshevik Revolution. He also commented that, "We produce so much Kropotkin here so I

end up reading a lot of Kropotkin,” referring to material printed by Black Cat Press and Thoughtcrime Ink.

Eric asserted that there are plural anarchist movements in Edmonton. Predominately there are class-struggle, green and lifestyle anarchists, though there are also anarchists involved with activism and non-governmental organizations, the radical LGB community and First Nations issues. Eric thought it was important for the anarchist movement to have local anarchist organizations, but that local groups need to be involved in the community; they cannot stay insular and only engage with people who already consider themselves anarchists. Nonetheless, Eric argued that action was more important than having an anarchist organization. Eric also stated that, “I don’t believe in individualist forms of insurrection.” He believed that anarchists need a social movement that challenges the state and capitalism.

Eric has mainly been involved with the Edmonton IWW, participating in solidarity support and propaganda work, as well as holding multiple secretarial positions. He has volunteered at the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair for six years, mainly in the kitchen and in the daycare, becoming more involved in the bookfair collective in the last several years. Eric had assisted on the periphery with Thoughtcrime Ink, the Edmonton Anarchist Black Cross and Occupy Edmonton. Eric was involved in the anti-globalization movement in the early 2000s, though he found it elitist. During that time, he protested both Bill 11 to privatize healthcare and the 2002 G8 meeting in Kananaskis, Alberta. He was a member of the Peoples Action Network Edmonton, which protested the Free Trade

Agreement of the Americas, and the Edmonton Coalition Against War and Racism, which protested the Wars on Terrorism. He was also involved in Food not Bombs. Eric has been active with a lot of informal groups, such as the anti-fascist movement and anarchist study groups. Other actions he has done include occupying various political offices, banner drops, phone zaps and a hunger strike. He has also participated in his trade union and in workplace direct actions, such as breaking safety equipment because it was not working properly and taking food from the workplace to distribute to co-workers.

### *Jake*

I met Jake through the Edmonton IWW and I interviewed him in November 2012. He has identified as an anarchist for sixteen years and has been a member of the Edmonton IWW since it was regrouped in 1999. Jake has also been involved with a variety of student, activist and anarchist groups.

Jake viewed “anarchism, the more successful variants, as a communism without Leninism.” This means organizing society collectively and voluntarily along non-state and non-hierarchical lines, where there are horizontal linkages and political organizations which maximize the vocal power of communities. Jake argued, “That’s basically how the leadership is turned into the rank and file” in which delegates receive mandates from their community and can be recalled if they deviate from the mandate. Core anarchist principles that Jake identified were mutual aid, voluntary association and rank-and-file leadership. Jake iterated that anarchism should use the benefits of industrial society for the betterment of people, instead of for personal gain.

Anarchism should democratize every facet of society, rather than leaving unaccountable forces to determine social policy. Jake argued that today the concept of democracy has been individualized to the point where voting is the best one can hope for in terms of democratic involvement, allowing “some new political class parasite to run things instead of yourself.” He continued, “I think people are so accustomed to giving away their power that they don’t even view this as an insult, or even as a problem.” Jake argued that it is the task of anarchists to go beyond this and democratize the social sphere. Jake supported the idea of revolution, arguing that the means and ends should not conflict with one another. Jake commented:

In my opinion, it’s basically how you organize along the way that... shapes the revolution. Process is the revolution for me... The process that you have in terms of your political organizing will shape the politics of the future society.

This would involve anarchists providing a framework of action, which would enact anarchist values such as mutual aid and horizontal social relationships, while avoiding actions which would counteract these ideas such as coercion or hierarchy.

Jake did not specifically identify with an anarchist tradition, though he was influenced by social and class struggle anarchism. He noted that social anarchism has “been for me the main source of lessons for current anarchists as to how to socially organize for the aims of social revolution and a liberatory society.” He did not believe that individualist variants of anarchism can achieve

that type of society: “It’s not about individual experiences, it’s valid but it’s not going to be what wins everybody else over. It’s about finding our common experiences and what we all want.” Classical anarchist theorists that have influenced Jake’s understanding of anarchism mainly include Errico Malatesta and Nestor Makhno. Contemporary anarchist theorists that have influenced Jake include Chomsky and Daniel Guerin. Jake shared a similar sentiment as Fabian about classical anarchist’s beliefs and personal lives, “We don’t owe these people any favors... Some of the classical anarchists were bastards in their personal lives.” For instance, Jake noted that some anarchists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were racist, misogynistic, hetero-normative and often lacked a colonial critique in their politics.

Jake was introduced to anarchism through anarchist literature and punk rock music, yet he felt that personal interactions with anarchists are more instructive than anarchist theory. Jake asserted that what anarchists are doing in their communities is more influential than studying anarchist theory:

I think for people living out their lives in society, it’s not really writers that are important; it’s more or less what the political organizations have to offer them. And that’s how we advance anarchism; it’s what we can accomplish by cooperating with people on equal terms that will bear far more fruit than nit-picking different political theories.

In the past Jake has been involved with the Student Organized Resistance Movement, SWAG, Food not Bombs and Occupy Edmonton. Jake started volunteering with the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair in 2006 and has recently

become more involved in the organizing collective. He has also participated in a lot of strike support for the IWW.

*Eugene Plawiuk*

Many of the interviewees mentioned Eugene's role in the local anarchist community and in the Edmonton IWW. I interviewed Eugene in March and April 2013. Eugene identified as an anarchist since the early 1970s, when he was in high school. He was involved in reforming the Edmonton IWW in the 1970s and the 1990s. Over the past four decades Eugene has been involved in many anarchist and community groups in Edmonton as well as in the labor movement. Eugene is also a freelance writer and is interested in the occult and in science fiction.

Eugene defined anarchism as "a voluntary society of cooperation between individuals to form the mutual whole for the self-sufficiency of all." He considered anarchism to be the real form of democracy which is self-government that encourages organizing from below. Eugene noted that an important dimension of anarchism is to empower people wherever one is. He elaborated by asserting, "The key to anarchist organizing is to try to involve people by creating cooperative, mutual, voluntary organizations." He continued by maintaining that, "Our jobs as revolutionaries [is] to build up cultures of resistance."

Eugene described himself as "an anarchist with Marxist tendencies." He has always considered himself an anarchist but also identifies with the broad spectrum of left communism, libertarian communism and situationism. Eugene generally considered anarchist theory to be lacking an adequate economic analysis

and for this reason he supported Marxist economic theory. Nonetheless, he noted that Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (1902/1998) is important for conceptualizing an anarchist political economy. Eugene described anarchism as "more of a political theory of taking action, particularly revolutionary action, than... a theoretical construct of somebody sitting in the library in London going through historical texts." As such, anarchism and Marxism complement each other, thus Eugene supported anarchist organizing and practice as well as a Marxist economic view.

Eugene identified with the individualist and syndicalist traditions of anarchism. Unlike many anarchists who tend to see these issues as polarized, Eugene argued that, "To me, there is no contradiction between the individual and their community; we create community as individuals and as communities we create individuals." Therefore, individualists can also be collectivists and both philosophies can be synthesized. Eugene asserted that, "To talk about individualism—it means anarchism. Our morality, our philosophy is an individual philosophy of freeing the individual." Eugene's individualist perspective influenced his articulation of core anarchist principles, such as "do as thou will" and "mind your own business," while solidarity and mutual aid related to his collectivist and syndicalist perspective.

Eugene supported reformism more than the other interviewees, arguing that it can be revolutionary. In Eugene's opinion, there are no revolutionary movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Eugene described himself as a reformist anarchist and observed that all the classical anarchist theorists proposed reformist policies in their day. For instance, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was a member of parliament

and promoted People's Banks, and Bakunin proposed abolishing inheritance. Eugene proposed several revolutionary contemporary reforms, such as "the Guaranteed Income as a social wage rather than welfare." Another reform could be within the parliamentary system, shifting "to proportional representation, a greater amount of representatives [and the] elimination of the senate."

Eugene proposed evolving capitalism into socialism, which is a concept associated with the Second International. This is an intervention in anarchist theory because most anarchists reject explicitly using capitalist methods to modify capitalism. Eugene has theorized what an anarchist government could look like through three stages of government, transitioning first from state and corporate capitalism to a workers' state, then to cooperative capitalism and finally to a workers' government. Eugene posited that, "We are not the creatures of capital; we are the creators of capital." Therefore, the means of production is a social relationship and people can decide what kind of capital they want. Eugene postulated that anarchists should work towards building a "workers' state", in which private capital is replaced by social capital, wherein capital, instead of being possessed by individuals, is collectively managed by workers. The workers' state would be a form of socialism and would essentially be workers' capitalism, where workers begin to own and control the means of production and distribution. Workers would decide how they will work. Eugene argued that cooperatives, microcredit programs, Peoples' Banks and mutual aid societies are all alternative forms of capitalism which promote social capital and reject private capital. He maintained that Peoples' Banks would not have an interest rate.

The next step would be “cooperative capitalism,” which would connect the community of cooperatives and mutual aid societies among different places. It would be “a revival of the cooperative movement but seen more in a global economy.” Cooperative capitalism would utilize the benefits of globalization, such as using modern electronic commerce to extend this network of cooperatives, though it could be managed outside the wage system, measuring exchange value instead of surplus value. Therefore, there is still a market but it will be ethically and non-hierarchically arranged; by contrast the capitalist market is state controlled and designed to create private profit at the expense of workers.

The final phase of evolving capitalism into socialism is a “workers’ government.” A workers’ government does not infer the communist dictatorship of the proletariat; instead, it means self-organization and self-regulation. Eugene argued that, “Anarchism is not anti-government; it is anti-state.” Continuing, he asserted, “Going through Kropotkin, Bakunin, Godwin, Proudhon, Malatesta and the rest, they always had a view of the government, which we would call today community government.” Eugene iterated that the local decision-making model would be the community league, which would be a syndicalist community structure. Each neighbourhood would have an autonomous community league which would self-elect a delegate to form a city council, a city the size of Edmonton might have 100 delegates, which would then be assembled in a federation provincially and federally.

Eugene was introduced to radical politics in high school. Eugene was a Yippie, a member of the Youth International Party. Abbie Hoffman, a co-founder

of the Yippies, came to speak in Edmonton and Eugene was influenced by meeting him afterward. During this time, Eugene read anarchist and other leftwing literature. He was impressed with Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* (1848/1992) and considered Anton Pannekoek's *Workers' Councils* (1947/2003) just as revealing. He read Stuart Christie and Albert Meltzer's *Floodgates of Anarchy* (1970/2010) as well as Goldman, Bakunin and Proudhon. Eugene and his friends organized underground school newspapers and a radio show called Youth Radio Productions, talking about the anti-war and feminist movements. They also ran a free store, where people took what they needed and left what they no longer needed. Working with other Yippies in Edmonton, they organized a folk and rock festival in 1972, protesting the city's vagrancy laws by sleeping in a park, which was banned, resulting in the involvement of the riot police. Eugene also went to the Free University in Edmonton, doing classes on revolutionary struggle.

After being involved with underground school papers Eugene became involved in alterative Edmonton newspapers, including *The Orb*, *Poundmaker* and *News from Nowhere*. Eugene was also involved with organizing Erewhon Books, an anarchist bookstore in Edmonton in the 1970s and 1980s. During this time, Eugene lived in a co-op house with people from *Poundmaker* and Erewhon Books. In the 1990s, Eugene started to write and lecture about politics. He has participated in multiple teach-ins during the early globalization movement, which included opposing the Meech Lake Accord and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. Eugene has also been highly active in his trade union.

*Malcolm Archibald*

Malcolm Archibald is regarded by most of the interviewees as one of the founders of anarchism in Edmonton. One interviewee commented that:

Malcolm Archibald has had a strong influence both by renewing a lot of hope by making works of Kropotkin accessible again, as well as Nestor Makhno, but also is an example to anarchists in Edmonton. He has shown a strong amount of integrity that has certainly affected me and many other people.

Malcolm identified as an anarchist since 1969. In 1972, he moved to Edmonton and started Black Cat Press, an anarchist publisher. Malcolm was also involved in reforming the IWW in the 1970s and co-founding Erewhon Books. I interviewed Malcolm in April 2012.

Core anarchist principles which Malcolm identified were anti-statism, direct democracy and syndicalism. He supported workers' self-management, commenting that, "The core idea of anarchism is replacing the state with direct relations between people. Since I identify with the labor movement, I support workers' organizations that have joined together in federations and setting up that social system." Malcolm noted that there are a variety of anarchist traditions, some of which contradict with one another. He argued that, "Just calling yourself an anarchist doesn't mean very much to me. To me you have to hyphenate it... If you call yourself an anarchist that's just too broad, you could be some anarcho-capitalist or something." Malcolm considered himself an anarcho-syndicalist because he has always identified with the labor movement.

Malcolm was more interested in classical anarchism, asserting that contemporary anarchist theory was less important to him. Malcolm noted, “There certainly seems to be a lot of [anarchist] theorizing going on but so much of it is post-structuralist or post-modernist which is quite antithetical to me.” Malcolm observed that contemporary anarchists are mostly not interested in classical anarchist theory. Malcolm has translated and published works on classical and contemporary anarchist theory and history.

Malcolm first learned about anarchism through reading about the Spanish Civil War by authors who were not anarchists. The first anarchist Malcolm met was Murray Bookchin in the 1960s, who was talking to student groups about Marxism, which was popular and anarchism was still quite uncommon. Nonetheless, Malcolm argued that there were many Marxists who “were unconscious anarchists” because their practice was anarchist. Malcolm elaborated, “The types of organizations that they set up and the way that they related to each other, it was an anarchist style, it wasn’t a Marxist-Leninist style.” Early on Malcolm noted that Bookchin advocated egalitarian principles but his style was authoritarian, for instance being dismissive of his critics. Malcolm agreed with Bookchin’s critique of lifestyle anarchism but was critical of Bookchin’s denunciation of the syndicalist movement.

In 2007, Malcolm published a short book he had written entitled *Atamansha: The Story of Maria Nikiforova—the Anarchist Joan of Arc*. It is a biography of Nikiforova who was a popular anarchist figure in Ukraine, and was aligned with Makhno during the Russian Civil War. The Red Army considered

her a terrorist. Despite being a popular militant and one of the few female anarchist organizers during that time, Nikiforova has been either ignored or stereotyped by most historical accounts.

Malcolm was attracted to a variety of leftwing traditions before becoming an anarchist: “For me, it was sort of a long march through the left. I started out in junior high school sort of being a primitive anti-capitalist. From there I went through social democracy, communism [and] Trotskyism.” Malcolm “worked first for the underground press, then the alternative press and then the community press for thirty years. I’ve worked on newspapers almost continuously over that period,” writing and reporting. Today Malcolm is more interested in editing and translating works through Black Cat Press, and finding literature he thinks is worth publicizing. Malcolm has supported a variety of labor and anti-state protests, but he pondered, “What do [the protesters] do between demonstrations?”

*Rob Caballero*

I met Rob Caballero through the Edmonton IWW and Thoughtcrime Ink. I interviewed him in March of 2013. Rob identified as an anarchist for approximately 12 years. Rob had been involved in both anarchist and liberal activist organizations.

Rob emphasized the importance of challenging unjustified authority and power in anarchist theory. He asserted that anarchism:

...[I]s a historical theory and belief in a movement about people resisting arbitrary control over their own lives, [and] getting together, especially as

a community, to control the circumstances that are usually decided by others... It's really people resisting authority.

Rob argued that this anti-authoritarian element distinguishes anarchism from traditional communism. Rob viewed anarchism as anti-sectarian and noted that anarchism includes ideas from liberalism and communism, commenting that, "It's like Cindy Milstein's definition that it is the best parts of communism and the best parts of liberalism."

Rob identified with anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism. He supported autonomous community organizing and solidarity unionism, which he felt anarchists should be involved. Rob was impressed with the direct action of the Seattle Solidarity Network, where:

They are making gains in organizing the working-class through battles with landlords and small employers, things they can actually take on and win. A lot of anarchist work seems kind of vague to me, like they're stuck in the liberal mode of doing things... do[ing] petitions, or run a traditional campaign.

Rob argued that changing the structure of work, where workers take control of their workplaces, "gives people a sense of power more than anything else... I think that actually turns more people into anarchists."

Rob started considering himself an anarchist soon after moving to Edmonton and becoming involved with the Anarchist Reading Circle. Rob's understanding of anarchism was influenced by Allan Antliff and Eugene Plawiuk. Prior to that, Rob had read some anarchist pamphlets and journals, but they

seemed to be “weird polemical rants.” Rob was not particularly interested in anarchism until he met anarchists: “It wasn’t until I met real people involved in it and then understood it on that human level... It was more through participation.” Unlike the other interviewees, Rob considered post-anarchism to contribute to anarchist theory, though he placed anarchism within the traditions of communism and liberalism. Rob argued that post-structuralists, such as Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, have a strong understanding of contemporary power, noting that “disciplinary modes of power and the subject has everything to do with anarchism and it’s probably how power is more often exercised.”

Rob has been involved with various anarchist, liberal and community groups. He was one of the original members of the Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle. Rob became involved with Thoughtcrime Ink soon after it started and was exposed to a lot of anarchist literature which influenced him, such as Kropotkin. He volunteered by proofreading and designing texts for publication. Rob became a member of the IWW “in support and then promptly almost forgot about it like a bunch of other people do. I’ve... been to very few meetings.” Nonetheless, the Edmonton IWW has substantially influenced him: “I would say that most of my views were shaped by interactions with IWW members.” Like several other interviewees, he went to see the Quebec Student Strike and saw a CLASSE congress.

Rob recalled that an early turning point for his interest in politics was protesting the 2003 World Petroleum Conference, which “was basically the entire world oil industry converging in Calgary... I went down with some friends who

said ‘this seems pointless’ and I said ‘this seems awesome.’” He was involved with the Peoples Action Network Edmonton in the early 2000s, and in 2010 he was involved with Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament. Rob directed the group not to get a police permit, “because we don’t need a permit in Edmonton to exercise our democratic right to march.” Rob had also worked in a workers’ cooperative. He recognized that co-ops are not the best solution, but if “everybody in Edmonton knew someone who works in a co-op, that would question the social organization. When you start to denaturalize the work environment by having an alternative, that’s when peoples thoughts really open up.”

Rob was a part of Occupy Edmonton, especially during the Melcor Park encampment, but he never slept at the camp so he could maintain that he was a community supporter. Rob was disappointed with the anarchist community because of their lack of interest and support in Occupy, since they viewed it as liberal and reformist. Rob related that, “Suddenly this light bulb turned on and I said to a few of them, ‘What you’re saying is you’re not going to participate in any political activity that isn’t already anarchist? How are they going to become anarchists without your participation?’” Rob posited that perhaps anarchists have to transcend the notion of a pure anarchist action, and instead participate in local issues which could radicalize the issue and the participants.

## Chapter 5: Anarchist Groups and Projects in Edmonton

“It can be alienating to be a leftist in general when it is not accepted in an extremely conservative environment, so it’s important to have organizations and events to come together and realize they have power together. Also to see that we provide food, childcare, like all that stuff [at the anarchist book fair], it’s not just a book, we’re creating a microcosm of what we’d like the world to be.”

Thomas

“In the 70s we had the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] going on for a while and the IWW—just like today in Edmonton—is a place where anarchists look for organization. It’s almost the main organizational thing that’s going on. That’s what anarchists tend to think of where an organization was trying to do something.”

Malcolm Archibald

The first anarchist groups that appeared in Edmonton formed during the early 1970s. Black Cat Press, an anarchist printer and publisher, and Erewhon Books, an anarchist bookstore, were the primary expressions of anarchism in the city. They made anarchist literature available in Edmonton and produced their own material about theory and local issues. During this time, local anarchists printed *News from Nowhere*, an anarchist paper printed by Black Cat Press, which was one of the first anarchist journals in Canada. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Edmonton was reformed in the early 1970s.

In the 1980s Erewhon Books and the Edmonton IWW branch closed. With the expansion of neoliberal policies and cultural attitudes, local anarchist groups

became largely inactive until the 1990s with student organizing and the development of the anti-globalization movement. For instance, groups protested tuition increases as well as the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas. During this time, the anti-free trade movement was active across Canada, with a shared opposition to global capitalism and the intrusion of international trade and corporations (Staggenborg, 2008). A Food not Bombs branch was formed in Edmonton and provided free vegetarian food while protesting capitalism and militarism. The IWW was also regrouped in the city in the late 1990s.

The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair started in the early 2000s and was the largest anarchist event in Western Canada for most of the decade. Several local study groups formed which discussed anarchism and communism. Thoughtcrime Ink was founded in 2007, which is an anarchist collective selling radical material. Occupy Edmonton was formed in 2011 and mobilized an encampment which received considerable media coverage. Most of the anarchist projects discussed in this chapter are volunteer-based, subverting the wage system and promoting a community of anarchists and activists. Thomas' comment is indicative of the role of prefiguration in anarchist practice, in which anarchists are setting up alternative social structures outside mainstream capitalist political and economic institutions.

The organizations discussed in this chapter have explicitly and implicitly practiced and promoted anarchist theory. The first section analyzes the various anarchist groups and is listed chronologically, with the exception of the IWW which is included because of the influence of the Edmonton branch on local anarchists. Considerable detail about many of the groups was provided by the

interviewees, some of whom were founding members while others were participants. For other groups I have relied on documentary analysis of material discussing their purpose and activities. The second section discusses groups and events which have anarchistic elements, though they are not necessarily explicitly motivated by anarchist theory. The dates recorded in the following sections are as accurate as I could ascertain; however, some of the dates for the start or end of local groups are estimations as they have not been documented before.

### **Anarchist Organizations, Collectives, Affinity Groups and Projects**

#### *Black Cat Press, 1972 - current*

Black Cat Press is a commercial printer and anarchist publisher in Edmonton, founded by Malcolm Archibald. Initially, Black Cat Press started as an IWW shop in the 1970s. It was originally a hobby for Malcolm, but in the early 1990s he decided to work full-time at the press. Black Cat Press has not grown much since it started, employing a few staff and paying union wages. The majority of its business is commercial printing, including printing for unions, non-profit organizations and small businesses. Yet, it also publishes classical and contemporary anarchist theory as well as histories on anarchism and labor organizing.

Black Cat Press temporarily stopped publishing in the early 1980s because there was declining interest in the subject matter. As Malcolm noted, unlike in the 1970s when there was a network of radical publishers, during the 1980s these publishers and bookstores were closing in Canada. They returned to publishing in

the 2000s. The main reason Malcolm started Black Cat Press was because there was not a local anarchist printer. Malcolm recollected:

I used to work in the underground press in the sixties and early seventies and it was always a problem getting our newspapers printed... Usually the commercial printers weren't the worst ones; it was the left-wing printers that wanted to censor our paper. They wanted to read every line and make sure that it was politically correct from their point of view.

Other leftwing groups, including communists and social democrats, were unwelcoming to the influence of anarchism in the 1970s. From Malcolm's point of view, it was important for anarchists to have their own literature published and available in the community.

When Black Cat Press started, they sold a considerable amount of their material through mail-order, which is now done online. There are currently twenty-one books, including several short books, in the publications section on their website. The catalogue includes classical anarchist theorists, such as Peter Kropotkin, Michael Bakunin, Errico Malatesta and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. Malcolm has translated into English and published the autobiography of Nestor Makhno (2007), the leader of the Ukrainian anarchist military during the Russian Revolution and Civil War. Malcolm is interested in having the publications of Black Cat Press included in research libraries where they will influence the historiography of the anarchist movement. Contemporary anarchist literature which they have published includes a book by Graham Purchase (2011), an Australian anarchist mainly interested in ecology, and two books by Arthur J.

Miller (2012a; 2012b), an IWW member, on the maritime and mining industries. Malcolm has translated studies into English, including one on 20<sup>th</sup> century anarcho-syndicalism (Damier, 2009) and another on the Makhnovist movement (Azarov, 2008). Malcolm is currently working on translating a study of Kropotkin's travels in Canada.

The Black Cat Press table has been set up at dozens of anarchist bookfairs across Canada. In an interview with AK Press, Malcolm commented that, "Nowadays with this network of bookfairs, if you publish something at least you're going to reach some kind of an audience" (Zach, 2009). Black Cat Press relies on Thoughtcrime Ink to table their material at the majority of bookfairs in Canada. Black Cat Press has inspired many anarchists in the city, including many of the interviewees, who have been influenced by work published by the press.

*Industrial Workers of the World, Edmonton General Membership Branch, 1972 - early 1980s*

The Industrial Workers of World (IWW) was reformed in Edmonton in the summer of 1972 (Chubb, 2012). Unlike the first Edmonton IWW in the 1910s, by the 1970s there were known anarchist members; Malcolm Archibald and Eugene Plawiuk were original members of the new IWW. Chubb (2012) notes that, "The numbers in the branch were always small at this point, never exceeding more than a dozen" (p. 53).

The IWW was mostly involved in solidarity and educational programs during this time. They printed IWW signs and supported labor strikes in the city (Chubb, 2012). Chubb notes that they "ran educational programs targeting

unorganized workers and students... Education of hospitality workers in the 1970s was done through literature drops, ‘walking into places, acting like customers and avoiding management’” quoting someone with whom Chubb spoke (2012, p. 53). Malcolm, as quoted at the beginning of the chapter, iterated that anarchists in Edmonton have sought the IWW as the primary organization active in action, even though the IWW is not an anarchist organization. This is because anarchists in Edmonton have not been able to sustain an anarchist group which practices anarchist actions in the community, besides printing and publishing anarchist literature, whereas the IWW reaches out to more than just the anarchist community. The IWW ended in the early 1980s because important members moved away (Chubb, 2012).

*Erewhon Books, 1973 - 1984*

Erewhon Books was an anarchist bookstore in Edmonton which started in the early 1970s and was organized as a volunteer-run collective. Erewhon carried radical leftwing material, including books, pamphlets, newspapers and Black Cat Press material. Malcolm Archibald and Eugene Plawiuk were co-founders of Erewhon Books. It “ran for more than ten years and was the only gay- and-lesbian friendly bookstore in the city” (Chubb, 2012, p. 53). Eugene recalled that it started because there was not a bookstore in Edmonton which explicitly carried anarchist material. The only other leftwing bookstore in Edmonton was the Trotskyist Vanguard Books but it was not sympathetic to anarchism.

Erewhon Books originally started as a literature table at the University of Alberta (U of A) campus once a week, although they soon secured a storefront in

downtown Edmonton. As a bookstore it was initially open only on Saturdays, but expanded to running Thursdays to Sundays. Malcolm recalled that, “We absorbed more people into the collective and started to carry a wider range of material and kept it open more hours.” The bookstore was relocated approximately six times in Edmonton, mostly in the downtown area. At one location Erewhon Books co-rented with *Poundmaker*, a paper which ran in the 1970s after the U of A’s *The Gateway* was separated from campus, which was protesting the Student’s Union. The building had a hall which was rented out for various events, including a food co-op.

In order to join the bookstore collective, each member agreed to volunteer once a week at the bookstore and pay a collective fee which contributed to books and rent. There were typically six people in the collective and they did not have paid workers. They met once a week to decide what to order for the bookstore. Members could start their own section at the bookstore if they wanted. Malcolm noted that they “always had a big anarchist section but not everyone in the collective was an anarchist by any means.” Erewhon Books initially carried mostly pamphlets and newspapers, though it eventually expanded into being a more general left-wing bookstore, featuring recent literature and academic journals that were requested as well as self-produced material. The bookstore had a surrealist and Spanish section, as well as silk-screened shirts, pressed buttons and printed posters.

Harold Barclay (2005b), an anarchist theorist and U of A professor emeritus of anthropology, wrote about Erewhon Books in his autobiography. In the early 1980s Barclay frequently went to Erewhon; however,

Most of the time... there was only the store clerk to converse with... Many days there were no customers at all. At last, the collective which operated the store became tired of the operation and it folded. During its existence I found it one of the few places where I could go and spend time with those who considered themselves anarchists. (2005b, p. 249)

Eugene recalled that, “We slowly declined as people moved away and people got less involved. The stock declined as well...” Eventually they were not able to generate a large enough return and at the end were often offsetting the rent from personal income.

*Students Organized Resistance Movement, 1994 - 1998*

The Students Organized Resistance Movement (STORM) was a campus based group in Alberta which protested the growing neoliberal austerity cuts to social services, which they considered a basic human right (STORM, n.d.a). Their primary focus was on education and healthcare and they promoted bottom-up self-organization and collective action. Most of the information pertaining to STORM was obtained from their website, which states “STORM was active between 1994-1998 on the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan College, University of Calgary, Mount Royal College, [and] Southern Alberta Institute for Technology campuses” (STORM, n.d.d, para. 3). Jake was a member and recollected that it was a political campus group which was largely tuition focused.

STORM held meetings once a week at the U of A campus, which was open to the public. Meetings were two hours long, one hour assigned for business and the other for discussion. The decision-making process was based on voting where members presented motions, which could be seconded, amended or rejected.

This group is included in this chapter because STORM's resolution from both of the group's conferences explicitly promoted anarchism. The statement from their first conference, held in 1994, noted that "STORM's ultimate goal is to aid the construction of an anarcho-communist society" (STORM, n.d.a, para. 1). The following year their second conference reasserted their adherence to their original principles "with their emphasis on non-hierarchical structure and democratic decision-making as the basis for the movement's organization..." (STORM, n.d.c, para. 4).

STORM held "[v]arious teach-ins designed to stimulate critical thinking" encouraging student activism and informing students about current events (STORM, n.d.d, para. 2). Their website chronicles various campaigns with which they were involved (STORM, n.d.d). In 1995, they helped deliver approximately 1200 eggs signed by students to Premier Ralph Klein, in response to a comment he made about how students must be fine with budget cuts because they were not throwing eggs at the education minister. The premier called the protesters jackasses and subsequently apologized for his comment. In 1996, STORM helped Albertans travel to Parliament Hill to protest federal budget cuts to social services. One STORM member was arrested for participating in "a civil disobedience action that shut down the Indian Affairs' ministry office... to protest

meager funding for aboriginal students” (STORM, n.d.d, para. 2). In 1997, STORM participated in organizing rallies protesting the Alberta Growth Summit.

On STORM’s website they offer a guide to organizing protest rallies based on their first year of operation (STORM, n.d.b). Their stance on collective action is that it is “inherently politicizing,” viewing it as giving voice to students. Their guide presents five steps to organizing a rally: first, setting a purpose, type of protest and time; second, forming partnerships; third, march logistics; fourth, organizing publicity; and fifth, informing the press. They advocated requesting permits from the police and marching on sidewalks, which reflect more civil disobedience tactics, while later anarchist groups in Edmonton have used more direct action tactics. Their website does not indicate why the group became inactive.

*Food not Bombs, Edmonton chapter, circa 1998 - 2009*

The Edmonton chapter of Food not Bombs (FNB) started in the late 1990s with the purpose of subverting the capitalist hegemony of a basic human need by providing free vegetarian meals. It was also explicitly protesting militarism and the budgetary allotment of funds towards the production of war and defense equipment instead of fighting hunger and poverty (FNB Edmonton Blog, n.d.). Posters printed by the Edmonton chapter read, “Food not Bombs because poverty is violence and scarcity is a lie” (Edmonton Activist Literature, 2004a). FNB resists the wage system by recovering edible food that had been thrown out by businesses, including grocery stores, often still in original packaging, which is then cleaned and prepared.

The first Food Not Bombs chapter started in 1980 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by anti-nuclear activists (Day, 2005). Richard Day (2005) asserts, “...FNB is a non-branded, decentralized network of autonomous chapters which function internally on a consensus basis” (p. 40). Graeber (2009) observes that, “Food Not Bombs is not an organization. There is no overarching structure, no membership or annual meetings” (p. 236). It is an idea that food should be used by people who need it, noting that there is a “...shared commitment to egalitarian decision-making and a do-it-yourself (DIY) spirit” (Graeber, 2009, p. 236). Randall Amster (2009) argues that FNB is anarchistic in its structure and operation, being leaderless, spontaneous and opposing capitalist relations of propriety. In the mid 1990s chapters spread across the US and Canada (Graeber, 2009).

The Edmonton chapter sporadically provided food once a week for a decade, changing serving locations and kitchens several times. They have served food in downtown Edmonton, beside City Hall (Kirman, 1999), and in Old Strathcona (FNB Edmonton Blog, n.d.). Besides holding weekly food servings, they provided free food for various activist events and lectures, such as a teach-in on the struggle of Mumia Abu Jamal in 1999 (Plawiuk, n.d.) and the Tar Sands Realities and Resistance Conference in 2007 (Oil Sands Truth, 2007). Like other FNB chapters, The Edmonton FNB chapter has been harassed by the police (Butler & McHenry, 2000).

The majority of members of the Edmonton FNB chapter were not explicitly anarchist. Nonetheless, both Eric and Jake participated in Food not

Bombs for about a year. Eric reflected, “It is very all over the place but very easy to jump in... we have taken carts of food and fed people. It’s a neat thing but it’s an anti-organizational thing... they’re tough to maintain.” Eric thought that a more formalized structure would have strengthened the local chapter. Jake recalled that, “It did some good things with food servings at public settings at key places where the homeless are often at in the winter.” However, it did not sustain community involvement and Jake argued he eventually saw it as missionary and charity work, instead of political activity:

It was able to push the envelope in some ways but at some point if you’re not drawing in people from the community that you are targeting, then you are just coming in as missionaries and at some point the main people that wanted to keep doing it ended up going into a center using their kitchens and getting absorbed into that structure and Food not Bombs stopped being what it was and basically came to be individuals helping out at a soup kitchen and lost its politics.

Some anarchists lost interest in the Edmonton FNB, though it continued to serve food for several years. In 2011, the Edmonton FNB web blog announced that they were active again (FNB Edmonton Blog, 2011), yet this seems to be its last record of activity.

*Industrial Workers’ of the World, General Membership Branch, 1999 - current*

The Edmonton IWW General Membership Branch (GMB) was reorganized for the third time in 1999. According to Aaron Chubb (2012), they had approximately 50 active members by 2010, making “the Edmonton Branch of

the IWW... the second largest in the world” (p. 2). Currently, of the ten branches in Canada, the Edmonton IWW is the largest. The Edmonton IWW has a variety of functions, including educational outreach, organizing, solidarity and information and skill-sharing. All the interviewees are either currently or have in the past been members of the IWW, though several current members do not regularly attend branch meetings.

The Edmonton IWW has an educational function as it provides workshops and training for members and the general public. They encourage workers to engage in their own workplace struggles to gain greater control of decision-making. The Edmonton IWW helps organize worker’s struggles and labor actions as well as providing a considerable amount of solidarity support, through members’ attending local labor pickets. The Edmonton IWW also has an information sharing function; as Blaine iterated, the IWW “also acts as a good clearing house of local activists and labor radicals and it allows a lot of networking to take place that otherwise wouldn’t happen.” Roles within the Edmonton IWW rotate, enabling members to learn how to participate in different roles within the IWW, as well as encouraging direct democracy and facilitating skill-sharing. The IWW offers the Train the Trainers program where members are trained to present and facilitate workshops.

Many of the IWW members view other labor unions as business unions, which are supporters of capitalism and the ruling class instead of protecting the interests of the working-class. The IWW considers the working-class as the only productive class, where the managers and bosses are only concerned with

maintaining profit margins and controlling and exploiting workers. Nonetheless, some of the interviewees who are active in the IWW are dual card holders, being members of other unions.

The IWW Preamble advocates abolishing the wage system and capitalism as well as proposing, in classical Marxist language, that the “working-class and the employing class have nothing in common” (IWW, n.d.a, para. 1). The IWW is anti-political, rejecting the effectiveness of state politics. The Edmonton IWW, along with many other branches, has numerous anarchist members, though the IWW is not an anarchist organization. The IWW, as Chubb (2012) has asserted, though not explicitly anarchist, is ideologically within the anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Many of the interviewees took the position that even though the IWW is not an anarchist organization, it embodies many anarchist principles and tactics. Eric commented that, “The IWW is not an anarchist organization but the way we organize, in my feeling, is anarchist. The structure we created is anarchist.” The Edmonton IWW reflects anarchist principles because it is self-organized and non-hierarchical, where workers control the decision-making. It also practices direct action and direct democracy. For instance Blaine asserted the IWW:

[I]s an organization... of the broad left, mostly the libertarian left, but it is attractive to anarchists like myself because it does at least in its local organization embody many of the attributes of anarchism. It is organized democratically, it is a very lateral organization; the membership drives the decision-making process... The activity is very locally based. I would say it is an organization that largely practices direct democracy.

Many of the interviewees strongly identified with the idea of workplace democracy, where rank-and-file workers drive the decision-making of the structure and function of their work. As Phinneas Gage commented:

We organize workers on the job to gain a sense of empowerment and a greater share of control over the work that they do and a greater share of the wealth they create. Some of that is in the rank-and-file of other unions and some of that is in non-unionized workplaces.

To join the IWW, each member has to belong to the working-class, agree to the IWW Preamble and pay monthly dues. The working-class is not defined as a socioeconomic measure but instead as a relationship to the means of production; therefore, membership is not based on the amount of income but whether one is a worker and not an employer or boss. Individuals cannot join the IWW if they employ people or have hiring and firing managerial responsibilities. Dues are minimal and are based on a scale of income.

The Edmonton IWW holds monthly GMB meetings, which discuss the various events they are organizing and supporting, reports from officers and delegates, and the business of running the branch. Three committees usually meet once a month for organizing, solidarity and propaganda. Organizationally, the IWW largely operates on Robert's Rules of Order, though the Edmonton branch operates on a modified version called Rusty's Rules. GMB meetings are between one and two hours; the general order of which can be seen in Table 1 (see appendix). A chair and recording secretary are elected each meeting and minutes

are recorded, which are read at subsequent meetings to reiterate previous decisions and past events.

There are annual elections from the rank-and-file membership for secretary positions which run specific tasks within the Edmonton branch, which are all volunteer-based. Many branch members, including many of the interviewees, have served as different secretaries. There are currently six secretary positions, designated for: the branch, finances, communication, organizing, propaganda and literature. Many smaller IWW branches do not have as many secretarial positions. Delegates are also elected to handle membership dues payments.

The following information concerning the secretarial roles has been obtained from the Edmonton IWW Membership Handbook (n.d.b). The branch secretary is responsible for reporting branch activities to the IWW headquarters and circulating the minutes and other announcements. The financial secretary records the branch's finances and manages the bank account. The communications secretary handles the electronic and postal mail accounts for the branch and maintains the website. The organizing secretary helps workers with workplace struggles and workers' actions. The solidarity secretary handles contact with labor and activist organizations and arranges branch support for strikes and protests. The propaganda secretary organizes workshops and lectures. During the summer of 2012 the propaganda committee offered four workshops. The IWW literature officer arranges opportunities for tabling at events, including anarchist bookfairs, labor conventions and lectures. Phinneas Gage asserted that, "We sell

literature in order to promote a culture of working-class self-education and reading and also to raise money for the organization.” The table includes a variety of material on labor organizing, IWW history and anarchism. The literature table also offers IWW posters, buttons and t-shirts, as well as CDs and DVDs.

Both Eugene and Jake were original members of the regrouped Edmonton IWW in 1999. About half a dozen people signed themselves up and one person was elected to be the delegate to take dues. Several original members were previously involved in either the International Socialist Organization or in student activism. In the early 2000s, Edmonton IWW members were affiliated with a study group, called Workers’ Power. The Edmonton IWW started educational courses around 2005 (Chubb, 2012) concerning workplace organizing. In 2007, *Shift in Progress: A not-so-comic book* (Louden et al.), a collection of comics about real workers’ experiences of exploitation at their workplaces, was published by the Edmonton IWW and printed by Black Cat Press.

The Edmonton IWW is a social movement organization which has sustained itself through a constituency, from attracting a group of people, which are not necessarily anarchist, including participants in the labor, student and activist movements. It has maintained membership by creating a collective identity, mainly around direct democracy and solidarity. The IWW will likely maintain its presence in Edmonton.

*Student Workers Action Group, circa 2001 - 2012*

The Student Workers Action Group (SWAG) was a U of A campus group which aimed to strengthen the solidarity between students and workers. SWAG

viewed students as part of the working class and “encourage[d] students to examine their situations as workers and be more assertive about their rights in the workplace” (APIRG, 2006, p. 4). According to a newspaper article, “SWAG was created to advocate accessible, democratic education and working environments...” (Olson, 2001, Nov. 8, p.1). There were several anarchist members, including Eugene Plawiuk and Jake, who were original members of SWAG, as well as Phinneas Gage. Membership was open to the general public if they agreed on basic issues “like bottom-up democratic organization” and dissatisfaction with current economic affairs (SWAG, 2008, para. 1). During the early 2000s, the original aim of SWAG was anarchistic though when it was reorganized in the late 2000s it was more Marxist oriented, without explicitly anarchist members.

SWAG protested issues concerning university politics as well as supporting local protests. Phinneas Gage recalled that SWAG protested tuition increases and supported the 2002 strike at the Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton. They also worked on an unsuccessful campaign against privatizing janitorial services on campus. In 2001, SWAG opposed student tuition increases and unsuccessfully lobbied the Student Union (SU) to oppose the hikes. According to an article in the U of A student newspaper, SWAG's campaign was largely anti-SU and critical of the SU president (Olson, 2001, Nov. 8). SWAG also worked on a successful campaign for a progressive SU presidential candidate, who was a member of SWAG. In the summer of 2012, I attended a SWAG solidarity march and information rally for the Quebec student strike,

which marched from the U of A to the legislature, which was followed by a variety of speakers. However, it appears that SWAG has not been active in the past year.

*Anarchist Reading Circle, circa 2000 - 2004*

The Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle was a group of individuals who read and discussed anarchist literature. According to their website, “Topics include[d] anarchist theory and practice as well as discussions of current events from an anarchist perspective” (Anarchist Reading Circle, n.d.). The Reading Circle was largely organized by Allan Antliff, who was at that time an assistant professor at the U of A. Both Rob Caballero and Blaine were members of the reading circle.

The Anarchist Reading Circle was open to the public and met once a week. There were approximately six core participants, though there were often more people who would attend, some coming because they had read a newspaper advertisement about the reading circle and were interested in anarchism. Blaine commented that, “It was just a reading circle but it allowed the growth of many activists and anarchists in Edmonton. For myself, it was an early introduction to the works of anarchism.” It helped anarchists become familiar with different movements and struggles and contributed to shaping the collective identity of the local anarchist community.

The reading circle mostly read chapters from books dealing with academic analyses of the anarchist movement in different places. They also read works by the workers’ European autonomous movement and by situationists. After Antliff

left the reading circle, more feminist literature was introduced, as well as works by Peter Kropotkin, whom Blaine introduced. The main Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle website, which is no longer available, included pirated material which allowed the participants to read in advance the material being discussed. They selected anarchist texts and converted them to pdf format to be freely accessible and easily shared. This was important because not everyone could afford to repeatedly purchase books.

Members of the Anarchist Reading Circle also organized the first Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair in 2002 and offered a book table there. Rob reflected that he had hoped the reading circle would have overlapped with more organizing dimensions, such as bringing in speakers whose work the reading circle could read in advance. One of the reasons he became disinterested in the reading circle was because it became just a book club. He argued that, “It wasn’t really educational because people weren’t organizing...”

Blaine noted that the Anarchist Reading Circle was loosely organized, which became a problem at times. After Antliff left “there was sometimes aimlessness in the group and lack of clear direction.” Meeting so frequently made it difficult to sustain participation, particularly if participants were working full-time. A lot of the people who attended the reading circle were students or partially employed, providing more time to read the chapter and attend the weekly discussion. At times there were also personality problems and internal conflict. Around 2002, the Anarchist Reading Circle intended to develop into the

Edmonton Anarchist Free School, though this never materialized. The reading circle gradually declined to under six core people and soon ended.

*Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, 2002 - current*

The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair is the largest anarchist event in Alberta and is a meeting place for anarchists, leftists, activists, radical environmentalists and other interested people. The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair started two years after the first Canadian bookfair in Montreal and was the largest anarchist event in Western Canada, attracting over one thousand people; albeit the Victoria bookfair now draws approximately two thousand people. All the interviewees have in some way been involved in the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. Some have been instrumental in organizing it, whereas others have helped by facilitating workshops, tabling, cooking food, posting flyers or handling media coverage. For instance, Eugene Plawiuk, Phinneas Gage, Blaine, Claire and Eric have presented workshops at previous Edmonton bookfairs.

Anarchist bookfairs typically consist of left-wing book publishers and bookstores, anarchist and activist information tables, various vendors, a keynote speaker, workshops and entertainment, such as live music or dances. There are two main spaces, one where the tables are located and the other where lectures and workshops occur. The Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair has always provided free vegan food and free daycare with a certified childcare worker. All the keynote speakers have published books or articles and are either academics or anarchist organizers. Given the expense of food and a keynote speaker, and the difficulty of finding childcare volunteers, some bookfairs do not offer these

services. The location of the bookfair is important as it influences the attendance. The first Edmonton bookfairs were held near the U of A campus and were later located in the downtown area before switching to the current location in Old Strathcona, which increased attendance as it is near the Farmers' Market and neighbourhoods which have large student populations.

Blaine recalled the original purpose of the bookfair was to create an anarchist meeting space and a way to increase rapport between anarchists in Edmonton and elsewhere in Canada, "build[ing] a community across the Prairies with other people with different ideas. It was this idea of making Edmonton's [anarchist] community more open to the world and less insular." Thomas' quote at the beginning of this chapter refers to the quality of prefiguration of the bookfair: "it's not just a book, we're creating a microcosm of what we'd like the world to be." Over three days the bookfair offers free food, free daycare, free education (lectures and workshops), free entertainment (musicians and dances), free literature (usually pamphlets) and free space for conversation. The bookfair operates on a volunteer basis, underpinning the need to provide the social provisions of life without an incentive for profit.

The bookfair is as much a political event as a social event. Politically, it promotes a common framework and collective action strategies. The bookfair also encourages people to be educated and critical of authority as well as fostering political and anarchist theory. The bookfair generally has grassroots groups which coalesce around it, such as the Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle, Occupy Edmonton and the Free School.

Socially, the bookfair is a culture-building event where people interact with others who have similar interests, while others are introduced to radical ideas for the first time. Since 2004, the Edmonton bookfair has hosted numerous parties and dances, which are a significant part of the social aspect of the bookfair, such as Halloween parties, a 1980s dance party, a queer party, an anarchist after-party and a pajama party. The 2005 Edmonton bookfair was the first year in which documentaries were shown. In 2007, the bookfair started offering anarchist music nights— “An evening of music fused with revolutionary politics” (Redmonton-Radical Edmonton Network, 2009, para. 2) —with various genres, including folk, punk, hip-hop and metal. In the same year, Norman Nawrocki, a Canadian anarchist comedian, presented a comedy cabaret and launched his book of poetry at the bookfair.

The first Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, organized by people in the Edmonton Anarchist Reading Circle with help from Anti-Capitalist Edmonton, occurred in December 2002. Allan Antliff had a strong role in organizing the first bookfair. Blaine recalled that the first year of organizing the bookfair was on an ad hoc basis. Unlike any of the other Edmonton bookfairs, the first one featured an art exhibition, likely an influence of Antliff, who is an art historian. In 2003, Antliff had begun teaching at the University of Victoria, so the second bookfair was organized by Anti-Capitalist Edmonton. There was no bookfair in 2004. The third Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair in 2005 was organized by a new group of people, who have continued to organize it, with a series of member changes, until 2012.

According to the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair blog (2006), areas for volunteering before and during the bookfair include the kitchen, childcare, putting up posters/hand billing, setup/tear down/cleanup, production of merchandise and transportation. These areas reflect a large part of the volunteer activities needed at the bookfair, although another important role is vendors. Black Cat Press, the Edmonton IWW and Turning the Tide, a leftwing bookstore from Saskatoon, have been present at all of the Edmonton bookfairs. Other anarchist bookstores that have tabled at the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair included Haymarket Books from Calgary, Mondragon Books from Winnipeg, Spartacus Books from Vancouver and Freedom Press, from the UK, which is the longest running anarchist publisher in the world. Large anarchist publishers have included AK Press and PM Press, both from Oakland, California.

The organizing process of the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair has changed several times. For the past several bookfairs there has been a core group of about five organizers, in addition to people helping out on the periphery. The bookfair ran on a modified consensus decision-making model for most of its existence, changing to a voting based process several years ago. Blaine is the only bookfair organizer who has been involved in every bookfair. Other bookfair collective members have included Fabian Graves, Jake, Eric and Claire.

Blaine argued that, “Theoretically we had meetings that ran on consensus but a lot of the real decision-making wasn’t taking place in meetings.” In effect, various people took care of different aspects, such as individuals taking over the kitchen, the finances, outreach to vendors or media, often making decisions prior

to communicating with the collective. By 2008, there was a new group of people involved, including some of the interviewees. Several interviewees recalled that after the 2010 bookfair, the collective and volunteers who assisted in the past voted to switch to Rusty's Rules, which is the Edmonton IWW decision-making model. The meeting occurred when several members who favored consensus were not present and would have likely prevented this resolution. This upset some bookfair volunteers and caused several organizers to leave or become less active. In the following meeting the decision-making process was revised where votes could only pass with a 75% majority. Fabian commented that the 2012 bookfair was essentially a closed collective. Eric lamented that, "We've moved more towards the direction of doing things over a select group of emails... And that doesn't leave much opening for people to get further involved." Several organizers commented that there was conflict in the decision-making, demonstrated by the transition from consensus to voting, with both models causing burn out over time. There were also complaints about people showing up with suggestions but not actually helping when the bookfair was happening.

During the past several years, the minimum price to run the Edmonton model of the bookfair has been \$4000 dollars. The most expensive aspect is renting the hall; originally it only cost a few hundred dollars but now it is approximately two thousand dollars for the weekend. The Edmonton Bookfair offers travel subsidies for vendors and the keynote speaker, as well as providing free food, which many other bookfairs do not offer. The budget for food is usually \$500, but it is easy to overspend on supplies and equipment. The

Edmonton bookfair has received financial support from the Alberta Public Interest Research Group (APIRG), Thoughtcrime Ink, Black Cat Press, the U of A radio station and Earth's General Store.

All the interviewees involved in organizing the bookfair expressed uncertainty and doubt that the Edmonton bookfair would happen in 2013. The main bookfair collective members have said they are taking a step back from organizing the bookfair. Several interviewees noted that they would be glad to share their knowledge about organizing past bookfairs, but did not want to be involved in the planning and running of the bookfair anymore. However, there is a new group of people who organized the 2013 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. It is likely that the 2013 bookfair has changed the Edmonton model to make it more affordable. Instead of three days, it was held over two days. They have changed venues and judging from their event announcement, they have removed a keynote speaker and travel subsidies.

*Workers' Power Study Group, circa 2003 - 2005*

Workers' Power was an informal study group, which included anarchists, Marxists and IWW members, and was affiliated with the Edmonton IWW. Eugene Plawiuk organized the study group. It met once a month and was a social evening with eight to fifteen participants meeting at various members' homes. According to one of their announcements, "Workers Power will reflect on the limitations of 'historical' Anarchism and Marxism to develop a revolutionary critique of daily life and a political practice to apply to the current crisis of capitalism" (A-Infos, 2004, para. 5). Eugene recalled the attitude of the meetings

was “bring your books, bring your ideas; let’s discuss it. How does it apply today? Is it still relevant? ... Has something changed?” They would occasionally have a potluck or watch a movie followed by a discussion. Blaine’s participation in Workers’ Power was his first introduction to council communism. He recalled that they did a lot of reading of Anton Pannekoek, a council communist who was very critical of the labor establishment and business unions, which influenced a lot of the members’ perspectives regarding solidarity unionism.

The readings were mainly focused on left communist, council communist and anti-parliamentary communist perspectives. These branches of communism in many ways compliment anarchist theory because they are anti-imperialist and oppose running in elections, instead supporting organizing and mobilizing from below. Eugene explained that “Workers’ Power was an attempt to integrate anarchism with left communism” and that “[e]verybody had been doing their anarchist readings, let’s read somebody else.” Their readings included Pannekoek, Malatesta, Toni Negri, Selma James, CLR James, Karl Marx, and the “autonomist workers movements from Europe” (A-Infos, 2004, para. 3).

#### *Black Books Distribution 2003-2013*

Blaine started Black Books Distribution as a hobby to sell books at small events, including anarchist bookfairs and activist events. He started it after he had helped order and table books for the first Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair. One of Blaine’s major reasons for starting Black Books was because most bookstores in Edmonton do not carry anarchist material. Blaine asserted that, “It was something

that I could promote anarchism with and also to promote reading literature that I believed in.”

Black Books carried books on a variety of issues including anarchist theory and history, labor organizing and history, LGB rights and various issues from a leftwing perspective. Over the past decade several book distributors he ordered from went out of business, making it harder to find books. Black Books carried books from AK Press and PM Press, but Blaine gradually attended fewer events and now only tables at bookfairs where these publishers are also tabling, making it redundant to carry their material. Black Books also carried a lot of anarchist pamphlets but another organization started printing and selling the pamphlets. Blaine had an arrangement with Earth’s General Store where Black Books stocked several bookshelves. Blaine remarked that he enjoyed running the Black Books in the 2000s but he is now phasing it out, citing that it is becoming difficult to sell books and he no longer has enough time. Additionally, during the past decade more outlets for anarchist literature have become available, particularly online sources, which make anarchist literature accessible.

*Thoughtcrime Ink, 2006 - current*

On their website, Thoughtcrime Ink (n.d.a) describes themselves as “a non-profit anarchist collective that raises funds for anarchist education projects, mainly through printing, publishing, and solidarity packages.” Co-founded by Fabian Graves in 2006, and based in Edmonton, Thoughtcrime Ink is a registered non-profit organization and a volunteer-based collective. They sell merchandise

with a revolutionary sentiment and donate the profits to various anarchist projects. Their website (Thoughtcrime Ink, n.d.a) also states that they are IWW members.

Thoughtcrime Ink originally started by producing and selling t-shirts, buttons and patches, but it has gradually changed its activities to printing essays and pamphlets and publishing books. Fabian commented that, “I would like us to be the publishing house of anarchism,” and that “a goal I want now is to be a publishing house for things that might not normally be published.” The literature they print focuses mainly on classical and contemporary anarchist theory and grassroots labor organizing. Fabian reflected, “Thoughtcrime has made class-struggle literature easier to find and some stuff wouldn’t exist without us. I’m proud of that.” All of Thoughtcrime’s literature is printed at Black Cat Press though they are separate groups which independently select what they print. There is an arrangement between the two groups wherein Thoughtcrime tables for Black Cat at anarchist bookfairs outside of Alberta.

Thoughtcrime operates on a voting decision-making process when consensus is not met. Fabian argued it is not the best anarchist model because he contributes most of the money and time, making it less likely people will oppose him. Currently there are seven members; four in Edmonton, two in eastern Canada and one in the United States. Most of the members table at nearby anarchist bookfairs. There are also people who volunteer on the periphery, such as binding pamphlets and tabling at events. Rob argued there is a performative quality of participating in anarchist groups, such as Thoughtcrime, expressing his

participation was instrumental for becoming involved in the anarchist movement because it associated him with anarchist events and issues.

Thoughtcrime Ink has posted a Frequently Asked Questions page on their website where they address the critique that by selling merchandise they are capitalizing on anarchism and are therefore promoting capitalism. Specifically, the first question is, “What is an ‘anti-capitalist’ organization doing selling apparel, anyway?” (Thoughtcrime, n.d.b, para. 1). Part of their answer states, “[w]e think eschewing profit for personal gain and using all the money we make for community projects is one way to be anti-capitalist in practice, to divert money from ‘the system’ into an alternative social economy” (Thoughtcrime, n.d.b, para. 1). This refers to promoting prefigurative politics where community groups replace capitalist relationships. Essentially Thoughtcrime resists generating private profit by volunteering and by donating their profits to anarchist groups. Their only paid worker is the web designer.

The collective meets several times a year to decide which upcoming events or groups they will donate to. The website notes their criteria for funding groups is that they “maintain oppositional stances to corporations and state [and] are doing radical work that needs to be done for healthy, connected communities...” (Thoughtcrime, n.d.b, para. 7). A 2008 blog post on their website notes they originally wanted to raise \$5000 for the Edmonton book fair, but eventually decided to donate their profit to multiple anarchist projects, including six Canadian anarchist book fairs, which can be viewed in Table 2 (see appendix). Thoughtcrime also donated \$1500 to the interviewers of *Anarchism: A*

*Documentary Film* who interviewed 101 anarchists from around the world (Anarchism a Documentary, 2011). In the past, they have donated to speakers who have lectured in Edmonton and in 2012 they printed five different styles of IWW t-shirts with the proceeds going to the branch.

In the past, Thoughtcrime Ink tabled fifteen events in one year, during which Fabian estimated they talked to 2000 people. He considered this important, where people see that anarchists are rational and perhaps persuasive. However, Thoughtcrime does not table nearly as much now, focusing mainly at anarchist bookfairs, but also tabling at events such as the North American Anarchist Studies Network Conference and Left Forum, a conference in New York. Thoughtcrime has tabled at the majority of the Bookfairs in Canada; in the US in New York City, San Francisco, and the Twin Cities; and at European anarchist bookfairs in France and Switzerland.

Thoughtcrime mainly sells pamphlets, some by classical anarchists like Kropotkin, Malatesta, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, which are often essays or a section of a book. This type of material is no longer protected by copyright and can be freely distributed. They also print material from individuals and groups that have given consent for it to be reproduced. Books they have published include a collection of essays by Wayne Price (2010) about anarchism and reformism, as well as the study of state capitalism in the USSR by Aufheben Collective (2013). Works by the writers of the Recomposition Blog have also been published. Rob noted that a goal for Thoughtcrime is to produce literature about current events, publishing “more contemporary pamphlets especially about

things that are happening... where we have material that you can disseminate because you want to insert it into social movements.”

Thoughtcrime also sells t-shirts, with 35 designs available on their website, but they are phasing out this form of merchandise. Their clothing is “sweatshop-free,” though they recognize any worker in the capitalist system is exploited. One shirt, in a variety of colours, depicts friendly bunnies holding a banner with the text, “We don't want a bigger piece of the pie we want the whole f---ing bakery.” Another shirt says “U.S. Army now Hiring” above a graveyard. A third shirt has a quote from and a picture of Lucy Parsons which reads, “Never be deceived that the rich will allow you to vote away their wealth.” Thoughtcrime has also released several musical CDs, which are no longer available on their website, from artists such as Ben Disaster, an Edmonton musician, and Rae Spoon, a transgender musician. They also have 24 buttons available on their website. Thoughtcrime also offers “Infoshop in a box” which is an assortment of anarchist material which can include shirts and other merchandise that can be tabled at events. This is particularly useful “if you live in a smaller centre where radical literature might be harder to get ahold [sic] of” (Thoughtcrime Ink, n.d.b, para. 2).

*Edmonton Anarchist Black Cross, circa 2007 - 2010*

The first Anarchist Black Cross (ABC) groups originated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as an alternative structure to the Red Cross, formed during the Russian Revolution and Civil War to supply aid to Russian anarchists (Anarchist Black Cross Federation, 2011). During the 1980s autonomous ABC groups formed in

North America. The ABC in Edmonton operated in the late 2000s with the purpose of supporting political prisoners and opposing the prison system. Its ultimate aim was to dismantle the prison system, though it defended current legal rights to prevent the further erosion of freedoms by ruling elites (ABC Edmonton, 2010a). Their website asserts that prisons are not rehabilitative but instead maintain class and race privilege while reinforcing state power. The organization of the Edmonton ABC was non-hierarchical and based on consensus with membership open to the general public. Eric was involved with the ABC in Edmonton, though he was not as involved as other members. They organized educational events about the prison system and supported prisoners “morally, financially and legally” (ABC Edmonton, 2010a, para. 2). They also organized a letter writing campaign for anarchist prisoners, supplying postcards, stamps and contact information.

ABC Edmonton cooperatively worked with other groups, participating in events and organizing their own events. In September 2008 when the Olympic Spirit Train arrived in the city they supported a protest with various First Nations groups against the Olympic Games and the Tar Sands (Anti-Olympics Archive, 2011). ABC Edmonton also participated in the 2009 North of Nowhere Expo programming, an activist arts festival supporting independent media (Edmonton Small Press Association, 2009). On August 10, 2008, the ABC organized a Prison Justice Day event in Edmonton, offering workshops, screening two films, arranging a benefit show and providing vegan food (Prison Justice, n.d.). The following year for Prisoner Justice Day, the Edmonton ABC and the Edmonton

John Howard Society organized a protest at the Alberta Legislature, aiming to raise awareness about the “[i]njustices of the justice system” (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2009).

As a way to support female prisoners, ABC Edmonton received a \$670 grant from APIRG for the Books Behind Bars campaign, which purchased “books for the library at the Edmonton Institution for Women” (ABC Edmonton, 2010b). ABC Edmonton also partnered with the U of A’s Community Service Learning (CSL) in 2008. The CSL program connects student with voluntary community groups, volunteering at a group while also conducting research on their experiences, writing papers and giving presentations (Community Service Learning, n.d.). ABC Edmonton appears to have become inactive after 2010.

*Workers’ Solidarity Alliance, 2010 - 2011*

The Edmonton chapter of the Workers Solidarity Alliance (WSA) was short lived. Many of the members were anarchists in the Edmonton IWW who wanted an explicitly anarchist organization. As Fabian put it, “The IWW is not an anarchist organization so sometimes there’s things you want to do that are not appropriate for the IWW.” After joining the WSA, which requires affordable membership dues, members were added to an email list service which networks information. It is up to local WSA members to organize local meetings under their own direction and the Edmonton chapter of the WSA held meetings for the purpose of organization-building and reaching common points of agreement.

Blaine recalled that, “In our local group we tried to build more of a coherent local

theoretical background. We did a lot of reading together; a lot of discussion.”

Members included Blaine, Phinneas Gage, Fabian Graves and Claire.

The WSA started in the US in 1984 and is anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian and anti-statist (Workers Solidarity Alliance, n.d.). The “WSA is not a union but an organization of activists. We advocate self-managed unions so that rank and file folks can control their own workplace struggles” (Workers Solidarity Alliance, n.d., para 18). The Edmonton WSA was organized because, as Blaine noted, some people were interested in organizing a local anarchist group but did not want to write a constitution. As a way to avoid starting their own organization, they joined the WSA. However some of the interviewees were disappointed with the Edmonton WSA, specifically with the lack of defined roles for members and the lack of meeting procedures. Blaine recalled that they were impressed by the efforts of the WSA in the US but locally they were not inspired and most of the members eventually left the organization, which ended the meetings in Edmonton.

*The Free Thinkers Market, 2012 - current*

The Free Thinkers Market is a monthly anarchist market based in Edmonton which started in 2012. It is free for people to vend and attend, and includes a variety of vendors, mostly an assortment of local artists and craftspeople. According to their website, their purpose is to “[s]upport local artists and help build a community outside of the system” (Free Thinkers Market, n.d., para. 1). People are producing their own products, including jewelry, paintings, food and clothing, which encourages creativity and independence of workers. The Free Thinkers Market is currently held at a bar in Edmonton, though they have

tried several other venues, including a cafe which allowed the market to be open to all ages. The market usually offers free vegan chili. They encourage bartering and other “alternative methods of exchange” (Free Thinkers Market, n.d., para. 2). A poster for the market notes they offer “great art, handmade goods, live music and open mic, books and zines, crystals and stones, bold brews, treats, sweets, buttons and trinkets” (Free Thinkers Market, 2013). I attended one of the Free Thinkers Markets, in which I was tabling the Edmonton IWW literature. An interesting encounter was with a local Christian anarchist who was selling zines he had produced on that topic. Occupy Edmonton had a table about their new food co-op. There were several artists who were painting or drawing while they were tabling their art.

### **Anarchistic and Non-Anarchist Groups**

There are a number of groups in Edmonton, many short-lived, which have had an implicit relationship with anarchism. Most of these groups and events are modular and non-branded, autonomously occurring in many cities in North America.

#### *Direct Action Groups*

The most prominent group of these groups is the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), which was active in Edmonton in the early 1990s. ALF is a leaderless movement which started in the early 1970s in the UK. Unlike every other group discussed in this chapter, ALF is the only group which has committed criminal acts of protest, including property destruction and arson. ALF activists in Edmonton committed two actions causing property damage over \$100 000,

targeting sources of animal cruelty (Animal Liberation Front, n.d.). In December 1991, activists set ablaze three fish delivery trucks and in June 1992, activists rescued 29 cats from a research lab at the U of A (Animal Liberation Front, n.d.).

Reclaim the Streets (RTS) and Anti-Racist Action are two anarchistic affinity groups that have organized direct actions in Edmonton. Besides ALF, both groups use more confrontational tactics than other local anarchist groups. There has been at least one RTS event, held in Edmonton on August 25, 2000 (Edmonton Activist Literature, 2004b). A poster for the Edmonton RTS event reads, “Road Rave not Road Rage” (Edmonton Activist Literature, 2004b). RTS coordinates unpermitted street parties, incorporating elements of the anarchist, environmental and rave movements. RTS originated in the UK in the 1990s by activists in the anti-roads movement, protesting the detrimental effects of the privatization of urban space and the heavy reliance on automobiles (Graeber, 2009). RTS is a non-branded and non-hierarchical action which has autonomously operated in multiple urban centres (Day, 2005).

Anti-Racist Action originated in the US in the late 1980s, coordinating direct actions against racism and oppression (Anti-Racist Action Network, 2009). There was an Anti-Racist Action event protesting a white supremacist demonstration in Edmonton in March 2012. It took only a few minutes for the white power rally, with a few dozen fascist supporters, to be disrupted by 300 anti-racist activists and anarchists (Libcom, 2012). The Edmonton police protected the white supremacists, separating them from the anti-racist protesters, causing the police to be criticized in the Edmonton anarchist community for

protecting fascists. There were also Anti-Racist Action inspired events in Edmonton in the early 1990s, protesting a local white supremacist gang (Anti-Racist Action Network, 2009).

*Affinity Groups, Study Groups and Coalitions*

Other Edmonton groups involved in anarchistic tactics were the Radical Cheerleaders and the Free School. The Radical Cheerleaders operated in the late 1990s and was regrouped about a decade later. The Radical Cheerleaders “aren’t practising for the next sporting event. You’re more likely to see them in front of the legislature or marching down the streets with fellow protesters” (Edmonton Journal, Sept. 7, 2007, para. 3). They attended protests, often dressed in red and black, and chanted revolutionary slogans for the purpose of building morale amongst protesters. In the early 1970s there was a Free University, organized by students at the U of A. Eugene Plawiuk was a participant in it and recalled that it was involved in the local radical anti-war movement, offering classes in revolutionary struggle. There was talk of starting an Anarchist Free School in the early 2000s but this never materialized. The Free School was organized in the mid-2000s and has had various group readings and discussions, although it used a Marxist instead of an anarchist framework, yet they hosted a workshop at the 2012 Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair.

The People’s Action Network (PAN) in Edmonton was a coalition group which was involved in the early anti-neoliberal globalization movement, operating in the late 1990s and early 2000s. It was involved with organizing solidarity protests in Edmonton against the Free Trade Agreement of the

Americas, coinciding with the protests in Quebec City in 2001. PAN Edmonton offered teach-ins about various issues concerning globalization. It was one of the first activist groups in Edmonton which formally ran on the consensus model of decision-making. One PAN Edmonton protest marched to the Alberta legislature with approximately 200 people and then featured speakers from community groups, musical performances and a play (K-line, 2001). Eric and Rob were members of PAN Edmonton, though their experiences were generally negative. Eric's impression was that many of the members were activists from the university who favored academic language which alienated people from working-class backgrounds.

The Edmonton Coalition Against War and Racism (ECAWAR), which started in 2003, is an activist group which has had anarchist participants, though today it is influenced more by the Communist Party and by liberalism. Fabian was one of the founding members and Eric was also active in the group. ECAWAR organized the largest anti-war protests in Edmonton opposing the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, also protesting militarism and war profiteering (ECAWAR, n.d.). The group has held various solidarity demonstrations for issues in the Middle East, including the Occupations of Palestine and Lebanon as well as the importance of avoiding military intervention in Iran and Syria.

Alternatives to Capitalism and Anti-Capitalist Edmonton (ACE) are two discussion groups which were influenced by anarchist theory. Alternatives to Capitalism was a leftwing study and discussion group which met once a week for approximately one year. It was originally a group which discussed books, but it

became more of a general discussion group. Blaine was a member and recalled that they would “read and... discuss alternatives to capitalism, influenced by anarchist thought.” For instance, they read a book by Michael Albert about anarchist economics. They also tried having a dinner once a month at somebody’s house. Blaine argued that Alternatives to Capitalism came out of the anti-globalization movement of the early 2000s and was full of hope but lacked “...a real vision aside from a wistful desire for a new society.” ACE started in 2002 and continued for a couple of years and was “concerned with a number of issues, including international trade agreements, legal rights, and community selfsufficiency [sic]” (APIRG, 2006, p. 3). Jake was a member of ACE and recollected that it educated members about anti-capitalist politics, mostly through readings. ACE helped organize the first and second Edmonton Anarchist Book fairs. Jake argued that there “comes a point where you should use the reading to engage the community and that wasn’t happening.”

*Occupy Edmonton, 2011 - current*

Occupy Edmonton was organized approximately one month after the mobilization of Occupy Wall Street (OWS). OWS is based on anarchist principles, including non-hierarchical social relationships, prefigurative politics and rejection of the legitimacy of current political and legal institutions (Graeber, 2011). Occupy Edmonton had its first public event on October 15, 2011, which was planned as a day for solidarity for the Occupy movement, in which 1500 cities participated internationally (Occupy Edmonton, 2012b). Occupy Edmonton (2012a) supports “direct action and participatory frameworks” and has biweekly

general assemblies. It is a consensus based organization and is a leaderless movement, instead using mentorship, as Rob noted, “We didn’t have any more say than anyone else.” Rob was involved in Occupy Edmonton for its first year. Eric and Jake were also involved in Occupy Edmonton for a short time.

After Occupy Edmonton’s first march through the downtown core, they marched to Melcor Park and set up an Occupy encampment for 42 days. The encampment temporarily created common property in a privately owned park, resisting the capitalist appropriation of land while targeting Melcor Developments, which is involved in the real estate industry. Rob asserted, “Occupy was a space that was temporarily liberated from the mediation of security, the state, landlords and bosses; it was a free open space.” Rob was very enthused with the rapid development of Occupy Edmonton: “One day there wasn’t anybody in the park and then the next day there were 200 people talking about political ideas that are in some ways radical. It was something really worth supporting.” Eric argued that Occupy Edmonton raised important issues including anti-capitalism, anti-oppression and autonomy, as well as creating self-identified anarchists or people who organize along anarchist principles.

Occupy Edmonton’s encampment received and ignored several notices of eviction by Melcor. Occupy Edmonton established a police committee to meet with the police and at one point two detectives threatened several participants with criminal charges if they remained in Occupy, although no one was charged. This was seen as a way to individualize blame and falsely portray the notion that several leaders were responsible for Occupy Edmonton. Rob recalled that the

media had a narrative about the danger of having people in the park at night. Occupy Edmonton framed their response as their presence was making the area safer. Rob related his own experience, saying “I used to live in the neighbourhood and... [Melcor Park] is so dark and empty... but now that there are people here it’s a really good community space.” The encampment was raided by the police shortly after 4am on November 25, 2011, as approximately 45 officers dislodged nine people from the park, arresting three people who refused to leave.

Rob asserted that the encampment was a difficult project for people, since many of the participants did not have previous experience in political activity. People entered a communal living situation with some similar values, such as fairness and social justice, “but very different strategies and notions of proper political activity.” Rob felt like he ended up struggling with liberal and state tendencies within Occupy Edmonton, asserting “there’re a lot of people involved that are trying to tone it down that come from very specific liberal perspectives.”

Occupy Edmonton (2012b) participated in 100 actions during their first year of operation. During and after the encampment, Occupy Edmonton worked on various campaigns, such as protesting federal funding cuts, a proposed oil pipeline and the continuation of Guantanamo Bay prison. They also had an Occupy U of A march where there were suggestions that there would be a new occupy camp on campus; however, the police did not allow the protesters on campus grounds (Williamson, 2012, Feb. 2). In the summer of 2012, Occupy Edmonton held solidarity protests for the Quebec Student Strikes and supported weekly “casserole nights” in May and June 2012, an activity which started in

Montreal where protesters used pots and pans during their marches. Occupy Edmonton has also engaged in banner drops and guerilla art.

Rob argued that, “Implicitly [Occupy Edmonton] was kind of radical and anarchist but often in its operations and its rhetoric it wasn’t.” It protested inequality in a very general manner without questioning the capitalist and colonial dimensions of the distribution of property. Rob asserted that the Occupy Edmonton encampment lost support because of internal behavior of the people at the camp, including sexism, colonialism, and classism. Inter-group conflict made some people not want to participate. Rob recalled one man acted like a leader, trying to organize everything himself. He was also a sexist who made sexual passes at women in the Occupy camp, making them uncomfortable. There was also alcohol and drug use by some of the members, making people act immature and egotistical, and some people attended meetings under the influence. Some Occupy Edmonton participants were against including homeless people in the camp; however, Rob encouraged integrating homeless people into Occupy, particularly because they were in the downtown core, which could allow another aspect of inequality to be discussed. Rob also felt like Occupy Edmonton lacked an accountability structure. Jake recalled that he had to struggle with other members to have the minutes recorded during General Assemblies as well as having to stress the colonial dimension of Occupy to have it acknowledged in their general statement.

Rob theorized that three cataclysmic events coincided in the United States which fostered the environment which OWS developed:

You had basically the looting of the US treasury, which is obvious to everybody on the right and the left wing of the spectrum politically in the mainstream of the USA. You had a bunch of people having their homes foreclosed on, so you have the American dream literally dying...

Homeownership is a huge part of the American dream. That's the whole rationale why you stay in your cubicle and work hard for years and years.

And also the doubling of the unemployment rate.

These three issues solidified the discontent in the US, fueling OWS, whereas in Canada, Rob argued, it was a solidarity movement failing to address issues that were happening in Canada.

Occupy Edmonton has become a general coalition group providing support and organizing protests for a variety of causes that members support. They continue to hold regular general assemblies and have recently offered several free barbeques. I attended two Occupy Edmonton marches: their first march and their one year anniversary march, though participation at the protests declined from approximately 1000 to 50.

## Chapter 6: Analysis

This chapter will first analyze social movement literature to establish some criteria for the definition of social movements which will determine if there is an anarchist movement in Edmonton. I will then examine the insights of social movement theory for understanding the anarchists in Edmonton. Next I will outline the interviewees' opinions whether there is an existing Edmonton anarchist movement and their estimations of how many anarchists are in the city. I will then discuss particular ways the interviewees' have interpreted anarchism, including their relationship to classical and contemporary anarchist theory, the Edmonton anarchist community, violence and revolution, and the role of the state and electoral politics. Finally I will discuss power dynamics in Edmonton's anarchist community.

### Is There an Anarchist Movement in Edmonton?

#### *Social Movement Theory*

The anarchist communities across Canada, the largest of which are in Ontario and Quebec, can be viewed collectively as an anarchist movement as they are engaged in multiple campaigns with sustained support in various locales. Yet locally, many Canadian anarchist communities do not have a large basis of support or a significant degree of influence. Edmonton, as described in the previous chapter, has had numerous anarchist groups active in the city and, as Chapter 4 demonstrated, there are active anarchists in the community. Nonetheless, many of the groups discussed lasted only a couple of years and consist of a relatively small number of people. Asking if there is an anarchist

movement in Edmonton is important because it implies the degree of support and influence anarchism has in Edmonton, outside of the ways it influences the interviewees' ideas and actions.

One set of criteria for defining a social movement is whether participants are engaged in collective action in confrontation with “clearly defined opponents,” connected by an informal network and “share a distinct collective identity” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 20). From this framework, it is arguable that the anarchists in Edmonton are a social movement. Their primary opponents are capitalists, statist and supporters of oppression and conflict, such as racists, sexists and war supporters. There are a variety of actions that anarchists use to publically display their opposition to these groups, such as anti-racist actions, anti-government rallies, anti-war demonstrations, and various efforts of Occupy Edmonton, which protests the injustices of capitalism. The Edmonton anarchists operate in an informal network, with linkages between individuals and groups involved in different social movements and community groups in Edmonton and across the prairies.

There is a collective identity in being an anarchist, primarily through extolling and practicing anarchist principles described in Chapter 2, though there is a heterogeneous relationship to anarchist theory and history. Collective identity is “the sense of shared experiences and values that connect individuals to movements and gives a sense of ‘collective agency’ or feeling that they can effect change through collective action” (Staggenborg, 2008, p. 21). The interviewees viewed anarchism as a form of organization which promotes cooperation, social

justice and equality. Workers' self-organization and solidarity were also highly valued by the interviewees. Groups and events like the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, the Anarchist Reading Circle and the Anarchist Black Cross have helped create an anarchist collective identity in Edmonton. All of the interviewees believed that collective action is worthwhile for improving various situations. Most of the interviewees did not consider protests an effective model of collective action, instead promoting labor organizing, but many still participated in protests in order to support issues and to show solidarity with other causes. There is certainly a belief in collective agency, or the ability to effect change, particularly through winning workers' rights and the ability to self-manage their workplace affairs and their own lives.

Social movements can also be defined as "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interactions with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Tarrow, 1998, p.4, as cited by Staggenborg, 2008, p.5). Suzanne Staggenborg (2008) notes that a movement is sustained by engaging in multiple campaigns or, at the minimum, multiple actions within one campaign. It is difficult to argue that Edmonton anarchists are in sustained interactions with authorities, though there are numerous examples of anarchists involved in such; albeit, they generally operate in community groups which are not explicitly anarchist. The largest of which has been Occupy Edmonton, in which the Melcor Park encampment was an example of a sustained campaign challenging the real estate industry. However, most anarchists were not highly involved in Occupy and the commonality of the members' purpose and identity is

disputable. The Edmonton Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) have engaged in multiple campaigns against bosses who have exploited their workers and the members of the IWW share a common purpose and solidarity. Other campaigns have been organized by activist groups, such as the defunct People's Action Network Edmonton or the Student Organized Resistance Movement, which organized demonstrations to protest the government, social inequality and tuition hikes. Another campaign has been protesting against waging wars, mainly through the Edmonton Coalition Against War and Racism (ECAWAR), though anarchists are no longer active in this group. Individual anarchists have also been involved in the environmental and feminist movements.

Since anarchists in Edmonton lack sustained campaigns of collective action which are explicitly anarchism, I think it is reasonable to conclude there is not an anarchist movement in Edmonton. There is a range of anarchist activity, such as printing and publishing anarchist literature, as well as the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, but it is not engaged in collective action which directly challenges elites, but instead is prefiguring an alternative to mainstream institutions while promoting anarchism. Another reason I think there is not an anarchist movement in Edmonton is because there are few explicitly anarchist social movement organizations currently in the city, instead individual anarchists are involved in other social movements.

Edmonton's infrastructures of resistance, defined in Chapter 2, include the projects and services detailed in Chapter 5. The organizational framework of the anarchists in Edmonton is grassroots, as they are self-organized, decentralized and

participatory. Organizations and events include the IWW, the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, anarchist study groups, activist protest groups and various outlets and producers of anarchist literature such as Black Cat Press and Thoughtcrime Ink. The anarchist repertoire of action in Edmonton includes various organizational structures and activities. Types of organizations include affinity groups (Anti-Racist Action), collectives (Thoughtcrime Ink), coalitions (PAN Edmonton), general assemblies (Occupy Edmonton), consensus based groups (Food not Bombs) and voting-based groups (IWW). Actions include union participation, picketing and housing and food cooperatives. Educational activities include the anarchist bookfair, study groups, workshops, teach-ins, lectures, publishing, printing, and writing. Direct actions include marches on the boss, unpermitted marches, disrupting ceremonies and meetings, blockades, phone zaps and banner drops, also referred to as *détournement*. Civil disobedience includes permitted marches, rallies, occupying political or administrative offices and hunger strikes.

In relation to the resource mobilization perspective, the assets of the anarchist movement are relatively limited. Staggenborg (2008) distinguishes between tangible assets, such as funding and material resources, and intangible assets, such as moral and social-organizational resources. Most of the tangible resources are limited to the group's membership and most anarchist groups do not have a large source of financial income, thus diminishing their ability to fund activities. The exception is the Edmonton IWW which collects dues from members. Some groups generate money from selling literature, such as Black Cat

Press, Thoughtcrime Ink and the IWW. Additionally, the Alberta Public Interest Research Group has financially contributed to the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair, Anarchist Black Cross, Anti-Capitalist Edmonton, Student Workers Action Group and ECAWAR. Most of groups discussed in Chapter 5 have not had a fixed physical space, such as an office, which is a practical resource. The exception is Black Cat Press which operates its printing in a building, which Thoughtcrime Ink also uses.

Intangible assets include the skills and tactics available to movement participants. Many of the local anarchists have post-secondary education, strengthening the ability to propagate and spread information concerning anarchism; for instance, many of the interviewees have either presented information to the public or written about anarchism. Most mainstream media does not cover anarchist events and instead anarchists have established their own communication networks. The main source of communicating ideas and events is on the internet. Most of the anarchist groups have their own websites or are on social networks for the purpose of announcing upcoming events. Some groups use listservs in which people correspond through email. In the past some groups have published their own papers, such as the Edmonton IWW's *Wobbly Dispatch* or Occupy Edmonton's *Edmonton Occupier*. A social-organizational asset is that the majority of anarchist groups are participatory and inclusive, allowing anyone the opportunity to become involved. Yet organizing under the anarchist banner can also be off-putting to the general public, since there are common misconceptions about anarchism. A moral asset is that anarchist groups are protesting inequality

and injustices, though many Canadians do not consider capitalism to be inherently unfair and anarchist groups can appear to be strange or perhaps even immoral.

New social movement theory is particularly important for understanding the anarchists in Edmonton. The significance of collective action has already been noted, which is a concept associated with this theory. New social movements are loosely structured (Staggenborg, 2008) which is applicable to the organizational structure of anarchism in Edmonton, distinct from the Old Left and formal political movements. However there is some disagreement between new social movement theory and anarchism (Day, 2005), since some anarchists, particularly in Edmonton, support the labor movement, which has been conceptualized as an old social movement structure.

The collective behaviour and political process theories also contribute to the understanding of anarchism in Edmonton. The collective behaviour tradition of strain theory is applicable because some activist groups have appeared during times of social disruption, such as the Occupy Movement, which arose after the financial crisis persisted irrespective of the political promises of stabilization. As Rob Caballero noted in Chapter 5, Occupy appeared during an accelerated period of foreclosures and growing unemployment in the US. Also in reference to strain, during the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s there was a growth of anarchist activity. Political process is also important because the concept of cycles of contention is applicable in Edmonton. During the duration of this study there have been at least two cycles. The first cycle occurred during the first year of Occupy Edmonton while a minor one occurred in solidarity for the Quebec student strike,

where there were numerous marches, including multiple info-rallies and casserole nights, and lectures. Further, political process theory has insights into the impact of the state on collective action (Carroll, 1997). The current state response to anarchism has not been repressive, allowing open anarchist activity, in contrast with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where radical politics were suppressed. It is likely the police are conducting surveillance on, and perhaps have infiltrated, anarchist groups, though the police do not intervene in Edmonton protests. Rather, there is often substantial police presence at anarchist supported protests; for instance, there were more than a dozen police at the 2012 and 2013 Edmonton May Day marches, with one officer filming the marchers.

The synthetic approach of resource mobilization and political process theories has developed the concept of framing (Staggenborg, 2008). There are frame disputes between anarchists in Edmonton concerning the most effective or authentic tradition of anarchism, since there are varying ideological and strategic perspectives. For instance, there is contention at the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair between social and individual anarchism. In Edmonton there are also frame disputes between anarchists and other leftwing groups, such as the Communist Party.

#### *Interviewees' Positions on an Anarchist Movement in Edmonton*

Most of the interviewees asserted that there is an anarchist movement in Edmonton. Phinneas Gage maintained there is a small but vibrant anarchist movement. Eugene Plawiuk affirmed that there is an anarchist movement in Edmonton and “it has a huge role in the city. It’s the backbone of the radical

organizing. More people self-identify with anarchism than any other leftwing political position.” This statement is likely true, but it is unable to be verified without quantitative research which, as mentioned in Chapter 3, would be costly and inefficient. Eric asserted that the anarchist movement in Edmonton has been more successful than other left-wing groups, naming Maoists, Stalinists, Trotskyists, Marxist-Leninists and the Communist Party.

Several of the interviewees argued that there are multiple anarchist movements in Edmonton. Eric commented, “I would definitely say there are anarchist movements in Edmonton. I use plural because there are several different strains of it.” Eric referred to class-struggle, gender, environmental and lifestyle anarchist movements in Edmonton. Eric attested that there is a core group of anarchists in Edmonton, with new members frequently coming into the movement, which makes it “organic and very alive and growing.” Blaine asserted that “there are at least two anarchist movements in Edmonton,” referring to big-A anarchists centered around the IWW, who are class struggle oriented, and small-a anarchists, who might be involved in bike commutes, the pride center or environmental issues. Phinneas maintained:

We have a significant presence in a couple of unions in town. We have a fairly significant presence in the students’ movement. In the past we had a significant presence in the anti-war movement, a lot of anarchists have moved on from that. It seems to me that anarchism is pretty vibrant in Edmonton... I would say there is an anarchist movement in Edmonton. Is it small? Sure, but I actually think it’s quite vibrant and we have real

connections and roots to the broader scene, especially in the labor movement.

Several of the interviewees were uncertain or hesitant to declare there is an anarchist movement in Edmonton. Fabian Graves commented, “I don’t think [anarchism] really has a role in our community yet, we’re pretty tiny, but that being said, we punch way above our weight.” Rob considered that there is an activist movement, but that it is not so much anarchist, noting that many do not use the label when organizing. Rob commented, “The anarchist movement happens in various dispersed locales, in little pockets of activity.” Malcolm Archibald noted that there has been growth in the anarchist community in Edmonton, where there seems to be more people that self-identify as anarchists than there were a decade ago; “Whether it means that it is a movement or not, I don’t see much in organization.” Jake commented, “I don’t know if there is a lot that is going on [in Edmonton] except for what the social anarchists are doing.” He acknowledged “people are on the margins of anarchism, such as Occupy and other groups that have some anarchists in it but more or less their aims are reformist or they are single issue groups.”

In the interview guide designed for this study, I asked the interviewees how many anarchists the interviewees thought were in Edmonton. The answers ranged between 100 and 500, with the average of 200 anarchists, although active anarchists were estimated to be around 50. Malcolm summarized it best: “Well I would think it is in three figures but that is about all that I can say.” Eric commented that, “There’s probably two hundred self-identified anarchists, to a

certain degree, if you take the people over the years... Beyond that, I don't really know. Not all those people organize." Fabian estimated there are 100 self-identified anarchists in Edmonton, yet "there're people who do not call themselves anarchists but say they are against hierarchy." This is in line with small-a anarchists, who may not be ideologically inspired by anarchism but are practicing and promoting anarchist principles. Fabian asserted that there are "sixty to a hundred who are theoretical anarchists, and then maybe thirty or forty that actually do stuff, whether it's helping in a community group or doing something at work." Rob guessed that there are 30 active anarchists "that are connected to some kind of project that is somehow anarchist." This section has shown that some of the interviewees considered that there is an anarchist movement in Edmonton, even though it technically lacks a sustained basis to refer to it as a social movement, according to academic literature.

### **Interviewees' Interpretations of Issues Concerning Anarchism**

#### *Anarchist Community*

Even if the anarchists in Edmonton do not constitute a movement, there is an anarchist community which contributes to an anarchist collective identity and shared solidarity. Blaine commented that anarchism:

Provide[s] something of a ready-made community. You have people who let you know that you are comrades and that gives a certain bond for people. It creates a certain milieu to socialize in. It creates a certain framework to relate to other people, not just anarchists too, because... I've wound up interacting with people who are socialists.

Many of the interviewees noted that the general public's understanding of anarchism is essentially unrelated to the anarchist community with which they are familiar. Blaine commented, "I find that people would be surprised at how many very ordinary people are anarchists and how many anarchists live very mundane lives." Claire also remarked:

There's really no similarity between what is portrayed in the media and the life that I live and the life that my comrades live. I don't think any one of us lives extraordinary lifestyles; most of us are not even bohemian. I think if anyone knew what the lifestyle of most anarchists looks like for real, all the glamour would be worn off.

Media portrayals often characterize anarchists as violent protesters, though the majority of the interviewees renounced using violent actions. Fabian articulated, "I would say less than 10% of the population could give me even close to an accurate definition of anarchism, but the other 90% believe they know and that's because of the media."

Many of the interviewees noted that it was a slow process to identify with anarchism. Many of them debated the concepts of anarchism and gradually became convinced of their applicability. Claire noted:

I struggled to use that word because I, just like everybody else, had negative associations with it... But after doing some reading I realized that it wasn't relinquishing one identity and taking on another, it was just an extension of the philosophy I already held.

Blaine also commented that he “finally became an anarchist after thinking about it for a long time.” Rob asserted that, “I think that practicing anarchism involves becoming an anarchist subject... It’s often sort of a painful process; it’s not very smooth or easy. Stuff like Occupy, it’s not a process without a lot of conflict sometimes.”

### *Local Anarchist Theory*

Anarchism is a theory that can have a wide range of interpretations and applications. Claire expressed that “Anarchism isn’t one thing” and it is compatible with many things. Claire articulated that there is not a blueprint or “one right way to live your life as an anarchist. I don’t have a guide that says what decisions an anarchist would make in this circumstance. I really only have the values that I have.” This reflects the attitude that anarchism does not demand ideological consistency, unlike other political perspectives, and that anarchists tend to borrow from other theoretical ideas.

The interviewees demonstrated that their political identities are fluid. Most interviewees stressed that there is a considerable amount of overlap between anarchist perspectives and broader traditions of left-wing politics. This is an example of intertextuality, in which the interviewees are influenced not only from anarchism but from other traditions as well, where they combine different theoretical ideas under the banner of anarchism, such as borrowing concepts from socialism, situationism and post-structuralism. More than half of the interviewees considered themselves socialists. Thomas commented that he believes in socialism, in the original sense of the word, while Claire remarked she is a true

socialist, though she reflected that all socialists probably think that. Fabian considers himself a libertarian socialist. Blaine argued that anarchism is “a socialist philosophy at its heart.” Eugene considers himself an anarchist with Marxist tendencies, being influenced by a variety of leftwing traditions. Thomas, Fabian and Rob made the distinction between socialism and anarchism, noting anarchism is more important in defining their political identity because contemporary socialism refers to the state ownership of the means of production and also implies hierarchical relationships; whereas anarchists are opposed to the state and instead propose workers’ control of the means of production.

Several interviewees remarked that they would use different political labels in certain situations. Claire noted that she sometimes uses the anarchist label strategically. At work she will often say she is a socialist, because of the misperception of anarchism in the general public. Three of the interviewees commented that they do not want their co-workers to know they are anarchists, fearing that they will be negatively affected because of their political beliefs.

All of the interviewees viewed anarchism as an inspirational vision or framework, but they did not consider it a complete or perfect formula for theory or action. Jake summarized this sentiment with the remark:

There’s always things you can take issue with, but that’s part of updating the theory. You take the best and you ditch what’s not relevant or what’s not feasible or workable, and you leave that behind. We don’t owe [classical anarchists] any favors, and they didn’t owe any favors to the people that came before them...

Therefore, even though the interviewees identify with the anarchist label, they are willing to critique the limitations of anarchist theory. For instance, Fabian did not consider Pierre-Joseph Proudhon an anarchist, even though he is often credited for originally articulating anarchism as a political philosophy. Jake declared that Proudhon and other classical anarchists were racists and sexists, though this was a general problem with 19<sup>th</sup> century theorists. Most of the interviewees did not find classical anarchism their main source of inspiration; although Malcolm and Phinneas considered classical anarchism more important than contemporary anarchism. Malcolm commented:

Anarchists generally don't read the classics. They don't have a lot of respect for someone with a big name; that is sort of an anarchist style of looking at things. I don't think it would bother an anarchist to say they haven't read any Bakunin, for example.

Thomas and Eric had not read much of classical anarchist theory and they did not consider this an issue.

The majority of the interviewees were critical of the post-anarchist intervention in anarchist theory. A lot of the interviewees were hesitant to define a human nature or that there are specific universal characteristics, which is actually supportive of the post-anarchist position that nothing is innate in human nature.

Malcolm considered the influence of post-anarchism detrimental, asserting, "There certainly seems to be a lot of theorizing going on but so much of it is post-structuralist or post-modernist type which is quite antithetical to me."

Interestingly, Malcolm, who is critical of a lot of contemporary anarchist theory,

noted that he does not think of the inherent. Blaine was also critical of anti-humanism, arguing that there are certain essentialist ideas such as the sociality and solidarity of humans, although he recognized that self-interest is also a part of human nature. Phinneas maintained that humans are inherently social and there is an instinct for freedom but not for equality. Eric argued that post-anarchism has some positives contributions, but believes in certain universal constants such as a cooperative human nature, though he did not believe in a human drive for freedom because people often oppress others. Rob also considered post-anarchism intervention to be valuable, acknowledging the relevance for anarchism of Michel Foucault's work on deconstructing notions of universality.

The majority of the interviewees extolled action over theoretical nuance, which is a typical anarchist position. For the interviewees, practicing anarchist principles is more instructive than studying anarchist theorists. Eric asserted that people learn through action rather than theory, emphasizing that the vast majority of influence is a result of action. Fabian argued that, "If you look at how to promote anarchism, I believe most people will come to anarchism through action. Whether its workplace or community action, it doesn't really matter, but it's through action, they don't really care about theory." This is ironic as his work with Thoughtcrime Ink has made anarchist theory more available in Edmonton. Jake argued that anarchists "need to provide a framework of action" positing that it is not writers who attract people to anarchism, but organizations that are able to provide public needs. Rob reflected that he:

...[B]ecame an anarchist through my involvement. That's a pattern where more people can be involved that way. It's probably a common story about how people get involved, they probably don't make a life altering decision where they want to figure out their philosophy so they're going to read X many of books.

### *The Role of Violence and Revolution*

All the interviewees rejected violence as an effective prefigurative tactic. Thomas noted some anarchists, largely in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, promoted violence as “propaganda of the deed” to raise anarchist awareness, which supposedly would cause a social revolution. A number of people who have called themselves anarchists attempted and sometimes succeeded in assassinations, including killing the heads of state of the US (1901), Spain (1897), and France (1894). This is why the interviewees stressed that anarchism does not promote violence and is instead a form of social organization which promotes a cooperative, community building project. Blaine commented that anarchism for him has never been a theory of violence and those who support violence, such as insurrections, are detrimental to the cause. Blaine explained:

Very few anarchists that I know or have ever known really believe in violence. I've never really seen any real talk of it. There are people on the fringes of anarchism who romanticize violence but I think that's a big problem.

Several of the interviewees sympathized with the black bloc tactics, which involves property damage, and one interviewee had participated in these tactics.

This interviewee commented:

I've broken windows in the past... I've done the throwing rocks thing...

There is a time and place for everything. I think the insurrectionists get too caught up in battling police in the street. We should focus more on trying to organize in the community and trying to do direct actions that empower people.

Even though Thomas said he would not participate in the black bloc, he argued it is non-violent, which is a common anarchist position because it specifically does not hurt individuals and instead targets symbols of capitalist exploitation, such as banks or fast-food chains. In contrast, Eugene asserted that the black bloc is left-wing consumerism which provides an excuse to discredit anarchists.

Though all the interviewees distanced themselves from violence, and especially the image that anarchists are violent, some recognized that violence would likely be necessary for transformative social change. Thomas commented that, "I think there ultimately will have to be violence; I don't think that the bourgeois class is going to give up their position without fighting for it." Fabian shared a similar sentiment: "I don't think we can depend on things being non-violent. So much wealth being controlled by so few people." Yet Fabian argued that insurrectionist anarchists are a harmful form of organizing, often causing hierarchies, which engages in the fetishization of action, promoting riots and sabotage as central means of anarchist practice, which he sees as problematic.

Jake argued that insurrectionists do not do the work to organize and do not have a plan for society. They come after anarchists and activists have organized events and stage property damage which defames the efforts of the organizers.

There is tension in anarchist theory concerning the role of tactics to achieve the values and principles anarchists would like to implement. The interviewees believed you cannot wait for the revolution to happen but instead should try to implement anarchist values in the ways they relate with others, such as non-hierarchical social relationships, which underlies the concept of prefigurative politics. Most of the interviewees still upheld the concept of revolution, though they did not see it as a totalizing rupture from capitalism as Michael Bakunin did. Phinneas was disappointed with Richard Day's abandonment of revolutionary politics, arguing that the drop-out tactic dismisses the capacities of the working-class. Jake argued that process is revolution, where the way one organizes shapes the outcome. In contrast, Eugene is a reformist anarchist, arguing that reforms can be revolutionary.

#### *Electoral Politics and the State*

Classical anarchists were vehemently opposed to participating in elections, viewing them as a useless endeavor. Thomas commented that anarchists often view voting as legitimizing capitalism, as all the parties accept the market economy. Eugene asserted, "Anarchism is a critique of parliamentary democracy. We really believe in direct democracy." Nonetheless, most of the interviewees have voted for progressive political parties. Two of the interviewees have worked

for the provincial New Democrat Party (NDP); for instance, Eugene was the Co-Director of Communications for the NDP during the 1997 elections.

Many of the interviewees recognized that political power has material outcomes. Namely, that there is a difference in policy between a Conservative and a NDP government. The interviewees recognized that there are necessary social provisions provided by the government, while noting the coercive and undemocratic character of the state. Claire commented that, “I could be the strident anarchist here and dismiss governments out right, but that’s a simplistic, propaganda stance.” Claire promoted the idea of strategic voting. Thomas stated that he understands why anarchists do not vote, but asserted that it is dogmatic to dismiss it entirely. He noted that the difference of government may have separate results; for instance, the Canadian 2011 Postal Workers strike may have ended favorably with a NDP government. Jake views voting:

[I]n terms of tactics, not strategy. I view it in terms of what you can actually gain in the short term, and for me is not a long-term goal for the left because every left-wing party that gets into power eventually has to face the power of the dictatorship of the market.

Fabian is not “against strategic voting, [but] I don’t usually take part in it.” Eric is the only absentionist.

All the interviewees were opposed to the state because they viewed it as an illegitimate and coercive institution. Blaine asserted that, “The state ultimately exists to protect capital.” Claire asserted that she does not “want to have a government in place. I believe that it would be perfectly reasonable to organize

the social order so that there are worker's councils after the revolution.”

Nonetheless, many of the interviews took a similar position to Noam Chomsky's distinction between goals and visions, discussed in Chapter 2, in which they were willing to support certain state services that benefit working-class people. It is likely the interviewees would not be opposed to state-funded education or state assistance for single mothers. Eric argued that if people are able to receive state funding while promoting radical politics, or if they are in need, that they might as well take it.

Rob articulated social democrats, who support state power, are “trying to tame the most aggressive dimensions of capitalism.” Rob acknowledged that the NDP are the “largest anti-systemic political organization in Alberta.” Yet at the same time it is “a trendy marketing campaign that is literally selling liberalism as a way to be, and it affects almost nothing and this is really no different than working in a high pressure marketing firm.” Rob continued, “The NDP is trying to limit your demands so your expectations don't get too high.”

### *On Consensus*

Many contemporary anarchist theorists have extolled the consensus model of decision-making (Graeber, 2009). Gordon (2008) argues that it makes the most sense for anarchist organizing, yet all the interviewees were skeptical of, and many hostile to, consensus. Many viewed consensus as projecting charismatic leaders while creating unnecessarily long meetings which are unattractive to newcomers. Phinneas argued that the effectiveness depends on the context, “In small informal groups of friends and like minded individuals it's fine, it's pretty

effective.” However, if people are not like-minded then it can be a stifling organizing structure. Phinneas commented:

Generally the most politically significant work, or as far as I’m concerned, are people who aren’t on the same page, who aren’t politically agreeing, and aren’t politically experienced savvy hip activists. I think generally speaking Robert’s Rules is the way to go for those kinds of organizations.

This is because the likelihood that people will know Robert’s Rules is greater, since it is a commonly used decision-making model, such as in Protestant congregations, political party constituency associations or even in business meetings. Jake asserted that consensus is inefficient when applied to coalition or community organizing. Jake argued, “It has a liberalizing process where it actually encourages the lowest common denominator politics, to reduce the political content to where more and more people agree the more and more you water down the political ideas in the process.” Rob recollected that CLASSE, the largest organizing body for the Quebec student strikes, did not use consensus but a voting model, maintaining that “some decisions are too important to be left to consensus.” This preference for a voting based organizing structure is likely highly influenced by the Edmonton IWW, which uses a modified version of Robert’s Rules.

### **Power Dynamics: Leaders in a Leaderless Movement?**

Blaine asserted that a “core principle of anarchism is the avoidance of building up informal or formal networks of individual power or the power of the elites... Now, whether anarchists do that in organizing is another situation.”

Blaine's comment reflects the fact that sometimes unjustified power is maintained in anarchist organizing, which is not exclusive to the anarchist movement and is a problem for many activist projects. Jo Freeman (1972), a sociologist and feminist, proposed the concept of the tyranny of structurelessness, arguing that decentralized organizations can cause unaccountability. Freeman warns of the risk of a friendship elite, where a familiar group of people become the main organizers of a group, which discourages others from participating. To some extent, this criticism can be applied to the anarchist community in Edmonton. Nonetheless, the interviewees valued accountability and were conscious of avoiding illegitimate and unequal power.

Anarchists are "hardly against power" (Gordon, 2008, p. 49), as indicated by the emphasis of "empowerment" in anarchist theory and practice. Uri Gordon (2008) advocates a nuanced understanding of power, beyond a monolithic concept of power as solely coercive and unjustified. Some anarchist theorists have advocated completely abolishing power, but most contemporary anarchists have criticized this position. Harold Barclay (2005a) argues that anarchist discussions of power and authority are often confused and that power is inevitable in social relationships. Barclay defines power as the "the ability to get others to do what you want them to do" (Barclay, 1990, p. 20, as cited by Barclay, 2005a, p. 105).

Uri Gordon (2008), adapting Starhawk's (1987) framework, proposes that there are three types of power. Power-over refers to imposing one's will on others, despite their opposition, which is the common conceptualization of power. This includes governmental and corporate hierarchies as well as inequalities

between people, and includes force, coercion, manipulation and authority. Power-to refers to the capacity to influence reality. This involves skills, political resources and material things. Power-to is used for enabling both power-over and power-with. Power-with refers to non-coercive influence among equal-standing people in which there are no conflicts of interests or wills. Power-to and power-with are forms of power which anarchists extol. Power-with is demonstrated in direct democracy and non-hierarchical social relationship and organizations, while power-to is demonstrated in empowering others to manage their own affairs and is also encouraged through sharing skills.

All these types of power are present in the Edmonton anarchist community. Power-to is displayed by the frequent skill-sharing and information workshops by the IWW as well as activist teach-ins and public lectures. Power-to is summarized by Phinneas' goal of the IWW, "I want to get as many ordinary working people real lived experience in managing" and participating in an organization themselves, especially the administrative tasks. Phinneas also wants "to train as many workers in rank-and-file direct action struggle on the job." This can also be seen as power-with because people should work together to manage workplace affairs while remaining equals. Rob also noted that organizers of Occupy Edmonton were not leaders but mentors who have an equal say in the decision-making as do the rest of the members.

Power-over has also been experienced in a variety of settings in which anarchists have been involved. Blaine noted that he has experienced "very ugly

personality politics working out in individuals who have kind of developed a cult of personality.” He also witnessed cliques operating in anarchist groups:

Either a clique will develop and will try to exclude others from decision-making, even if they’re only doing it unconsciously, or cliques will develop that will socially exclude people who don’t fit into a particular mold of what they consider to be anarchist.

This refers to Freeman’s concept of a friendship elite which excludes others from participating or from the decision-making. When Blaine first became an anarchist he felt like an outsider because he was not a hippy or a punk rocker. Eric noted that there is sometimes elitism in activist groups, including the Edmonton Anarchist Book fair, where it is “hard for people to come in.” At times, power-over has been used for organizing at the book fair, such as switching from consensus to Rusty’s Rules. Another example of power-over is that several interviewees referred to one organizer as acting bossy and preventing certain changes in the book fair. This organizer has recently decided to step aside to allow other people to participate and bring new ideas. As noted in Chapter 5, Occupy Edmonton has also experienced problems with gender dynamics and lack of recognition of the colonial aspect of occupation in unceded First Nations lands, which can be viewed as a form of power-over. The criticism of “manarchy” of the anarchist movement is another example of power-over. Manarchy is a term referring to the tendency of the anarchist movement to disproportionately include men, which may cause women to feel unvalued or alienated in anarchist organizing. To some extent this research study can be criticized for this, as most

of the interviewees are men, though I had attempted to include more female anarchists.

Anarchism is a political and social philosophy which encourages empowering people to handle their own affairs while practicing mutual aid. It is important to recognize these power imbalances in the local anarchist community in order to address them. The interviewees were sensitive to avoid recreating power-over in their actions and organizations. Acknowledging these limitations is important to prevent them from persisting while also strengthening anarchist theory to be more participatory and egalitarian.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

This study has investigated the ways anarchists in Edmonton have theorized and practiced anarchism. It has also documented the histories, goals and tactics of local anarchist projects, which began in the 1970s. The primary research method utilized was semi-structured interviews to collect data about the ways anarchists have interpreted anarchist theory, particularly since there has been a shift in theory in the past several decades, as well as ways the interviewees have promoted or implemented anarchist principles. There are likely a couple hundred anarchists in Edmonton, with varying degrees of involvement in espousing anarchist politics; however, based on the academic literature concerning the criteria for defining social movements, I concluded there is not an anarchist movement in Edmonton. This last chapter will first discuss the future of anarchism in Edmonton, as described by the interviewees. It will then discuss the limits to this research study. I will conclude by analyzing further methods that could be employed to study anarchism in the Edmonton context.

### **Future of Anarchism in Edmonton**

I asked the interviewees what they thought is the future of anarchism in Edmonton. Most of them considered that the local anarchist community would continue to grow, though this is dependent on reaching out and appealing to people who do not already identify as anarchists. Jake commented that the future of anarchism “depends on us going to where people are at and trying to work with people to resolve their own issues and to do that in a liberatory manner,” while implementing anarchist principles, such as organizing horizontal networks. Fabian

Graves reiterated this point arguing that “average people are way more important than people who identify as revolutionaries because we’ve been calling ourselves revolutionaries... for 150 years and we still haven’t accomplished a hell of a lot, so it’s the average people we need.” Blaine considered that there could be two potential outcomes of anarchism in Edmonton. One is that anarchists will turn inward, “worry[ing] about theoretical concerns, about internal arguments and fights,” such as which philosophers were correct or wrong; for instance, “was Nestor Makhno a nice guy?” and worrying “about having the correct food at potlucks.” This option equates to anarchists’ debating with one another about the authentic tradition of anarchism. The second outcome is that anarchists will look outward and “try to engage in society and build a dialogue with society... If we chose the second path we have the hope or possibility of building a broader presence in the community.” Fabian, Jake and Blaine’s comments reflect Jeff Shantz’s (2009) discussion of social insertion, in which anarchists should not be concerned with maintaining anarchist organizations with people who already identify as anarchists, but instead should become involved in grassroots community groups and working-class organizations.

Malcolm Archibald was concerned that anarchists should do more than just attend protests and demonstrations, which he thought most anarchists tended toward. Malcolm remarked:

That’s quite different from a hundred years ago, when anarchists aspired to change the whole of society, not just a little part of it. Not just the lifestyle of a group of people. That seems to be the problem with the

anarchist movement today. It has become a middle-class cult and when you say middle-class you mean no class because the movement doesn't have a class basis.

This critique suggests anarchists should not just concern themselves about living an anarchist lifestyle but become involved in transformative social change.

Malcolm would like to see anarchists remain involved in the labor movement, from which some contemporary anarchist theorists have distanced themselves.

Malcolm's comment also suggests that anarchists should look outward and include working-class people in their organizing.

Rob Caballero thought that in order for the anarchist community to grow in Edmonton anarchists should organize between cities and connect people in various locales. Rob commented that anarchists need "more institutions and more circulation and just more activity... I think the entire generation of radical thought is more orientated towards anarchism than traditional communism." Phinneas Gage anticipated that there could be a new group or idea that may appear which is significantly influenced by anarchism but is not organized under the anarchist banner or explicitly connected with the anarchist tradition. Something of this nature could be similar to Occupy, which had rapid growth and support during its early activity and was implicitly inspired by anarchism. Eric predicted that there could be growth through more projects such as collectives and cooperatives.

## **Limitations of Research and Future Directions**

### *Limitations of Research*

My research has primarily studied the social and class-struggle faction of the anarchist movement, leaving the other anarchist perspectives largely unexplored, such as individualist<sup>4</sup> and environmental anarchists. Part of the problem of recruiting individualist anarchist interviewees is that they are often not involved in anarchist or activist groups and are therefore difficult to locate. I could have also interviewed more anarchists involved with different social movements but due to time and space constraints I limited recruitment to ten interviewees. A substantial limitation is the fact that nine out of ten anarchists are men, which is not representative of the gender ratio of anarchists in Edmonton or the anarchist movement in general. I regret that this may have perpetuated the critique of “manarchy” in the local anarchist community.

Another limitation is that I could have studied the efficacy of the anarchists in Edmonton. I have not studied how successful anarchists have been in recruiting new members or sustaining participants in anarchist projects. This is a major question of social movement literature, which was overlooked because I did not possess the skills or resources to adequately address these issues. I could have studied ways local anarchists have framed issues and if this has effectively mobilized members and attracted new participants. Also, I could have analyzed group dynamics in further depth, which could have elaborated the ways power is used in anarchist organizing. Another shortcoming of the research is that I removed a research method of this study in order to save time and space; I

conducted participant observation at twelve anarchist supported events, but did not include my experiences, even though they would have provided an account of interactions and activities.

### *Directions for Future Research*

There are a variety of methods available for acquiring further knowledge on the subject of anarchism in Edmonton. A researcher could continue the same methods I have applied and interview anarchist organizers from different groups other than those to which I spoke. For instance, the researcher could interview organizers of the Edmonton Anarchist Black Cross, the Free Thinkers Market or Anti-Capitalist Edmonton. Further, interviewing more female anarchists could provide insight into a perspective underrepresented in this study. Additionally, a researcher could conduct a comparative study between the anarchist community in Edmonton and other anarchist communities, perhaps in Alberta or across the prairies. A researcher could use a stricter version of life history interviewing and study the biographical evolution of each of the interviewees' identification with anarchism.

Future research on anarchism in Edmonton could use the participant observation method. The annual Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair is a central meeting place for anarchist discussion and activity in the city. An event like the bookfair could warrant an entire study in itself, such as the types of people, groups and subjects discussed in the workshops and in casual conversations. Other participant observation events in Edmonton could include protests and rallies, such as those organized by Occupy Edmonton, or the annual May Day

rally and march. There are also occasional anarchist lecturers and film screenings, both of which occurred during the duration of my research. A study detailing a strike, or a workplace struggle could provide a concrete example of anarchism in practice.

Should a researcher want to continue studying anarchists in Edmonton, and is generally supportive of the cause, she or he could volunteer or join an anarchist group to gain that experience to research. Groups could be the Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair Collective, Thoughtcrime Ink or Black Cat Press. This type of research would be more ethnographic. Ethnography would be more suitable for obtaining and analyzing information regarding interpersonal relationships and the culture of anarchism.

One of the interviewees after the interview suggested that anarchists might be hesitant to be interviewed because they feel uncomfortable individually presenting to a researcher what anarchism is. This might be because the interviewee feels as if he or she has to speak definitively for the movement, essentially being a spokesperson for a variety of anarchist groups. The interviewee suggested that if there were group discussions with fellow anarchists, it could provide ideas that might not come up individually. This is essentially the idea of a focus group, which could be a method to further study anarchism in Edmonton.

### *Conclusion*

Anarchists are frequently conflated with terrorists or rioters, yet anarchism is quite the opposite. Anarchism is a dynamic social and political philosophy

concerned with creating communities which care about one another, which practice mutual aid and promote radical responsibility. Ways anarchism is practiced and interpreted are fluid, yet there remains a commitment to social justice and equality. The study of anarchist activities within locales is often neglected, even though the anarchist movement is one of the main radical political inspirations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Edmonton anarchists have been creative in espousing their political beliefs and will likely continue to impact the social and cultural terrain in the city. This study has intended to document anarchist ideas and projects in Edmonton, though the subject could be further elaborated and contextualized.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> These works are a thesis on the Edmonton Industrial Workers of the World by Aaron Chubb (2012) and an online article about anarchism in Edmonton by Eugene Plawiuk (2007), which is no longer available on the internet.

<sup>2</sup> I consider the Wild Rose Party within the conservative ideology.

<sup>3</sup> Anarchist traditions include: mutualism, collectivism, internationalism, anarcho-communism, anarcho-syndicalism, social or class struggle anarchism, libertarian socialism, green or deep anarchism, anarcho-feminism, anarchism without adjectives, anarcho-indigenism, queer anarchism, post-anarchism, individualist anarchism, lifestyle anarchism, insurrectionary anarchism and primitivism (the last three are often contested by other anarchist perspectives). Anarchism shares an affinity with left-wing Marxism, autonomous Marxism, council communism, and a variety of socialist traditions.

<sup>4</sup> The exception is Eugene Plawiuk who identifies as an individualist anarchist.

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## Appendix

<b>Table 1: Rusty's Rules of Order</b>	
I.	Opening and Calling of Meeting to Order
II.	Good Standing Report
III.	Election of Chair and Recording Secretary
IV.	Approval of Agenda
V.	Reading of Application for Membership
VI.	Reading of Minutes
VII.	Monthly Report of Financial Secretary
VIII.	Reports of Delegates and Officers
IX.	Unfinished Business
X.	New Business
XI.	Nominations, Elections, and Installations
XII.	Adjournment
Edmonton IWW Membership Handbook, n.d.b, p.9	

<b>Table 2: Thoughtcrime Ink donations in 2008</b>	
Victoria Anarchist Bookfair - \$150	
Calgary Anarchist Bookfair - \$200	
Edmonton Anarchist Bookfair - \$200	
Saskatoon Anarchist Bookfair - \$200	
Winnipeg Anarchist Bookfair - \$200	
Hamilton Anarchist Bookfair - \$200	
Travel fees for Ward Churchill - \$400	
Buttons and literature to sell at door of Edmonton Bookfair ~\$400	
IWW Solidarity Fund ~\$200	
Anarchist Collective in Oaxaca, Mexico - \$500	
Buttons and supplies to the Edmonton Anarchist Black Cross	
Literature to the Calgary Anarchist Black Cross	
Thoughtcrime Ink, 2008, para. 1	