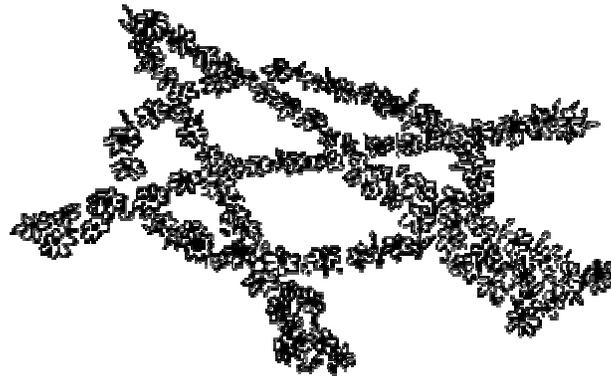


Symbols of Resistance:

A Study of Anarchist Space and Identity in Philadelphia



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Abstract

During the period from January 20th to May 3rd I conducted participant observation research at two different locations in Philadelphia – the Wooden Shoe bookstore and the A-Space. All three of these places are run by volunteers from the anarchist community based in West Philadelphia. I explored the ways in which these various spaces function within their surroundings – how they serve the community as well as how they are used by the anarchist movement responsible for their upkeep. Additionally, I addressed the topic of individual versus collective identity within the anarchist community and the ways in which this plays out in the creation and maintenance of a movement dedicated to socio-cultural transformation. This study of radical space in Philadelphia – its meaning and function within the community setting – explored the ways in which such locations have the potential to act as catalysts for social change. These places, although securely grounded within the present community situation (through sponsoring outreach and community development programs) nonetheless serve a utopian function – that of social criticism and inspiration for positive social change. Without such spaces of resistance working to maintain utopian ideals within our society the will for political change would be subsumed by stagnant complacency. Resistance movements and how they manifest themselves within physical space therefore deserve attention from both the academic and public spheres if we as a society are to continue to grow and evolve.

Introduction

The anarchist movement in West Philadelphia has been thriving since the 1970's, establishing collective housing (the Life Center Association), a bookstore (the Wooden Shoe) and several community centers from which various outreach projects operate. Today there are over 200 people involved in the anarchist movement, but those operating the bookstore and community centers make up the tight-knit core of community. Unlike anarchist groups in other cities, which are often seen merely as cultural oddities, the movement in Philadelphia has been a vital force in the activist world for several decades. I was interested in exploring the ways in which active members of the anarchist "scene" perceive the movement (i.e. how it has changed since it's resurgence in the seventies, and where they see it headed). I wondered how a movement that appeared to be made up of autonomous groups of three or four people maintained a sense of common identity and cohesiveness, and how the ideals of anarchism, such as rejection of property and authority, were reconciled with certain essential aspects of creating a successful social movement. It soon became apparent, in agreement with Harris' line of reasoning (1999), that the infrastructure (the physical foundation of the movement) played a key role in sustaining and expanding radical ideas in Philadelphia as well as maintaining a common sense of anarchist identity within the community. Exactly how this played out became a central question in my research.

In researching the uses and meanings of various anarchist-owned spaces throughout the city I tried to reach an understanding of how they are used by both the self-proclaimed anarchists who operate them and by the surrounding community. How do these places act as political catalysts for revolutionary change and how, exactly, do they

serve those who may not necessarily call themselves anarchists? Questions regarding the self-given definition of “anarchist” by those who operate from within these various spaces (i.e. “what is an anarchist?” and “how is one defined as a member of the anarchist community?”) were also addressed. I investigated the role of anarchist locations in educating the community concerning revolutionary ideas as well as their more practical endeavors such as Books Through Bars and Food Not Bombs. (Respectively these organizations collect and deliver used books to prisoners upon request and provide free groceries to those in need). How are these two functions of the movement - information resource and community development - complimentary? How do the spaces that serve as both meeting places for those already involved, and as community outreach centers, serve to legitimate and/or complicate the anarchist presence in Philadelphia? In sum, the use of social space and how it functions as both a physical and social symbolic manifestation of resistance and discontent was of primary interest in this investigation of the dissemination of anarchist ideas and ideals within a framework of social and symbolic interpretation.

Methodology

Participant observation is the basis of anthropological inquiry, and as such it was the primary method used in my study of radical spaces in Philadelphia. While carrying out my fieldwork I spent many hours at the Wooden Shoe bookstore talking with volunteers and customers as part of an attempt to understand both the store’s role in the anarchist community and in Philadelphia at large. I also visited the A-Space upon several occasions. However, as it is not open to the public, but serves only as a meeting place for scheduled events, my time there was limited to participation in two community meetings

and an afternoon volunteering for the anarchist project Books Through Bars (discussed later).

As laid out in Powdermaker's book, Stranger and Friend (1966), participant observation puts the researcher in close proximity to his/her sources of data, and is "natural" in that it permits the researcher to interact with the people at the site on an informal, human level. I was able to assimilate relatively easily and fit in with my surroundings as a "quasi" member of the community. The opportunity for gathering different kinds of data arises from participant observation, as the researcher is able to interact with different members of the community and observe potential discrepancies between what one person might say and do. When quantitative data is difficult to obtain (as is the case in small communities) participant observation serves as a meaningful and useful form of data gathering. It provides data on daily life and interactions, peoples' differing interpretations and evaluations of events, how the outside world is viewed within the community as well as how they work to shape their environment to fit their beliefs and ideals. Participant observation combined with informal interviews provided me with a wealth of information concerning the everyday aspects of life within the anarchist community. Additionally, participant observation allowed me to be exposed to situations and possibilities not thought of before entering the field. Such flexibility is essential to producing meaningful, multi-layered social research, where the researcher is able to remain open to unexpected or contradictory information as well as that which may have been anticipated prior to entering the field.

The informal interview, as a vital subset of participant observation, was of primary importance in my research on radical spaces in Philadelphia and their relation to

anarchist identity-building. It provides the researcher with a means for organizing and verifying his/her findings in the field, and serves as the most successful method for gathering rich qualitative accounts of the experiences of an “insider.” I conducted several interviews with six active members of the anarchist community followed by more specific follow-up questions in order to clarify or verify previous findings. I gained contact with my first respondent through the Wooden Shoe bookstore. A staff member referred her to me once I had described my project, and the network of subsequent respondents followed easily from there. While I entered the field with specific questions I wished to address (issues of self-identification, goals of the movement and the various perceived roles of the Wooden Shoe and the A-Space), the most valuable information was often found in respondents’ tangents to my original inquiries. Thus the value of the ethnographic interview; generally informal and encouraging of such dialogue. Pseudonyms were used in all cases.

Blee and Taylor (2002) point out the importance of semi-structured interviews in social movement research, noting that it is an indispensable means for gathering data regarding “the motives of people who participate in protest and the activities of social movement networks and organizations” (Pg. 92). They go on to state that “semi-structured interviews provide greater depth of information, the opportunity to discover the respondent’s experience and interpretation of reality, and access to people’s ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher” (2002: 93). From interviews the researcher is able to gain not only a sense of meaning from the perspective of the respondent, but themes and categories of analysis around which one is then able to organize one’s work. In the discussion and analysis of my

findings I attempted to limit my own voice as much as possible. However, all the data obtained was ultimately filtered through the act of rendering it on paper and hence the end product is unavoidably the result of my interaction with and understanding of the experiences of others. While interviews do add human agency to ethnographic research, enriching one's data qualitatively, this is at the expense of quantitative data such as surveys. I did not use any surveys. My findings rely entirely upon participant observation and interviews. While the position of the researcher as an outsider is often seen as uncomfortable if not at times problematic, it is precisely this position that allowed me to access certain information that may have otherwise been taken for granted by "insider" community members. And it is often these taken-for-granted assumptions that ultimately offer the most valuable insights into community structure and identity.

While there are many people in Philadelphia who may call themselves anarchists I limited my study to those who are directly involved with either the Life Center Association (a land trust of which the A-Space is a part) or the Wooden Shoe bookstore. This allowed me to readily define a specific set of people as opposed to struggling with the often varied and complex group definitions and boundaries that tend to make up western societies. When referring to the "anarchist community" I am merely referring to this set of people as described by my informants. My interviews focused beyond the goal of their motivation and values to an effort to understand both large and small-scale cultural change as it is reflected in the beliefs and activities of the anarchist community. The purpose was to create a picture of an historical movement rather than a static portrayal of a group of people. As the objective of the community is revolutionary social

and cultural change it is critical that this be reflected in any analysis of their daily activity.

Relevant Literature

The information I gathered through interviews and participant observation was then placed against relevant academic literature in an attempt to contextualize both my experiences as an observer and those of the people I interviewed. A brief overview of social movement theory provided a theoretical context from which I was able to begin my initial inquiry, and background literature on anarchy and utopian thought helped set a framework within which current anarchist movements can be examined and understood.

The principal tenet of anarchy, that which separates it from other “utopian” social ideals such as socialism or communism, is total autonomy and the decentralization of power. Voluntary participation rather than coercion is emphasized as the basis for this radical form of democracy and contempt for hierarchical social constructions provides anarchy with “a bold response to the problem of alienation” that is so often used to characterize modern society (Bronner: 1999). Social change must first occur within the individual, it cannot be forced or commanded. As Eugene Debs, a leader of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) stated, “I don’t want you to follow me or anyone else. If you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of the capitalist wilderness you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into this Promised Land if I could, because if I could lead you in, someone else would lead you out” (Bronner: 1999: 78). While these are the basic principals of the anarchist vision, there remains the distinction between “political anarchy” and “social anarchy.” Bakunin is perhaps the most well known theorist of

political anarchy. He emphasizes the need for an absolute reconfiguration of the political and economic systems of capitalism, favoring, instead, a totally decentralized communal strategy for living and working (Dolgoft: 1971). Social anarchy (that which is manifested in the Philadelphia community), on the other hand, is more concerned with the transformation of beliefs and morals that will later manifest themselves in practice (Yack: 1986). This is arguably a prerequisite for the realization of political anarchy (if it is to be non-coercive). The unifying theme for both forms of anarchy is the belief that freedom is more than an abstract concept, but is in fact a “vital concrete possibility for every human being” (Chomsky: 1970).

Utopian thought, as the underlying element of anarchism, serves primarily as a somewhat removed inspiration for social transformation. As it arises from discrepancies between the desires of the people and the means for satisfaction available to them (Levitas: 1990), utopia sustains the vision of and desire for a better world. According to Levitas utopia need not be seen as realistically achievable (merely theoretically coherent) in order for its transformative potential to be realized within society. This allows for a certain degree of creativity in exploring the means to social change and leaves the individual with the responsibility of employing this concept to that end. The primary function of utopia, then, is not that of direct agent of change, but that of social critic. The role of utopia within the anarchist community underscores Levitas’ assertion in that although it is not directly expressed as the end goal, the concept of utopia serves as the driving force behind much of the activity that takes place within the movement. It is the inspiration for rather than the ultimate goal of social change.

Lastly, social movement theory provides some insight into how the anarchist community, as a socio-cultural movement, both illustrates and challenges the dominant trends within that field of study. Resource Mobilization Theory as well as New Social Movement Theory (as described by Kelly, 2001) provide frames of reference from which the political and cultural aspects of social movements can be explored. An emphasis was placed on the works of McAdam (1997), Epstein (1991) and Melucci (1997) as they examine the cultural aspects of social movements (often been ignored by other social movement scholars), in recognition of the fact that culture plays a central role in the success of all social movements. The process of radicalization within the anarchist community is often the result of a culturally embedded experience, and as such it is these aspects of the movement that deserve our attention.

The purpose for studying a radical community in Philadelphia lies in the fact that resistance is something that is intangible, yet there exist several physical manifestations that serve as symbols of this resistance. It is important and useful to examine how these spaces operate within their communities and how those operating them and those utilizing them understand the role of such places in educating the public and challenging the dominant system of knowledge. I hope to be able to elucidate, in the following chapters, both the function and symbolic meaning of these spaces and how they compliment (and/or contradict) certain beliefs and ideals of anarchy. While anarchist principals assert that the individual must choose liberation, that it cannot be commanded, the role of the A-Space and the Wooden Shoe are that of community outreach and education. How does this fit with the ideal emphasis on individual growth independent

from any outside force? Is the community outreach aspect of these centers entirely separate from their anarchist agenda, and if so, does the anarchist community feel a certain responsibility towards non-“members”? How do anarchist ideals play themselves out in interaction with the surrounding community and how do the various anarchist settings function as both a base for anarchist identity in Philadelphia and as community-oriented public spaces? The transformative potential of these locations as catalysts for socio-cultural change is evident, and an exploration of their roles within the community setting provides useful ethnographic information regarding community development in response to utopian ideals.

The following chapters begin with a general background of the movement in Philadelphia while highlighting one individual (Voltaine de Cleyre) who is today regarded as an example of the ideal of anarchism in Philadelphia. An historical background of the A-Space and the Wooden Shoe, gathered from numerous oral histories provided by my informants, is also included in this chapter. The following chapters deal with issues raised as a result of my interviews and observations in an attempt to answer the questions posed above. Throughout this thesis I place my findings within a larger theoretical context, relating ideas concerning function, symbolic interpretation, identity and social change within a particular kind of social movement. This study is by no means comprehensive as I had only six key informants with whom I regularly interacted. My information, although preliminary and limited, nevertheless provides useful insight into the function and meaning of the movement and its infrastructure as seen through the assessments provided by my respondents. And although these varied, some trends among

my informants became apparent throughout the interview process. A more extensive follow-up survey would prove especially interesting in that regard. Finally, a concluding chapter addresses the “success” of the movement as well as its future as it is perceived by those involved. My thesis closes with some suggestions for further study that arose from my fieldwork experiences in the anarchist community.

1 *Histories of People and Places*

Anarchism in Philadelphia

Philadelphia has a long tradition of progressive political and social movements, and the anarchist movement is no exception. According to local historian Bob Helms (personal interview: 2003) it began in the 1880s and was primarily composed of European (Jewish and Italian) immigrants until well into the twentieth century. Many of these pioneering anarchists practiced a specifically American strain of anarchism – “individualist anarchism” – holding the belief that each person is responsible only for him/herself and that no one has the right, regardless of the situation, to interfere in the lives of others. They advocated worker’s rights, free love, a secular society, and above all a world without government. Due to the rising fear of communism and the popular love for and belief in the capitalist system (then at its peak), the late 1920s saw a decline (or at least a move underground) in the burgeoning anarchist community. And from the 1930s until the late 1960s (when radical sentiments were revived through the emergence of civil rights and pacifist movements) any visible anarchist movement in Philadelphia was very thinly dispersed. Nonetheless, anarchism was always well represented in the arts and in writing traditions if not in political activism. It was during this time of governmental suppression that anarchism in America, and Philadelphia in particular, developed a sound intellectual and theoretical basis.

Anarchism, like any other social/political ideology, has always been composed of several often antagonistic factions. Mutualist anarchism, for example, espoused the idea that through mutual cooperation and aid one could thrive without the tyranny of any form of government dictating their actions. Living and working to support oneself through a network of mutual respect and collaboration would ultimately produce a functioning and truly liberated society. Communist or collectivist anarchism, on the other hand, recognized the initial need for some form of governmental authority, but saw this as only a temporary necessity that would naturally disappear over time, leaving the decision-making power in the hands of every working person. Individualist anarchism, especially popular in the United States, rejected notions of collective decision-making or forced mutual collaboration. Each person should be solely responsible for all aspects of his/her life and live accordingly. Currently these adjectives are of lesser importance as the recognition of common ground and the need for a somewhat solidified sense of identity has risen to the foreground of the anarchist community. Today anarchists in Philadelphia call themselves “anarchists without adjectives,” a phrase first used to describe Voltairine de Cleyre, a prominent Philadelphia anarchist and feminist of the early 20th century.

A Philadelphia Anarchist

Voltairine de Cleyre was born in 1866 to a poor family living in a small village in Michigan. At the age of 19, after escaping from the convent in which her father had placed her, de Cleyre began her career as a dedicated activist, public speaker, voluminous writer and propagandist for the anarchist cause (Presley: 1997). Her biographer, Paul Avrich, notes that the only reason she is less well known today than her friends and

colleagues Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman is due to the fact that she died prematurely in 1912. He describes her as “a brief comet in the anarchist firmament” (Avrich: 1978), and Marcus Graham, editor of *Man!* once stated that she was “the most intellectual woman I ever met” (Presley: 1997). Her rigorous ideology carried over into the way in which she lived her life - in poverty and refusing marriage as she saw it as merely a socially sanctioned form of slavery (Presley: 1997). Two of her most well known works, “The Dominant Idea” and “Anarchism and American Traditions,” represent both her contempt for the capitalist system in America and her unyielding belief that American society, in its current state of materialism, will require more than merely a “moral or intellectual stirring” to throw off what she saw as an oppressive economic system. Her only hope lay in what she called the “blind development” of economic and political oppression itself (De Cleyre: 2001).

“The Dominant Idea” traces what de Cleyre believed to be the ruling values and worldviews of different societies throughout history, ending with the statement that current American society is dominated by “Thing-Worship” (De Cleyre: 2001). She goes on to criticize those progressives who “foreread the gospel of Circumstance to mean that very soon the pressure of material development must break down the social system” (Pg. 193), maintaining that only an active pursuit of social change rather than a passive belief in its inevitability is truly progressive. She sees Circumstance as merely an excuse for those unwilling to sacrifice their comfort in the name of progress, and she condemns this as a product of the materialistic “dominant idea” of western society. Circumstance is blamed when people become too comfortable in their material possessions. Even those who were once in favor of progressive social transformation soon become “swallowed up

in the Dominant Social Idea” (pg. 193) and are hence unwilling to proactively devote their efforts towards anything that might challenge such a lifestyle.

In “Anarchism and American Traditions” she extends this point with the theory that anarchism is only one step further than the original ideals of America’s early pioneers. De Cleyre states,

“The real Revolution was a change in political institutions which should make of government not a thing apart, a superior power to stand over the people with a whip, but a serviceable agent, responsible, economical, and trustworthy (but never so much trusted as not to be continually watched)... They thus took their starting point for deriving a minimum of government upon the same sociological ground that the modern Anarchist derives the no-government theory; viz., that equal liberty is the political ideal” (1932: 4).

De Cleyre ends by saying that the only difference between the American traditions of liberty and equality and those espoused by anarchists lies in that fact that Americans were willing to accept government as “a necessary evil.” Anarchists, on the other hand, saw government as a highly oppressive institution, ever in the process of warping and destroying true American tradition. “Let the guarantee of free speech,” she writes, “be in every man’s determination to use it, and we shall have no need of paper declarations” (pg. 11). While de Cleyre was fervent in her belief in anarchism as the only true means to liberty and equality, she nonetheless noted that the majority of mankind “prefer material possessions to liberty.” Not until people “waken to the consciousness that things are to be used, and therefore men are greater than things” (pg. 12) will the “spirit of liberty” emerge in western, capitalist society.

Voltaire de Cleyre remains a strong influence for the current anarchist movement in Philadelphia. She spent most of her life in the city and one can find numerous books at the Wooden Shoe concerning her life and work. Radio Volta, a

progressive Philadelphia-based Internet radio station with an anarchist bent, is named after de Cleyre, and the A-Space, an anarchist community center in West Philadelphia, sponsored a lecture series of 40 events (including lectures by historians and activists who focused on anarchist issues) dedicated to the Philadelphia atheist, feminist, anarchist. Her self-proclaimed title as an “anarchist without adjectives” is manifested in today’s anarchist community as well as her achieved balance of intellectual theory and political activism.

Anarchist Places: The Wooden Shoe

The Wooden Shoe bookstore was founded in 1976 by Philadelphia Solidarity, a group of communists from the wobbly branch. The store derived its name from the Industrial Revolution when overworked French factory workers would jam their wooden clogs in the machines to slow them down. The Wooden Shoe was originally a labor movement bookstore, but most of the revenues were a result of record sales, and by the mid 1980s, when the punk scene hit Philadelphia the communist network had nearly vanished. Those still running the bookstore decided to hand it over to the newer generation of progressives in the city – the anarchists. This collectively operated project soon became primarily dedicated to disseminating anarchist and other radical literature as well as pins, T-shirts, records, posters, and free radical newspapers and magazines. It soon outgrew its tiny basement location on 20th and Sansom and endless discussions concerned with finding a new space to rent took place over the next 10 years. When, in February of 1997, the Wooden Shoe burned down due to faulty electrical wiring, the

insurance money as well as donations from the community allowed the collective to begin renting out its current location on South Fifth Street.

Today the Wooden Shoe has a volunteer pool of over 50 people, and all the sales go directly back into paying the rent and expanding and improving the collection. The only paid employee is the store's bookkeeper. As well as serving as a resource and clearinghouse for the anarchist community (with a large bulletin board on the back wall for flyers and announcements), the Wooden Shoe, according to one of its members, is a valuable resource for the city in general, providing alternative literature not normally available in most "capitalist establishments." It is perhaps the most accessible of the anarchist establishments, permitting and encouraging the collective that runs it to interact with people who may not be familiar with anarchism or the activist work that takes place throughout Philadelphia. The store acts as a kind of recruiting center for the movement, where workers readily engage their customers in discussion, and suggest additional reading to the regulars. Because it is a public enterprise just off South Street business has picked up both economically and politically. Not only is the store becoming "strangely profitable" (in the words of one of the staff members), but it has played a substantial role in making the anarchist voice louder and more prominent throughout Philadelphia. Although the bookstore is a true business in the tradition of capitalism, selling goods to the community at a profit, this is justified by the fact that the store also serves as a kind of anarchist outreach project. It works to disseminate "alternative" literature to the public, and in doing so to make the anarchist presence known as an ever-growing, legitimate entity within the city of Philadelphia.

Anarchist Places: The A-Space

The current site of the A-space, like the Wooden Shoe, was once a center for Marxism in Philadelphia before the dawn of the recent radical anarchist movement. In 1991 the Marxist School disintegrated. As one informant remarks, “Marxism crumbled around the world including West Philadelphia,” so the group donated the building to the Life Center Association, a land trust begun in the 1960s dedicated to providing affordable housing for radicals and activists in the Philadelphia area. Today the Association owns the A-space, a food co-op a few doors down and an ever increasing number of collective houses in West Philadelphia (all either squatted and then purchased from the city or bought at Sheriff’s auction for minimal amounts of money). Members of these collectives pay around 200 dollars a month each for the maintenance of these spaces.

The A-space was established in response to the increasing need for a larger meeting place as the anarchist community had previously been having organizational and planning meetings in the living rooms of various members. The movement was growing rapidly, and in an attempt to make it more accessible to interested activists the anarchist community opened the A-space to serve the purpose that living rooms had once served. The initial agenda was to create a center that would be open to the public on a regular basis, providing coffee, offering art exhibitions, musical performances, film showings and lectures, and although these things do take place there today, the A-space does not have a regular schedule of operation. It’s primary function is that of meeting space, center of operations for several volunteer projects, and clearinghouse for the anarchist community, with a loaded bulletin board (similar to the Wooden Shoe) announcing upcoming events and offering various services etc. The collective rents the space out to

other groups on the condition that materials endorsing any kind of political party will not be distributed. As one informant noted,

“...There’s no fixed obsession on anarchy, but there is one rule: No political party can meet there. You can easily forget and then people with money in their pocket can come along who want to have a meeting. If you don’t remember what you are there for then you are going to really forget, and then the faces change of who controls the A-space. So if you don’t keep strict with a circle A on the front...”

Although public accessibility of the A-space is limited, it nevertheless serves the surrounding community through a number of volunteer projects for which the center acts as a base. Food Not Bombs now has several chapters throughout the city, but the original point of operation was the A-space. Every week a group of anarchists would come to the center to package groceries they had received from various participating stores. These would then be distributed to anyone in the community who might need a little extra assistance. Books Through Bars also has its base at the A-space. This is an organization that collects used books from individuals, schools etc. to send to prisoners who request them. The project has grown exponentially over the years and the back room of the A-space is now piled high with boxes of books waiting to be sorted, packaged and shipped all over the country. A group of volunteers meets every Saturday to sort through the many letters the organization receives and to answer the requests as soon as possible. The members involved with this effort are also branching beyond the mere provision of books to prisoners to public education and awareness regarding incarceration and the prison system. In a neighborhood so wrought with these issues it seems to be a particularly pertinent agenda towards gaining meaningful community relations. The A-space stands as both a pillar of the anarchist community and as a key presence within its larger social surroundings. It achieves the balance between a specifically anarchist resource and an

active participant in serving the needs of others through activism and outreach programs such as Food Not Bombs and Books Through Bars.

The Anarchist Movement: Its Future in Philadelphia

The success of both the Wooden Shoe and the A-Space have spawned efforts to create yet another community center in West Philadelphia dedicated to the cause of progress and liberation by means of anarchist ideals. As increasing numbers of activists move into Philadelphia to take advantage of the solid anarchist infrastructure and network system the need for continued growth in that area is made apparent. One of the people with whom I spoke is currently working on opening up a center on Lancaster Avenue that will serve much the same purpose as the A-space, but he anticipates taking it a step further. The anarchist newspaper “The Defenestrator” (edited by the aforementioned informant) will have its publication headquarters in this space, and with the installation of video and computer equipment this new center will have capabilities extending beyond those of the A-space. This fast-paced growth of the anarchist community in Philadelphia and the ever-developing infrastructure associated with it is not anticipated to wane anytime soon. According to all of my informants, ever since the WTO and IMF demonstrations, the movement has been expanding throughout the country, especially in Philadelphia.

The community has played an active role in current anti-war demonstrations as well as other more permanent projects such as the aids activist organization ACT UP. The existence of such places as the Wooden Shoe and the A-space ensure that the anarchist presence will persist throughout the city while at the same time allowing these

activists to dedicate their efforts to other projects. Because anarchism is not the only (and often not even the primary) agenda for many members of the community, the movement has retained a sense of creativity and evolution that prevents it from growing stagnant in its potentially dogmatic anarchist ideals. Many of the people with whom I spoke pointed to this as the reason for the demise of the Marxist movement in Philadelphia. Activist participation, for many of my informants, takes precedence over strictly adhering to the basic tenets of anarchism. But it is the already existing infrastructure that allows for this progressive attitude. The anarchist base already exists. All that is left to do is to expand upon it through branching out to other corners of society. The popular view of the anarchist movement as isolated and exclusive (as espoused by various newspaper articles) is somewhat misguided. Their presence in the city is growing and their participation in volunteer and activist projects is extensive precisely because they have the luxury of not having to start from scratch. The inexpensive collective housing frees up time (otherwise spent at work in order to pay rent) for such activity, and the Wooden Shoe and the A-space act as resource and outreach center respectively, providing a steady foundation from which the anarchist community is able to effectively spread their radical ideas and actions.

2 *Anarchist Identity Localized in Place*

Beginning Fieldwork

Wooden Shoe books, located just off of South Street, does a thriving business, catering to punks and University students alike and generally adding to the “alternative” atmosphere of this youth-populated area. A sign in the window boasts “hard to find books,” but it is hidden among the countless other flyers and announcements that cover the glass. The large wooden sign above the door is hand-made and painted, but the paint is fading and chipping off. The door creaks as I enter and a woman behind the counter to my right asks me to leave my bag with her. The wooden floors are clean but well worn and the store smells slightly of dust. The woman behind the counter is talking to a pierced, bearded man about how Philadelphia activists aren’t “active enough,” but the conversation soon switches to punk music. She asks if she can help me find anything and points me towards the magazine rack on my left.

The center of the store holds a long table covered with recent additions to the collection including *Fast Food Nation* and *A People’s History of the United States*. A bookcase at the end of the center table houses several videos as well as tapes and CDs. The magazine rack is piled high with anarchist publications and various other free Zines (independently published “manifestos,” poetry etc.) put together by radical groups and individuals. “Guinea Pig Zero,” a Zine compiled by a man who was later to become one of my informants, is intended as a resource for people participating in drug studies

(something I was later to learn many anarchists do for a living). It rates facilities all over the country according to cleanliness, respectfulness of staff and pay. (The publisher is now facing several lawsuits after *Harper's* magazine printed portions of the Zine). The rest of the collection varies from everything Noam Chomsky, Emma Goldman and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon ever wrote on the one hand to self help books concerning pregnancy and abortion, gay erotica and the infamous *Anarchist Cookbook* (detailing the construction of necessary weapons should armed struggle arise) on the other hand. In the back corner there is a T-shirt rack and another table of free radical publications. A bulletin board above the table is littered with announcements and flyers for upcoming lectures, concerts, actions, and meetings. Upon arriving at the counter I notice the rack of pins and bumper stickers. "THE MEDIA ARE ONLY AS LIBERAL AS THE CONSERVATIVE BUSINESSES THAT OWN THEM" reads one. Another, "NATION OF SHEEP. RULED BY WOLVES. OWNED BY PIGS."

When the Wooden Shoe burned down in 1997 the impact on the anarchist community was greatly felt. When delays arose around finding a new place to set up shop one of my informants stated that "this was a real morale killer. The longer the store stayed closed the less hopeful people became. The community just wasn't the same without the Shoe." Without a central location where one could come and get plugged into what was happening in the activist world, or just to hang out and chat, the already diffuse anarchist movement lost a sense of connection and meaning within the larger community network.

While the Wooden Shoe has always enjoyed much success and appreciation, the A-space, according to one of my informants, has gone through periods of neglect.

Although it, like the Wooden Shoe, is run by a collective, its role within the community tends to be less readily definable, and because it has no regular operating hours it becomes easy to assume that “someone else” will take responsibility for whatever needs to be done. Today the walls are a relatively freshly painted light green, and the floors, though in need of waxing, are not in bad repair. Tables and chairs line the outskirts and the back wall contains a bookcase holding a radio and several books as well as poster and banner-making materials. There are several posters on the walls urgently declaring the need for anarchy, and a blue-painted Circle A marks the front door. However, the center could not always boast even this minimal amount of organization and upkeep.

“Whenever something is owned and run collectively” says one informant, “you run the risk of having certain things that never get done” (personal interview). The A-Space collective, according to him, had been neglecting a number of upkeep issues, and so he, who at the time lived above the anarchist community center, took up the responsibility of repainting the interior, refinishing the floor, and commissioning a sign to be made for the door. But he soon realized that he could not continue to do this job alone. Too much needed to be done, and he simply did not have the time or the resources to do them without support from the rest of the community. He stopped work on the A-Space, and it slowly degenerated to what it had been before he decided to take matters into his own hands.

Place and Identity

A while ago, when I was at the Wooden Shoe, I noticed a flyer on the bulletin board suggesting that the A-Space would have to be closed if these issues of neglect were

not resolved. It urged members of the anarchist community throughout Philadelphia to come and show their support for the center in order to ensure that it remained open as a resource for them and others. The tone of the flyer was urgent, printed in large letters on bright yellow paper as if the potential closing of the A-Space signified the beginning of the end for anarchy in Philadelphia, thus confirming to me the importance of place in the process of identity formation.

I arrived in front of the A-Space at the designated time to join a mass of people dressed in various shades of black with various piercings and various non-traditional hairstyles. Everyone was talking animatedly while waiting for the person with the key to arrive and let them all in. Once everyone was finally gathered inside there were no empty seats and barely even enough room to stand. All it took was a few looks around the room to realize how important this center was for sustaining social solidarity within the anarchist community. A more obvious impression could not have been made. The threat of its closing had produced the largest turnout in the history of the A-space. The A-space remained open, the walls and floors are now maintained by more than just one frustrated member of the collective, and the center continues to enjoy an active role as both a meeting place for the anarchist movement and an outreach center for the community at large.

Two key incidents, the temporary absence of the Wooden Shoe after it burned down, and the threatened closing of the A-space, illustrate the symbolic and functional importance of these places in maintaining a sense of identity and cohesion within the anarchist community. Due to the decentralized nature of anarchist movements, where personal identity is individually rather than collectively defined, it is crucial that some

physical place serve to create and sustain a sense of social solidarity if the movement is to successfully endure over time. Not only do these two places provide the community with internal referents of identification, serving as cultural and informational centers for radicals, but these spaces, externally, are also public symbols of the anarchist struggle and radical ideals. It became increasingly apparent throughout my fieldwork that these places were deeply bound to the social production of anarchist identity both for the community itself and for the observing public. Their role as foundational symbols of resistance serve both to remind the somewhat spatially disjointed anarchist community of the basic ideals that unite them as a group and to announce to the public at large the presence of the movement.

Theoretical Reflection

The experience of space as socially constructed has been taken as an anthropological fact since the time of Durkheim in the early twentieth century (Gupta and Ferguson: 1997). The new question then is how do these spatial meanings become established in various social circumstances? The Wooden Shoe and the A-space are sites of resistance, and as such define themselves in opposition to and yet independent from the dominant power structure of mainstream society. Anarchist counterculture takes place at these locations as, in the words of Ruddick, “a by-product of acts of resistance” (1998: 345). The culture of the movement was formed through the creation of these places and their consequent function as symbols of anarchist ideals. Just as the radical community actively sought to create their own space within the city of Philadelphia, the rest of society is complicit in this act through the recognition that they are indeed “radical

places.” Anarchist identity is intimately tied to these sites. While many theorists have treated “place” as a mere stage upon which identity is performed, Moore believes that “cultural politics of place [are joined] to those of identity” (1997: 88). The production of these places as “anarchist” and the identifying label of “anarchist” are interdependent. The community’s culture of resistance was formed in and through the Wooden Shoe and the A-space as symbols of anarchist identity, and as the material existence of these symbols once served to create that identity they now serve to maintain it. As one informant stated,

“I think that the major reason why the movement hold together is because it has such a strong infrastructure as compared to other cities. In visiting cities that don’t have infrastructure – they have the same kernels that we had, but without the physical spaces that we now have.”

Solidarity within the anarchist movement, and the sense of a common objective, could not exist without these physical and symbolic foundations of cultural opposition.

Resistance acts in response to the dominant power structure. It takes place in specific “geographies,” both public and private, and creates its own space within the existing social system. Although resistance is a reaction to domination, it may, according to Pile (1997), have its own spatialities independent of domination. Power relations are “incomplete, fluid, liable to rupture, inconsistent, awkward and ambiguous” (Pg. 14), thus allowing for a dislocation of resistance from domination. It seeks to create new meanings out of those imposed upon it and moves across and under the “topographies of domination” (Pg. 16). The discontinuous spaces produced by power relations allow for resistance to move between and around the structures of domination, and in so doing define itself according to its own plan rather than as a response to domination. Resistance

movements, according to Castells (Pile: 1997), are either geographical or spatial in nature. Geographical movements are grounded in a physical, bounded community whereas spatial movements find their roots in abstract notions of community such as “class” (Pile: 1997). The spaces of resistance, whether physical or abstract, can, due to the discontinuities produced by “awkward” power relations, be defined as in opposition to, yet also independent from, the dominant systems of knowledge they seek to challenge. In this sense the anarchist community falls somewhere in between a “geographical” and a “spatial” movement. While there are certain physical locations that define the movement both internally and externally, there also exists, as described by my informants, a kind of abstract, uniting notion of “radicalism” and “activism” that transcends the physical boundedness of these specific places.

Ruddick notes that feminist scholars were the first to recognize the role of space as one offering the potential for marginality to be “affirmed and celebrated” (1998: 344). Similarly, the Wooden Shoe and the A-space, as particularly anarchist places, can be seen as marginal in the sense that they challenge mainstream culture, but their self-contained independence from the mainstream allows the community to define itself without reference to anything external. Among the collective housing, the co-op, the Wooden Shoe and the A-space all the community’s cultural, economic and social needs are provided for. One could theoretically exist in this social system without ever having to interact with “reality.” In this sense they are able to transcend, through these places of resistance, their stereotype as marginal and countercultural due to the fact that they are able to live, and hence define themselves, without reference to the dominant social system. They were able to effectively create new meanings out of those that may have

been imposed on them by the mainstream cultural economy and thus freed themselves from any potentially constraining assumptions. Through these physical loci of the movement the community created an identity that was entirely independent and self-sustaining, but this was seen as a problem by all of my informants. As Massey (1998) states, one “must conceptualize space in terms of a complexity of interacting social relations.”

Autonomy and Separateness

While the separateness of these anarchist establishments does allow for some degree of transcendence (from stereotypes etc.) for the anarchist community it is this exclusive nature that, for my informants, poses a threat to the success of the movement. Tom stated, regarding the beginnings of the A-space, “one of the problems at first was that it really became like a living room for the anarchist community. People would walk in off the street who had heard there was a little café there and people would look at them like, ‘who are you?’” This, for Tom, was antithetical to the purpose of the movement and the center. In order for anything fruitful to come of the efforts of anarchist activists, their spaces, as fundamental symbols of what the movement is all about, must be accessible to the public. The community must recognize the importance of social relations and networks outside of the immediate community if the movement is to grow and evolve. It is this interaction, rather than the static safety that comes from their exclusivity, that must ultimately define the movement and its establishments. If cultural transformation is the goal, interaction with that culture is essential, and this entails a kind of openness that, for my informants, was lacking within the current anarchist community.

Turning Anarchist Values into Public Knowledge

Davies (1995) notes that the single most important aspect of a place is its “perceived purpose.” When the internally perceived purpose of the Wooden Shoe and the A-space reflect the larger community’s externally perceived purpose of these places the anarchist community will have succeeded in making itself accessible to non-“members,” and the wish to accomplish this was expressed by several of my informants. The Wooden Shoe is an example of an establishment that has succeeded in this regard, while the A-space, due to its less defined role, still remains somewhat symbolically unformed. The Wooden Shoe is a business, and conforms to social standards in that regard, but as its objective is the distribution of alternative, often suppressed literature, it achieves a productive balance through bridging the gap between anarchist counterculture and mainstream society. One informant stated that “it serves as the communication center for the movement, but it is also handy for other people because it is open all sorts of hours, and that is a good thing.” The A-space, however, remains more along the lines of the anarchist “living room,” but through recent lecture series, exhibitions and the previously described volunteer efforts it is nearing its goal as a resource not just for the anarchist community but for anyone interested in alternative ideas. One informant stated, “the A-space is tied in with the neighborhood because when we started there people were just grateful that it wasn’t another boarded up storefront, and now we run several pretty successful outreach projects from the center. It’s really becoming more accessible to just anybody.”

Conclusion

Thus the social role of these anarchist centers is twofold. Primarily they serve to sustain the radical community by providing physical manifestations of its identity as a resistance movement. Furthermore, as symbols they are perceived by the public in such a way as to reinforce that identity in so far as their mission becomes recognized and accepted. As the anarchist community becomes more integrated into their surrounding neighborhood, through volunteer and outreach programs for example, the existence of these places will achieve a certain amount of legitimation. Their potential as catalysts for cultural transformation lies in building a solid, accessible base from which the anarchist community members are able to interact collectively with the public. This solidification of the identity of the anarchist movement, independent from mainstream assumptions but nonetheless in conversation with them, ensures its symbolic and functional vitality as a living, evolving cultural force. This identity lays the foundation for these anarchist spaces to begin their transformative process.

3 *The Individual and the Collective*

Autonomy, Affinity Groups and Anonymity

My first experience at a planning meeting organized to generate ideas for action on the first day of the war in Iraq serves as a telling example of how notions of autonomy and collectivity within the anarchist community play out on a daily basis. The tension that exists between the autonomous individual and collective action creates a productive dynamic that provides room to maneuver within various, sometimes overlapping, realms of social meaning and activity.

I arrived at the A-space at 7:30 in the evening, the designated time for the meeting that one of my informants had suggested I attend. Waiting outside the building, in the freezing night air, was a group of about 20 people, men and women, all under 30, all white, and easily characterized as “punks” and “hippies.” Many were dressed all in black. The others wore ripped jeans and wool sweaters. A few had their hair dreaded, and several had noticeable piercings and / or tattoos. When the key to the A-space was finally located we all entered and set up plastic chairs in a circle. The meeting started immediately. Nick, one of my informants, was obviously in charge of organizing this meeting, and he began by warning everyone there not to explicitly state any of their plans for action in this room if they involved illegal activity. The meeting’s agenda centered on “making the anarchist presence known in Philadelphia during the March 15th protest.”

Everyone present emphasized the need to create an “emergency mentality,” and various ways in which to accomplish this were discussed.

Smaller direct actions to be followed by a larger strike that would “loudly proclaim the anarchist agenda during the protest” were suggested, and volunteer groups were assigned the task of creating banners that would read “CAPITALISM IS WAR.” The possible legal ramifications of these actions were also addressed, and a list containing the names and phone numbers of lawyers who work for radical groups was passed around. Some of the actions discussed included a bike parade to protest oil use, a funeral procession to emphasize the unnecessary deaths caused by war, and the creation of blockades in front of recruitment centers around the city. Finally it was decided that whatever was done needed to be “a joyful resistance showing opposition to the devastation.” Several people expressed frustration concerning the effectiveness of marches, but there was no delusion regarding the group’s ability to actually stop the war. Their only objective, at this point, was simply to do something “reactionary and symbolic to make our presence known and maybe gain some support.” No definite plans were made at this meeting, but everyone left determined to make their voices heard during the March 15th protest.

There are several key elements pertaining to social organization as it relates to activity that can be inferred from this meeting. The first lies in the fact that no definite, collective plan of action was ever defined. Autonomous action was encouraged (especially if the planned action involved breaking the law), and the necessity for ensuring total decentralization in all activity was stressed. If there are no official leaders, and no universal knowledge regarding the range of activities to be undertaken by various

groups within the movement as a whole, it becomes virtually impossible to infiltrate the organization and preemptively shut it down. And because this remains an issue for the anarchist community (ever since the police surveillance of the A-space during the Republican National Convention), all direct action is carried out by “affinity groups.”

The affinity group is a concept that arose during the anarchist revolution of the Spanish Civil War. It is based on the idea that people work best in small groups of close friends and colleagues where trust and dependency are essential features of the relationship. One informant mentioned to me how important her affinity group was during direct action events. “I just know that if I get arrested or anything I will always have a support network. That’s one thing being a part of this community really guarantees – security no matter what.” Affinity groups generally consist of only three or four people, and depending on the action to be carried out the membership may shift. It was described to me that if you wanted to get something done all you had to do was find someone else who felt the same way and do it together. Familiarity (trust), common ideals, and common goals are the formative elements of affinity groups.

Another key feature of actions carried out by members of the anarchist community is that they always remain anonymous. This is partly to protect those involved from legal action or backlash, but more importantly, it reinforces a sense of solidarity within the movement as a whole. Individuals or small groups carry out actions in the name of anarchy, and they remain anonymous so as to maintain a sense of common identity and coherence within the anarchist community. The action is both performed by no one and by everyone. Because no personal “glory” is involved it becomes a collective endeavor. My observations reveal a second important function of anonymity. As Kent

(1995) notes, it serves to promote non-conformity. It allows for a certain amount of creativity in choosing how one approaches a particular issue, and this is an essential component of any successful protest or problem-solving endeavor. It became apparent that within the anarchist community anonymity is valued both for its creative and community-building functions.

The previous three elements of direct action (autonomy, affinity groups and anonymity) and their relation to social organization within the anarchist community clearly illustrate the centrality of the individual. However, the underlying emphasis lies with the abstract idea of the collective. Anything carried out by an individual or affinity group is done to reaffirm solidarity within the greater whole, and to promote a sense of common identity. This explains the emphasis on anonymity and underlines the utility of small affinity groups in maintaining this decentralized, nameless, and essentially leaderless structure. The individuality within the anarchist community is such that rather than working to achieve personal recognition, the individual works to advance the cause of the entire community. While the emphasis on autonomous action appears to be such a central characteristic of the movement, it is merely a precaution against massive preemptive shutdowns by the authorities. Beneath it all it is the ideal of collectivity (common beliefs and goals being carried out in and through common living and working spaces) that defines the social significance of the anarchist movement in Philadelphia.

Consensus and Communal Space

The collective houses in West Philadelphia as well as the new Lancaster community center offer further examples of how the ideals of autonomy and collectivity

compliment one another in the creation of communal space. In the late 1970s the anarchist community inherited the Life Center Association, founded in the 1960s by the Movement for a New Society (a peace activist collective). This land trust now includes seven collective houses in West Philadelphia and is always in the process of expanding through buying properties cheaply at sheriffs' sales. The upkeep of these houses is a mere 200 dollars a month per person and everything from cooking to paying the bills is done collectively. One informant said, "we cook together, we do dishes together, we complain about each others' dirty dishes...we live together like you would expect a family to." The greatest benefit of communal living, as articulated by my informants, is the fact that the low cost of living "creates the easiest lifestyle for all of us to keep going and doing our activism, and having to work the least amount possible for money so we have enough time to devote to things we don't get paid for." The non-hierarchical structure of these communal houses is an essential aspect of the anarchist community. Personal autonomy as well as responsibility is crucial, and the realization of these ideals serves as a unifying factor for the members of these collectives. One informant stated,

"The hope is that everyone in the house, but also people involved in the organization, either already have an understanding or are eager to learn about how to operate in a structure that's not dominated, where people are not 'taking control.'"

The method best suited for maintaining this egalitarian structure within the community and its common spaces is consensus. The Lancaster community center that is currently in the process of opening serves as a comprehensive example of that process. As laid out in the "constitution" (see appendix 1), this is a space designed to be used by both the anarchist community and any person or group willing and able to recognize the

fundamental objectives of the center. It is operated by a core group of people, but anyone can become a member of the collective at any time by regularly showing up to the general meetings. Central decisions such as who will be given a key to the building are made through consensus. This process is also used in the separate, smaller committees that were formed to address issues of scheduling, project planning and upkeep. There also exists a committee responsible for “conflict resolution and anti-oppression training,” that ensures the ideals of the collective are upheld and that all those involved learn to recognize and confront their “discriminatory behavior.” Consensus performs several functions within the anarchist community. Primarily it is used to reinforce the egalitarian, anti-authoritarian ideals of anarchism, to ensure that everyone’s voice is heard, but that no one’s is favored any more than anyone else’s is. Secondly, in support of Epstein (1991), consensus-based decisions and operations that serve to affirm solidarity within the community are salient. Once again it becomes apparent that the collective (group solidarity and cohesion) is a central element in the social formation of the anarchist community.

Leadership

While egalitarianism and autonomy define the organizational structure of the community, leadership is an essential aspect of all successful socio-cultural movements. Parsons, a nineteenth century anarchist spokesperson, writes, “anarchy gives free play to the natural leader” (Pope: 2001: 160), and indeed, this statement holds true in my observations of anarchist social structure. In asking my informants to articulate the role of leadership within the group everyone maintained that formal leadership was always

rejected. Informal leadership, on the other hand, was readily recognized as playing a key role in shaping the direction and organization of the community. One informant stated,

“I think a lot of times leaders emerge through people who really haul ass and do work, and some people have more natural leadership qualities – they’re good at conflict resolution or identifying areas where people can make a difference and then encouraging them. My experience at the IWW is very formal, there’s not really anything like that in the “scene” in Philly, which is maybe problematic in some ways, but it is also very good because it allows a lot of space for new people to plug in. But I think that their responsibilities are not really articulated in a way that can push the movement more. So when I think of leaders I think of people who make a positive difference.”

Personal initiative and natural leadership abilities are given “free play” in shaping both the public and private face of the anarchist movement. Whether it entails organizing household chores or protest marches, some form of leadership (however informal) is ultimately responsible.

The reason that leadership takes on such an informal role within the community points back to the fragmentation and decentralization of its various projects. Affinity groups are the primary structural form within the movement. Thus, following Hare’s line of thought (1995), their small size results in the fact that they require no formal leadership in order to successfully accomplish their goals. While power relations are an inevitable part of all human relations, inescapable so long as one lives within social networks (where power and interdependency are intimately related) (Epstein: 1991), the anarchist community has developed a system where power is minimized while efficiency is maximized. The thoroughly decentralized nature of the social and political organizations within the movement reflect and uphold anarchist ideals while at the same time providing the flexibility and openness necessary for a vital, growing community.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have stressed the underlying concept of the group (or collective) as a central feature of anarchist social organization, but it might now prove useful to define how a collective (group) differs from a simple “collection of people.” Hare (1995) outlines the key elements as follows: While a collection of people can only be defined based on similar traits or close proximity to one another, a group has a set of shared values that govern activity. Additionally, a group puts effort into acquiring and developing resources and skills to be used in carrying out these activities. A certain amount of social cohesion exists in groups, where members generally adhere to a set of norms that define the roles and specific goals needed for successful action. Despite the disparate nature of the anarchist community this quality of cohesion through shared values and goals nonetheless applies. Additionally, as discussed in the previous chapter, the resources available to them, through the extensive infrastructure of the movement, further ensures a sense of anarchist unity and identity within the greater city of Philadelphia.

The social structure of the anarchist community, as previously illustrated, is necessarily fragmented and informal. Small scale associations and collaborations are created and sustained through friendship and common goals, but existing beneath this structure is a set of collective ideals that serves to unite the movement as a whole. Egalitarianism, anti-authoritarianism, collectivity and consensus underlie the outward appearance of autonomous individuality, and informal leadership functions to maintain this entire social system. The fluid lines and overlapping boundaries within the organization of the anarchist community allows for the production of various realms of

social meaning and activity. This provides the movement with a certain creative vitality as well as the ability to adapt to changing circumstances (such as the rapid growth that has been happening ever since the Republican National Convention where the community hosted hundreds of anarchists from around the country). Fragmentation centered on the more abstract notion of the collective has proved to be a lasting and productive system for the anarchist community, allowing for maximum flexibility and efficiency while simultaneously upholding the most cherished values of anarchism. When the social structure of a movement is consistent with the objectives and ideals of that movement, it is safe to say that the collective identity of its members is reaffirmed in every aspect of social life and political activity.

4 *The Cultural Roots of Anarchism*

An American Ideal: Individualism

The founding of the United States of America resulted from a deep distrust and rejection of centralized authority. The freedom of the individual to shape his/her own life was valued above all else, and this individualist tradition remains the basis for much of American cultural experience concerning government to this day. De Leon (1978) writes, “We have frequently assumed that there is an order inherent in nature, that society is self-sufficient, and that government is likely to interrupt the vital functions of individuals and voluntary associations” (Pg. 4). He goes on to state that American radicalism has always been centered on the total destruction of traditions seen as oppressive or anti-progressive rather than on their reconstruction. The American veneration of individuality and personal freedom, and the progressive movements that have risen from these values, are thus natural precursors to anarchism. As De Leon notes, “The American’s individualism was directed toward the goal of creating each person as a universal being, guided not by simple egoism but by rational self-interest” (Pg. 38). Rational self-interest is the basis of individualist anarchism, but the addition of the phrase “for the betterment of all” might be a more apt description for modern anarchist movements in the U.S. While personal freedom remains the highest goal of anarchism today, it is recognized that the total abolition of authority would entail a kind of collective consciousness if it were to succeed.

Upon examination one may note that the formation of a ruling State was conceded out of a perceived necessity for some form of authority. However, the federal system was created in such a way so as no one person was ever granted absolute authority without having to answer to the people. In addition to the foundations of the American governmental system reflecting a kind of pre-anarchist mentality, De Leon points out that the very landscape within which the formation of the country was taking place prefigured such developments. The vast open landscape, abundant resources and the potential for unlimited personal gain were essential factors in shaping today's society where everyone lives in individual houses rather than large complexes and drives personal cars in place of mass transit (De Leon: 1978). Anarchism has solid roots in traditional American ideology. It merely seeks to carry to fruition that which the founding fathers ultimately desired but were too cautious to actualize.

Individuality in Modern Social Movements

At the root of today's social (cultural and political) movements lies individual experience and identity. Buechler (2000) maintains that the process of modernization has resulted in the disintegration of identity as increased social control (media, technology etc.) now penetrates nearly every aspect of both public and private life. He posits a theory that all social movements are a defense of identity. He writes, citing Melucci, "Control of 'inner nature' is a scarce resource, and new conflicts arise over its appropriation" ... These conflicts are increasingly likely to express themselves in social movements, just as movements are increasingly likely to build on the basis of individual experience" (Buechler: 2000: 153). Modernization has privileged the individual as the base upon

which the current social structure is created, and as previously noted in the chapter on individuality and collectivity within the anarchist community, my research revealed that this structure is reflected in today's social movements.

Radicalization, for my informants, more often than not followed from a kind of personal awakening akin to religious conversion (James: 1985). One informant describes the experience of finding the anarchist community as “a spiritual and intellectual homecoming,” and another speaks of her identification with the community as the result of extensive involvement with various activist projects. Klatch (1999) believes that people become radicalized through “intellectual growth, a deepening knowledge of politics, experiences of frustration at the lack of social change, confrontation with government and evidence of police brutality” (Pg. 109). These experiences are rooted in the sphere of politics, but the personal decision to confront that reality, and identify oneself as an anarchist, lies within the sphere of culture. This decision constitutes not only a change in beliefs and practices, but also a change in one's very identity (Klatch: 1999), and that often entails the sacrifice of the private world as one dedicates one's life to public (political) struggle. Buechler (2000) asserts that the very structure of advanced capitalism has “collapsed” the dichotomies of public and private, political and personal due to the ever-present interference and even manipulation of private life by outside forces. Epstein (1991) underlines this point by maintaining that because current social movements are demanding not only “personal transformation” but also “economic and political change,” everything private becomes public and vice versa. Consequently, the new social movements are now dealing directly with “a defense of identity” (Pg. 160). Their public, political struggle is deeply entrenched in the personal lives of those

involved (something Buechler has termed “life politics”), and thus the inescapable political nature of reality and all social relations is affirmed. In agreement with Epstein (1991), it follows that radical politics can no longer be separated from cultural revolution as they arose in response to “a cultural crisis” with the inversion of public and private.

Theoretical Discussion

I have heretofore been referring to the anarchist community as partaking in a social movement without a discussion of what defines such a movement and how they come to exist in the first place. Johnston and Klandermans (1995) define social movements as follows:

“Social movements not only can arise from cracks in culture but also can process culture insofar as they consume what is culturally given and produce transmutations of it. The individuals, groups, and organizations that form a movement process culture by adding, changing, reconstructing, and reformulating. Like other aspects of the society that a movement is embedded in, culture is processed through construction of meaning” (Pg. 5).

They therefore assert that although social movements constitute a break from the dominant socio-political system, they are nonetheless “shaped by inclusion in and modification of that culture” (Pg. 6). As Epstein (1991) notes, the emergence of new social movements are a result of “a widespread perception of a gap between experience and the ideas that govern society, and a belief that things could be organized differently” (Pg. 35). The goal of such movements can then be understood as the creation of radical new forms of social structure in the realm of politics and economics as well as personal relations. The efforts of those involved in social movements are thus consciously focused on tapping into “highly resonant ideational strains in mainstream society” (McAdam:

1997: 474) so as to further illuminate the gap between ideology and practice in order to maximize social mobilization. McAdam points to Martin Luther King Jr. and his role as the spokesperson for the civil right movement as a good example of success in this regard. He was able, through his use of mainstream American ideals such as equality and liberty, to produce a movement that resonated with both the oppressed and the oppressors (McAdam: 1997). Social movements must take advantage of the contradictions between “resonant cultural value and conventional social practice” (Pg. 475) that is inherent in every society in order to engender immediate political and long-term cultural progression.

Current Social Movement Theory: Two Camps

The Resource Mobilization theorists and the New Social Movement theorists offer differing and important theoretical perspectives. While Resource Mobilization Theory emphasizes the “strategic dimensions” of social movements (i.e. the rational, non-reflexive aspects of the encounter of movements with the mainstream), New Social Movement Theory is concerned with the “normative or ideological value” of social movements (Kelly: 2001: 19). Fundamentally, Resource Mobilization Theory answers the question of *how* movements arise and thrive while New Social Movement Theory answers the question of *why* they arise in the first place. While New Social Movements Theory seems to be more appropriate considering the culturally (symbolically) embedded nature of today’s social movements, its reliance on cultural manifestation (rather than merely political influence) “exacerbates the problem of validation” (Kelly: 2001: 20). As the State becomes less and less significant in the goals of new social movements, it grows harder and harder to gauge the impact of modern day progressives. In the past theorists

have been reluctant to consider the cultural aspects of social movements due to the association of “shared beliefs and identities” (the classical collective behavior paradigm) with a kind of irrationality considered inappropriate for social movement analysis (McAdam: 1997). However, the recognition of the centrality of culturally informed behavior in the emergence of new social movements has led to a rejection of such assumptions in favor of embracing the opportunity for a deeper exploration of the symbolic nature of collective action and behavior.

Interpretation: Symbolic Action

It became apparent through my observations and interviews that the anarchist movement, as a “social movement” is primarily concerned with challenging the dominant cultural system as it is the culture of any given people that ultimately determines the politics of that society. Thus it is the internal beliefs and practices that must be transformed before one can hope to recreate the external political system. Following Buechler’s differentiation between political and cultural aspects of social movements, the anarchist community, rather than directly contesting for power, is instead seeking to “symbolically express their central goals and values and to affirm their collective identities” (Buechler: 2000: 204). Anarchism in Philadelphia is challenging the dominant logic through a cultural rather than a directly political approach. One informant stated,

“I think anarchism is a political idea, but in ways it’s manifested itself culturally. Implicit in anarchism is a rejection of society, which I think creates a culture that’s antagonistic to mainstream society. In that sense, to me, it’s like a logical manifestation of anarchism.”

The fact that large-scale political protests only make up a small portion of what the anarchist community is involved with illustrates the secondary importance of direct political activity. Rather, it is the daily activities of the community and its interactions with the surrounding neighborhood that are considered to be of primary importance for the movement. An informant maintained, “large-scale actions are only a small part of what the movement is all about. Most people only focus on that aspect of it, but it is important to not concentrate on that. It’s not a real priority for most.” The culture that underlies the identity and daily actions of the anarchist community is infused with the concept of utopia. It is this vision of a better world that once served as the original inspiration for the movement’s formation and now serves to maintain it. The numerous activist projects to which members of the anarchist community dedicate their time and effort are taken up as a means for challenging the logic of the dominant system and defending their identity against mainstream society. The role of utopia in sustaining anarchist social structure extends beyond the provision of an ideological foundation for the movement to the level of individual consciousness.

Utopia: Personal Observations

Classical utopia has been associated with impossible notions of a perfect society – a kind of fantasy where everything is easy and peaceful and abundant (Levitas, 1990). However, utopian thought today performs a range of functions from mere nostalgia or hope to social criticism and political catalyst. Levitas (1990) notes that the utopian impulse, for Manuels, is part of the collective unconscious of all humankind, and although such essentialist proclamations are largely rejected today, utopian thought is

nonetheless recognized as existing, to some degree, in every society. Utopia, however, is not a “natural” impulse, but a socially constructed response to an equally “socially constructed gap between the needs and wants generated by a particular society and the satisfactions available to and distributed by it” (Levitas, 1990). Utopia is thus defined in terms of desire and social definition.

While utopian desire may act as inspiration for social change, it does not necessarily require it. Thus, for Levitas, the key function of utopia is social criticism. She states, “For social criticism only theoretical possibility and internal coherence are necessary, not practical possibility” (Levitas, pg. 177). She sees the present characteristics of utopia as merely possible rather than inevitable (as she thinks Marx saw it), involving an extreme break from the current situation, and “a vaguely defined event” (pg. 197). The fact that utopia need not be seen as realistically possible allows for a deeper exploration of alternative values, and its function as social critic rather than direct agent of change leaves the individual with the responsibility for utilizing the concept of utopia for social transformation. Utopia is a transformative force, but the transformation must first take place within the individual (Yack, 1986), as societal problems cannot be blamed on society alone.

The role of utopian thought within the anarchist community, as discovered through my fieldwork, underscores Levitas’ notion that it’s primary function is social criticism. While it is apparent that anarchism will most likely never be accepted by mainstream society as a legitimate political or economic system, the movement in Philadelphia seeks only to awaken a sense of social consciousness in the community at large. Their personal dedication to living the ideals of anarchism serves merely as a

foundation from which they are then able to challenge social norms, and in so doing invite others to do the same. They are economic, political, social, in short cultural, critics. It is not only politics they wish to change, nor is it simply the economic system, but it is the entire cultural mindset that allows these systems to thrive throughout the world that they are questioning on a daily basis. Their “folk model” is holistic in this sense; inherent in their worldview is the goal of an ultimate, fundamental transformation of society.

Their biggest fear is that the anarchist community is perceived as isolationist, hidden from society in their rejection of it. However, the very fact that this is a concern underscores the claim that greater cultural change is the ultimate aim. Rather than remaining content with the small, tight-knit community that exists today, their purpose rests upon recognition by larger numbers of people beyond their immediate social networks. And through this they hope to at least have their dissenting voices realized as legitimate criticisms of current society. It is important to note that actively forcing their ideals and beliefs on others is never the objective of the anarchist community. If social awakening/conversion does not occur naturally from within an individual (independent of outside pressure) it is not “true” in the sense that it is merely the result of external forces. Cultural change must emerge from within individual members of society rather than from any form of external coercion.

Conclusion

My conclusions are consistent with the work of Kittrie (1995) who, in his analysis of radical groups, notes that “rebelliousness” often leads to both a feeling of alienation from one’s peers as well as a sense of responsibility towards one’s community. The

anarchist movement in Philadelphia as I encountered it fits this characterization, as it is apparent that the general objective lies with serving the surrounding community. Rather than attempting to directly alter or demolish existing social systems and institutions, the anarchist community is working instead towards transforming (or awakening) the values and beliefs of individual members of society. According to Goldschmidt (1977) this would make the movement culturally rather than socio-politically oriented in that it is directed towards internal (as opposed to external) change. The Philadelphia anarchist community is working to keep utopia alive in capitalist society, working against what has been termed “the end of utopia.” Shklar (1998) notes that modern society’s way of ending utopia “through fear of hope and of change” (pg. 190) makes positive political thought impossible. And what is a society if it is not, on some level, in a constant state of growth and transformation?

Since the 1960s, both lethargy and energy have characterized progressive American politics (Euchner: 1996). A kind of fatalism regarding the possibility for true social change has been countered by anger stemming from the realization of injustices, and this incongruity has produced many short-lived, but contentious, radical movements. The anarchist community, because it is not an issue-based movement but an all-encompassing project towards total cultural reconstruction, has enjoyed steady growth over the years. It has become more than just an organization dedicated to political reform. It is a lifestyle for those involved. That is, it is a deeply cultural phenomenon. The numerous and varied volunteer efforts of members of the anarchist community, and their

dedication to the dissemination of alternative world-views places them in the position of cultural revolutionaries. Despite the community's marginal position within mainstream society and the relatively small size of the movement nationwide, anarchism, as a total rejection of oppression, is considered by participants in the movement to be the logical end for an egalitarian, integrated society.

Conclusion

“My goals have revolved around making a foundation that is strong so that the movement can go in any direction that it wants. So, buying property, making sure the Wooden Shoe and the A-space are available as resources. As far as a strategic plan – that hasn’t really happened yet. I think people are really good at identifying one project, doing it well, and then moving on to the next project, which isn’t really a strategy. But I look at things as compared to how they were when I first got involved and they’re much bigger than they were.”

(Interview: 2003).

It is often difficult to measure the “success” of resistance movements such as that in which the anarchist community is taking part. Because the community is so inwardly focused, believing in social transformation from the individual outward, it becomes much more difficult to trace the external effects that their ideals may have on those around them. It has been argued that social movements do not constitute “real acts of resistance,” but are merely “symbolic acts serving to reproduce the very structure of inequality that they challenge” (Ruddick: 1995). However, because the anarchist community has achieved a certain amount of independence (both culturally and economically) from mainstream society, I do not think that this can be said of them. Melucci (1997) rejects the notion of “success” altogether when it comes to social movements. He writes, “Since they challenge the dominant cultural codes, their mere existence is a reversal of symbolic systems embodied in power relationships. Success and failure are thus meaningless concepts if referred to the symbolic challenge” (Pg. 271). The anarchist community has created their own symbolic cultural institutions (the Wooden Shoe and the A-space), as well as collective housing and food distribution (the Life Center Association). And this autonomous infrastructure has begun to attract other anarchists and activists from around the country also seeking to “challenge the dominant cultural codes.”

The culture that this community has created confronts the dominant socio-political system in all aspects of life, but that is the core of what they are doing – simply living. No one was able to articulate an overarching political goal for the movement (one informant jokingly said “anarchy”), and this readily accounts for the many different, (often temporary) projects to which members of the community donate their time and effort. Epstein (1995) writes, “successful radical mobilizations forge a new status quo, new patterns of daily life, new routines, a new common sense” (Pg. 335), and this is precisely what the community is building for itself with the hope that others might follow by example. It is not a political agenda that sustains this community, it is personal relationships, and common beliefs and practices. In short, it is the underlying culture of resistance, and its symbolic physical manifestation in the infrastructure that holds the group together, and is therefore responsible for its “success.”

The lack of one, fixed political goal for the anarchist community may in fact have contributed to its longevity. The tendency of the community to participate in several causes at once while still maintaining its essentially anarchist base is a result of what Epstein (1991) terms “prefigurative utopian politics.” She asserts that issue-based resistance organizations often burn out after one or two large mobilizations, but a group that builds and maintains a network of “counter-organizations and institutions,” creating a framework for their ideals and actions, has the potential to outlast those groups that lack such a base. The anarchist community inherited this “framework” from the Movement for a New Society, an organization that recognized the importance of an overarching, all-encompassing progressive outlook, and the infrastructure with which to support such goals. The broad, non-issue-based nature of this movement is reflected in today’s

anarchist community, and as such it has enjoyed, and will continue to enjoy a thriving existence in Philadelphia.

Throughout my research I was continuously reminded that since its inception in the 1970s, the anarchist community has been growing steadily each year. One informant states, “it’s no longer just this marginal movement that’s an idiot magnet with a couple of good people in it. It’s a lively movement that’s building itself. And it’s becoming very familiar with its own history.” Another informant underscores this point, saying, “I think things are maturing a lot from where they were a couple of years ago. There’s a lot more discussion about ideas happening than there used to be.” As the community grows and evolves, expanding its presence in the city, the collective identity of those involved is strengthened and their goals become more solidified. With activists moving to the city to take advantage of the network and infrastructure already in place, the movement benefits from the vitality of an ever-changing population. New ideas enter with new members, enhancing the existing structure and serving to reinforce the network of Philadelphia activist anarchists.

The future appears bright for many of my informants. One states,

“In eleven years I’ve just described how far the movement has advanced, and it can advance another couple of giant shoe sizes. To many of us, global capitalism not only has very obvious problems, but is also being challenged in a lot of ways. A lot of people leading the challenges are anarchists. I hardly need to tell you that a lot of these big protests are organized by anarchists and that the liveliest parts of these protests are anarchist actions. Publications relating to anarchism are booming... So, when will there be a ten-story anarchist center that’s completely active all the time? I am not so naïve as to believe that too much of that can happen without a fight...”

In the spirit of Foucault the anarchist community is living proof that so long as power exists, resistance will thrive. The specifics of the movement’s future are unknown

and cannot be predicted, but that it will continue to be a “lively” activist scene in Philadelphia for years to come is a safe assumption to make. The Wooden Shoe has become a profitable business and the A-space proved to be such a success that another center is being opened on Lancaster in the near future. The anarchist community is solidly grounded, both physically and symbolically, within the city of Philadelphia, working to ensure that no one ever gets too comfortable with the status quo and encouraging others to do the same.

Suggestions for Further Study

Throughout my research the self-consciousness of the anarchist community regarding the fact that the movement is primarily made up of white activists became apparent. An interesting topic for further study would explore this phenomenon, how it arose, and how the community is working to address the issue. Such a study would illuminate the problems inherent in homogeneous social movements, and would examine the question of why radical activists tend to be primarily white and privileged (the countercultural movement of the 1960s, for example, fits this description). Exploration of this issue might begin to explain some of the foundational values of social movements and their potential relationship to class and social up bringing.

Appendix

Constitution for the new Lancaster Community Center

Structure:

This is a tentative agreement on our structure agreed upon by the collective.

1) The General Collective

The space will be managed by a collective of individuals and groups. There will be open, general meetings for the collective, and anyone who comes to these meetings will be considered a 'member' of the collective. These members will be encouraged to participate in discussions and to volunteer for shifts and projects within the space. These general meetings will be run by consensus, however general consensus members will not be able to block consensus nor will they immediately get keys. We will consistently hold new orientation meetings, where new members can learn about the history and occupants and mission of the space, learn about consensus decision making processes, and also conflict resolution processes.

2) Keyholders

There will also be 'keyholders' (or 'core' members) who will have the right to block consensus, and these keyholders (as the name suggests) will receive keys to the space. The admission of a new 'keyholder' requires the consensus of the group.

(Note: this is something we addressed in the meeting previous to the celebratory "last night at the surrealist house," that D.O., all current key holders, and now myself (K.) are all part of a KEY RING, responsible for rotation of opening the space on workdays so they start promptly. (Just wanted to add that in there since the proposal/consensus passed already).

3) Spokespeople

A group can also be a member of the collective, as a group. The group must send a spokesperson to the collective meeting. For a group to be a keyholder they must either be a tenant or it must be agreed upon by the collective.

4) Commitment to Community Resource Projects

We want our commitment to providing resources to the community to be institutionalized in our structure, to prevent us from dropping our commitment when we become too busy. To that end, we want to commit to maintain at least 4 interactive, community-based projects that provide public resources.

5) "Tenant" groups

We will make explicit arrangements with groups who wish to privately use space in the building on a one-to-one basis. Our general commitment is to eliminate rent entirely or make it as low as possible. We may ask the group to commit to a minimal rent that may be waived on a month-to-month basis, if fundraising is sufficient. We may also ask

groups for other kinds of commitments. All tenant groups will be asked to send a spokesperson to the general meeting. We may ask for volunteer hours or other kinds of commitments, like sending a representative to other subcommittees (as described below).

As an immediate measure, it was suggested that we try and arrange some agreements with groups as soon as possible so we can begin to see how the space is filling up, what space we have left, and so the groups can begin their own work on the upstairs spaces.

6) Subcommittees:

We discussed the creation of three ongoing subcommittees:

6.1) Operations Committee

The Operations Committee would be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the space. Responsibilities would include the coordination of the physical maintenance of the space, the day-to-day operation, volunteer management (shifts), and the finances of the space.

6.2) Programming and Outreach

The Programming and Outreach committee would be responsible for producing a monthly calendar, coordinating the scheduling of events, coordinating some publicity, and optionally organizing events.

6.3) Conflict Resolution and Anti-Oppression Training Committee

The goal of the Conflict Resolution committee is to create an in-house mechanism for dealing with the internal conflicts that are bound to arise. It is important to us that the committee has a rotating membership, so it does not become a base of power or a set 'jury'. We also want to provide and promote conflict resolution workshops, to ensure that people can participate on the committee and understand how it works once a conflict arises. The anti-oppression aspect of the committee's mission involves its responsibility to train the collective and those who use the space to recognize their own discriminatory (racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, etc.) behavior.

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