

Rebels with many causes: Anarchists in Belle Epoque Buenos Aires.
(a book manuscript by José C. Moya)

Introduction

On a Sunday morning of November 1909, Pablo Karachine, an Odessa-born 25-year old mechanic and an atheist Jew, took a Catholic prayer book and a tin box and headed for the Church of the Pilar in Buenos Aires' most exclusive neighborhood. The nature of the services and the content of the box, rather than a religious epiphany or conversion, explained his peculiar action. A funeral mass was being held for Don Carlos de Borbón, a member of the Spanish royal family and the honorary president of the local Traditionalist Circle. The box held twenty-four bullets, eight mercury capsules, nitroglycerine, and a fuse. Karachine planed to blow up the church to avenge the Spanish government's recent execution of the anarchist pedagogue Francisco Ferrer, and the Argentine police shooting of workers during the previous May Day demonstration. Not wanting to cause any personal injuries, he waited for the mass to end and was caught by Social Order detectives while he waited. Rather than denying his intention, Karachine defiantly defended the nobility of his cause and predicted its imminent triumph. So did Sofia Lisichsky, his wife, or rather *compañera*, a twenty-five year old seamstress who had also been jailed in Czarist Russia for her anarchist activities. She added that her ideals had been shaped by her first-hand experience with social injustice, her readings, and her interest in female emancipation, emphasizing that women should struggle hand in hand with men for those ideals.¹

¹ Archivo General de la Nación, [AGN], Buenos Aires, Tribunales Criminales, R-5, pgs. 93, 95.5. *El Correo Espanol*, November 7, 1909.

As in almost all cases of this type, the police desperately searched for a cabal. But it could not find any. Karachine's intended action fitted the anarchist ideal of "propaganda by deed": violent acts carried out by individuals rather than organizations, inspired by personal moral outrage rather than party directives, and directed against property or symbols and figures of power rather than indiscriminately against the general population. The action also embodied the ethic and aesthetic principle that a local anarchist journalist called "the beauty of the gesture."² The sight of a conscious individual willing to sacrifice his freedom and his life to avenge wrongs committed against people who did not belong to his own particular ethnocultural group had to awaken, anarchists figured, at least secret sympathies in anyone who had ever dreamt of human solidarity. It had to draw attention to the moral chasm they felt separated the universality of their ideal from the crude tribalism of nationalism or any other creed based on exclusion or particularist loyalties. It could not fail to highlight, they argued, the disparity between their individualism, ample and in harmony with communal solidarity, and the version of liberal and capitalist ideology, narrow and selfish, unable to rise above the most elementary form of material, and short-sighted, self-interest.

Karachine's actions, and others like it, represented for anarchists not terrorism but a justifiable response from below to violence from above. The latter form of violence, they argued, dwarfed in intensity and scope subaltern resistance. Anarchist journalists often

² La Protesta, June 3, 1906. The connection between anarchism and esthetics also appears often in the non-anarchist literature of the period but normally devoid of ethics. G. K. Chesterton, for example, has the character of the anarchist poet Gregory, in his detective story *The Man Who Was Thursday* (London, 1908) claim that "An artist is identical with an anarchist... You might transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything." (pg. 5).

reminded their readers that the number of workers killed by the forces of “law and order” in a single city, on a single day (or even hour), and on countless occasions (not to mention the millions of human beings slaughtered by armies) by far surpassed the number of “despots” ever assassinated by anarchists in the entire world. The fact that these arguments predated the world wars, holocausts, and genocides of the twentieth century seems to add prescience and retrospective poignancy to their stark logic.

For anarchists, the mere fact that such patently obvious statements needed to be made exposed the collective mental shackles that centuries of indoctrination had forged. Such indoctrination came not only, or even principally, from overt political propaganda. Its presence in the family, schools, religion, the workplace, and other social institutions was so constant and ubiquitous that it simply went undetected. This process--which Gramsci, borrowing anarchist arguments, would later term cultural hegemony--could make the most perverse situation seem natural and common sensical.³ It explained why the immensely more brutal official violence of the state was generally accepted, including by many of its victims, as natural and unavoidable, or even celebrated as heroic patriotism and civic duty, while the sporadic and reactive violence of “the oppressed” was vociferously condemned as aberrant and terrorist. It concealed the basic fact that the state, despite its claim to legitimacy as the upholder of peace and order, actually rested on, and engendered, brute force. Such force surfaced during bouts of repression and wars

³ Carl Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists* (Oxford: Berg, 1999) shows the impact of Turin’s anarchists on Gramsci’s thought. Levy concentrates on syndicalist practices, but I would argue that the anarchists’ cultural critique represented a more important influence.

but in a veiled form it represented the foundation on which any system of privilege rested and thus the fundamental principle of existing social organization.

Anarchists felt, thus, that their primary task was one of cognitive and ethical liberation. They had to emancipate the human mind from conformism, to awaken the human spirit from the moral stupor of convention. They had to convince people that their slogans “Neither God, Country, nor Family” and “Property is Theft” embodied more than mere nihilism; that society’s most sacrosanct institutions served as instruments of domination rather than redemption; that authoritarian hierarchical arrangements were not natural and inevitable products of the human condition, or even necessary evils. They had to persuade skeptics that alternatives existed; that a society based on spontaneous and consensual egalitarian organizations and devoid of coercive mechanisms other than moral pressure was not just a pipe dream; that anarchy meant only what the word itself signified “without authority,” not chaos and disorder; that, on the contrary, as their circled-A graffiti asserted: Anarchy is Order.

Anarchists were well aware that this was an uphill battle. Unlike other political groups, they aspired not to supplant a particular regime but to end all systems of domination in general, and not simply at the state level. Their claim that disobedience represented, as Oscar Wilde put it, “man’s original virtue” was at odds not only with the traditional biblical precept but also with existing civic and political discourses’ fixation on order. Their desire to fragment and decenter power with an endless web of small, grass roots, local organizations went against the contemporary current towards political centralization

and economic concentration. Their vision of an egalitarian and free society depended on a premise that had been increasingly dismissed as the product of the naïve optimism of eighteenth-century Enlightenment: that humans were basically good and rational, or at least that these elements surpassed, in magnitude and might, cruelty and ignorance.

The faith of some in this basic premise was so deep-rooted that they felt the sheer intellectual and moral force of their ideas would assure their final triumph. Even those in power would eventually be convinced and without appeals to altruism. The preservation of their privileges, after all, came at the price of living in a system fraught with insecurity, alienation, and fear, including their own. This was not rational self-interest but myopic self-delusion. They too would lead more secure and rewarding lives in a society with fewer injustices, restraints, and social anxieties. They too would draw the existential benefits of living in a freer environment that promoted good will, creativity, and the fulfillment of human potential. For these anarchists who placed their hopes on the power of rational persuasion, violence was strategically counterproductive because, as Octave Mirbeau put it, “the greatest danger of bombs is in the explosion of stupidity that they provoke.”⁴ In this view, violence also soiled the movement with the very evil that it meant to eradicate. The majority, however, felt that the intransigency and ruthlessness of “oppressors,” even those that represented liberal democracies, left them no choice. As the notion of “propaganda by deed” indicated, violent acts were also seen as a form of proselytism. They called attention to the movement, and--because they were usually committed to avenge previous executions or massacres--they would appear to the

⁴ *Le Journal* [Paris], February 19, 1894.

“masses” as a form of popular justice and shake the sense of invulnerability of ruling elites.

So violence, even if in reality it was sporadic and not an intrinsic part of the ideology, became an indelible marker of the movement for its opponents and followers alike. Such identification was intensified by the temporal concentration of *attentats*, their visibility, and their flamboyance. Within a span of seven years (from 1894 to 1901) anarchists assassinated such prominent figures as French President Sadi Carnot, Spanish Prime Minister Cánovas del Castillo, Italian King Umberto I, Empress Elisabeth of Austria, and U.S. President William McKinley. Failed or non-mortal *attentats* during roughly the same period included the Serbian premier, his Bulgarian counterpart, a Russian military commander, magnate Henry Clay Frick, the president of the Italian Council, the Spanish king (twice) and another prime minister, another French president, two Argentine presidents, and the Japanese God Emperor. A contemporary commentator sarcastically defined anarchism as a peculiar malady that affected kings and heads of state. The physical targets of anarchist bombs were equally visible: the French Chamber of Deputies and Stock Market, Greenwich’s Royal Observatory, Paris’ Madeleine Church, the opera houses of Barcelona and Buenos Aires, police stations, and other centers of political power and social prestige.

As with Karachine’s action, the fact that many of these acts were carried out by individuals who were not of the same nationality as the people whose victimization they claimed to avenge increased their international visibility. So did the youth of the actors,

the audacity of their acts, and the drama of their trials, which anarchists used not to defend themselves but to contest the justice of Law and indict their accusers. The final sight of committed idealists defiantly yelling “Long Live Anarchy” in front of firing squads or guillotines added another dramatic element. The urban uprisings that, under the name of Red or Tragic weeks, rocked cities such as Paris, Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Milan, Naples, and Ancona, furthered the violent and revolutionary image of anarchism. Contemporary attention by the media and public officials went up and down, as it does today with most radical movements, with anarchist violence. The vast majority of newspaper and magazine articles on anarchism dealt with *attentats* or street violence. Governments obviously tried as hard as they could to foment such an image. But so did anarchists themselves. The image buttressed their self-identification as people of action and not just words. It reinforced the movement’s revolutionary and radical credentials, in contrast to the reformism of “legalitarian” socialists, and thus its ideological position as the left of the Left.

Karachine’s actions, then, may have been carried without accomplices but they formed part of what was unarguably the most important radical movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Anarchism’s critique of bourgeois society and its utopian vision spurred millions of men and women into individual and collective action with an intensity rarely matched by other putatively secular creeds that did not depend on ethno/national grievances. This magnitude and passion fed a public interest that the movement’s association with violence raised to the level of fascination.⁵ Journalists

⁵ The public fascination with anarchism and the exploitation of this by publishers is captured in a speech given by the character of Gregory, a detective passing as an anarchist, in G.K. Chesterton’s 1908 novel *The*

churned out thousands of articles on the subject. Anarchism attracted the attention of contemporary novelists and playwrights such as Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry James, G. K. Chesterton, Joseph Conrad, George Bernard Shaw, Pio Baroja, Roberto Arlt, Anatole de France, Fedor Dostoevsky, and Ivan Turgenev.⁶ The list of the literary and artistic figures that identified with, or expressed sympathy for, the ideology is as long and prominent. It includes composers Richard Wagner, Alexander Skryabin, Thomas Von Hartman, and Gustave Charpentier;⁷ writers Oscar Wilde, Dora Marsden, Ezra Pound, Octave Mirbeau, Paul Adam, Emile Zola, Leo Tolstoy, William Morris, D. H. Lawrence,

Man Who Was Friday: "Comrades... Our belief has been slandered, it has been disfigured, it has been utterly confused and concealed, but it has never been altered. Those who talk about anarchism and its dangers go everywhere and anywhere to get their information, except to us, except to the fountain head. They learn about anarchists from sixpenny novels; they learn about anarchists from tradesmen's newspapers; they learn about anarchists from Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday and the Sporting Times... We have no chance of denying the mountainous slanders which are heaped upon our heads from one end of Europe to another."

⁶ Noel P. Peacock, "Constructions of Anarchism in British Fiction, 1885-1914," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Western Ontario, 1994) for an interpretation of anarchist images in Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima*, G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* as expressions of social anxieties over revolution, class-mixing, and degeneracy. Jennifer Shaddock, "Culture Through Anarchy: British Representations of Anarchism, 1840-1907," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, New Brunswick, 1993) argues that anarchism represented "the irrational, chaotic, immoral, and effeminate Other" in the same works by James and Conrad, in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* and, in a less convincing way, in Helen and Olivia Rossetti's *A Girl among the Anarchists*. For other studies of anarchism in English literature see Avrom Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), David Mulry, "The Perfect Detonator and Conrad's Pursuit of It in *The Secret Agent*," (Ph.D. diss., University of Kent at Canterbury, 1989), Alex Houen, "The Secret Agent: Anarchism and the Thermodynamics of Law," *English Literary History* 65:4 (1998):995-1016, and Arthur F. Redding, *Raids on Human Consciousness: Writing, Anarchism, and Violence* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), chapter 3 on Conrad and Dostoevsky. G. B. Shaw, *The Impossibilities of Anarchism* (London: The Fabian society, 1895). Frederick Karl, the foremost biographer of Conrad, maintained that he had "well-hidden anarchistic tendencies" (quoted in the introduction by Martin Seymour-Smith to the Penguin edition of *The Secret Agent*). Glen S. Close, *La Imprenta Enterrada Baroja, Arlt y El Imaginario Anarquista* (Rosario, Argentina: Beatriz Viterbo, 2000) for the fascination with anarchist violence in two trilogies of novels by the Spaniard Pio Baroja and the Argentine Roberto Arlt. Michael G. Williams, "Politics Without Love: Anarchism in Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and James," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Michigan, 1974).

⁷ Carol V. Hamilton, "Wagner As Anarchist, Anarchists As Wagnerians," *Oxford German Studies* 22 (1993):168-193. Susie P. Garcia, "Alexander Skryabin and Russian Symbolism: Plot and Symbols in the Late Piano Sonatas," (D. MA diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 1993) for the "Mystical Anarchism" of this Russian composer. S. Huebner, "Between Anarchism and the Box-Office: Gustave Charpentier's Louise," *Nineteenth Century Music* 19:2 (1995):136-160

Helen and Olivia Rossetti, Erich Muhsam, Vicente Blasco Ibañez, Charles Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, André Gide, Henrik Ibsen, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, Virginia Woolf, and Franz Kafka;⁸ and visual artists Camille Pissarro, Georges Seurat, Paul Signac, Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia, Edvard Munch, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Paul Klee, Marcel Duchamp, Vassily Kandinsky, Natalia Goncharova, Kasimir Malevich, Man Ray, and Jean Vigo.⁹ The attention of governments was of a different nature but just as intense. As Theodore Roosevelt put it in an address to the U.S. Congress and Senate a

⁸ Bruce Clarke, "Dora Marsden and Ezra Pound: 'The New Freewoman' and 'The Serious Artist'," *Contemporary Literature* 33:1 (1992):91-113. Isabelle Saulquin, *L'Anarchisme Littéraire D'Octave Mirbeau* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1998). Isabelle Genest, "Intellectuels Et Decadence Durant La Belle Epoque: Les Cas D'Octave Mirbeau Et Paul Adam," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2000). Eduardo A. Febles, "Explosive Narratives: Anarchy and the Demise of Naturalism in Zola's *Germinal*, *Paris*, and *Travail*," (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2000). Kenneth C. Wenzel, "Tolstoy's Georgist Spiritual Political Economy (1897-1910): Anarchism and Land Reform," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 56:4 (1997):639-667. Linda A. Richardson, "William Morris and Women: Experience and Representation," (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1989), chapter 6. Simon D. Casey, "Naked Liberty and the World of Desire: Elements of Anarchism in the Work of D. H. Lawrence," (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2000). Ondine E. Le Blanc, "Anarchism, Gender, and the Avant-Garde Word," (Ph.D. diss., The University of Michigan, 1994), on the anarchist influence in the work of D. H. Lawrence, F. T. Marinetti, James Joyce, and Eugene Jolas (chapter 1); Tristan Tzara (chapter 2); and Helen and Olivia Rossetti (chapter 3). James D. Steakley, "Anarchism and Culture: The Political and Cultural Theories of Erich Muhsam," (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1986). Gloria E. Li, "Literatura y Sociedad En *El Intruso* y *La Bodega* De Vicente Blasco Ibanez," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1995) for the "strong anarchist leanings" of this Spanish novelist. R. Shryock, "Anarchism at the Dawn of the Symbolist Movement," *French Forum* 25:3 (2000):291-307 and Ali Nematollahy, "Anarchism and Literature in France, 1870-1900," (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 2001) for Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and the French symbolists in general. Arturo Schwarz, *André Breton, Trotsky Et L'Anarchie* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1977). Theresa C. Papanikolas, "The Cultural Politics of Paris Dada, 1914--1922," (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1999) for the anarcho-individualism of Breton and Tzara. Lucio P. Ruotolo, *The Interrupted Moment: A View of Virginia Woolf's Novels* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1986). W. Prochazka, "Kafka's Association With Hasek, Jaroslav and the Czech Anarchists," *Modern Austrian Literature* 11:3-4 (1978):275-287.

⁹ John G. Hutton, "A Blow of the Pick: Science, Anarchism, and the Neo-Impressionist Movement." (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1987) on the relationship between the rise of neo-impressionism and anarcho-communism in 1890s France. R. S. Roslak, "The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neoimpressionism, Science, and Anarchism," *Art Bulletin* 73:3 (1991):381-390 on Seurat. John House, "Anarchist or Esthete? Pissarro in the City," *Art in America* 81:11 (1993):80-93. Patricia D. Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) argues that the anarchist influence on Picasso during his years in Barcelona was reinforced in the artistic circles of Paris and continued to have an impact on his work even during the presumably formalist cubist period. Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) chapter 4 on Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. Nina Gourianova, "The Early Russian Avant-Garde, 1908-1918: The Aesthetics of Anarchy," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2001) for Kandinsky, Goncharova, and Malevich.

year before Karachine's attempt: "When compared with the suppression of anarchy every other question sinks into insignificance."¹⁰

Anarchism has also demonstrated a surprising resiliency. The spread and intensification of nationalism among the working classes during World War I, on one hand, and the rising status of the state within the revolutionary left after the Bolshevik Revolution, on the other, seemed to have given a mortal blow to an anti-nationalist and anti-statist movement. The democratic left's increasing identification with the activist or "welfare" state shoved what seemed to be an ideological fossil further to the margin. The Spanish Civil War, traditional wisdom (and communist propaganda) asserted, had represented the movement's last stand. Then radical students searching for a non-authoritarian tradition resurrected it as "the left-wing alternative to obsolete communism" (to reverse the title of the English translation of the Cohn-Bendits' manifesto), during the Spring of 68.¹¹ That spring of discontent may have been followed by a long summer of apathy. But anarchism has proven to be, as a recent New York Times' headline put it, "the creed that won't stay dead."¹² In an ironic twist given its anticlerical tradition, it influenced the development of Liberation Theology.¹³ An ideology that throughout the twentieth century had been dismissed by Marxists as a premodern relic is being extolled at the outbreak of the

¹⁰ "Message from the President of the United States to the Senate and the House of Representatives," 60th Congress, 1st Session, Document n. 426, April 9, 1908.

¹¹ Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969). See also Carol R. Motta, "Poetics of the 1968 Student Revolutions in France, Brazil and the United States," (Pennsylvania State University, 1999).

¹² Joseph Kahn, "Anarchism, the Creed that Won't Stay Dead: The Spread of World Capitalism resurrects a Long-dormant Movement," *The New York Times*, August 5, 2000, p. A15.

¹³ Linda H. Damico, *The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology* (New York: P. Lang, 1987).

twentieth-first as postmodern.¹⁴ Its culturalist critique, once denounced by the proponents of dialectic materialism as soft and “bourgeois,” has become the epistemological core of “cultural studies,” acknowledged admiringly by those who realize much of the wheel had already been invented and repeated as the latest epiphany by those who do not.¹⁵ Anarchism has become one of the most salient ideological forces in radical feminism and environmentalism, in punk rock, and in the so-called anti-globalization movement (misnamed in the sense that it does not oppose globalization but the terms under which it is being promoted).¹⁶ Today, circled-A graffiti have supplanted the hammer and the sickle from the walls of cities all over the Atlantic world and beyond (and in the internet) as a symbol of protest.

These resurgences, however, have not matched the intensity of the pre-World War I years and during this heyday Buenos Aires became one of the most important centers of anarchist activism in the world. The anarchist May Day demonstration of 1909, whose victims Karachine intended to avenge, had congregated 30,000 people, four times as many as the rally organized by the socialists and the largest May Day demonstration in the world that year. Three days later, 70,000 marched during the funeral for the five fallen workers, the largest public gathering the city had ever seen. May Day was followed

¹⁴ B. e. y. Hakim, *L'art du chaos stratégie du plaisir subversif* (Paris: Nautilus, 2000), for a postmodernist exaltation of “ontological anarchism” and its “immediatism” as the subversion of the capitalist state.

¹⁵ A. O'Connor, "Whos Emma and the Limits of Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies* 13:4 (1999):691-702.

¹⁶ Barbara Epstein, “Anarchism and the Anti-Globalization Movement,” *Monthly Review* 53: 4 (September 2001). Daniel A. Coleman, *Eco-Politics: Building a Green Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994). Thomas W. Simon, “Democratizing Eutopia: Environmentalism, Anarchism, Feminism” in *The Anarchist Papers*, editor, Dimitrios Roussopoulos (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2002).

by a week of strikes, riots, and repression that paralyzed the city and much of the country and came to be known in Argentine history as the *Semana Roja*. On May 10 the U.S. Charge d’Affaires informed the State Department that “for the last nine days the city of Buenos Aires has been under the dominion of mob Law.”¹⁷ A week after Karachine’s attempt, another Yiddish-speaking youngster, Simon Radowsky, assassinated Buenos Aires’s chief of police and his assistant. In a letter to his comrades back home, an Italian immigrant asserted that “the proletariat of Buenos Aires marches at the vanguard of the international revolutionary movement.”¹⁸ No city in Europe, he claimed, could boast a similar number of anarchist publications, conferences, meetings, strikes and the same level of militancy. Some historians would later agree. One began his 1975 doctoral dissertation quite categorically: “The Argentine anarchist movement was the largest, most coherent libertarian effort of its time.”¹⁹ Contemporary foreign visitors rarely failed to notice the vigor of the local labor movement and the anarchists’ prominence in it. The attention of the international press pointed in the same direction. Of the eighty-nine articles on anarchism that appeared in the *Times* of London between 1909 and 1914, thirteen dealt with Buenos Aires, the largest number except for those on Barcelona.

Karachine’s actions thus formed part of a local movement that had probably surpassed Paris’ and approached Barcelona’s, traditionally the top two anarchist centers of the Atlantic World, in size and intensity. This book aims to provide an intellectual, social,

¹⁷ National Archives [NARA], College Park, Maryland, M862, 20058, May 10, 1909.

¹⁸ Camillo di Sciallo, *Il terrore nella Repubblica Argentina* (Castellammare, Italy, 1910), 7-8.

¹⁹ Richard Yoast, “The Development of Argentine Anarchism: A Socio-Ideological Analysis” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975).

and cultural history of this movement from its beginnings in the mid 1880s to its heyday in 1910.

The first component of the triad offers a discursive analysis of an ideology that, at least at first sight, seems to have been inherently ridden with philosophical contradictions. Unlike Marxists, anarchists were not willing to compromise their demand for complete individual freedom for the sake of social equality. Unlike liberals, they were not willing to forgo the latter for the former. Indeed, their communist vision exceeded that of the socialists' in its egalitarian ethos and their demand for personal autonomy surpassed that of classical liberalism in its libertarian impetus. Many political scientists would identify these as antagonistic rather than complimentary aims. But anarchists attempted to integrate them and often defined themselves, some may argue oxymoronically, as libertarian socialists. Anarchism's classless humanistic vision coexisted uneasily with its syndicalist tendencies and its calls for working-class revolution. As other heirs of the Enlightenment, anarchists partook in the cult of reason and science. But their beliefs contained a romantic bent and a transcendental propensity rare among other rationalists. Discursively, their arguments mixed the expository styles of Cartesian logic and analogic symbolism. These convinced materialists and rabid anticlericals meddled in spiritualism and theosophy and often represented anarchy (their utopia) in quasireligious imagery. Their scientism went along with a Rousseauian veneration of nature that often bordered on hippie-like primitivism. These apostles of modernity opposed the material basis of modernization: capitalism (whether private or state-controlled) and the factory system, proposing instead a preindustrial order based on independent artisans. In an age when

power was becoming more concentrated and centralized they propounded local autonomy. They treated technology with more suspicion than respect, fearing its use as a mechanism of domination and its capacity to produce human alienation. They struggled to integrate pacifism and a cult of violence. They organized the Argentine working class while denouncing bureaucracies, hierarchies, and—at times--organization itself. The moralistic discourse of the movement included all sorts of equally conflicting pairs: non-authoritarian communism and Nietzschean egoism, proletarian puritanism and bohemian hedonism, abstinence and free love, abstemiousness and absinthe.

The aim of the discursive analysis in this book, however, is not simply to point out contradictions or celebrate the movement's intellectual vim. It attempts a more difficult task: to find leitmotifs and even patterns in what seems to be a discursive cacophony, to impose [some] order on anarchy without placing it in a straightjacket or resorting to reductionism. Theoretically, I rely here mainly on the interpretive mode of poststructuralist humanities. But methodologically, this hermeneutic approach works well on limited amounts of text and anarchists seem to have been affected by graphomania. It is simply humanly impossible to “thick read” between the lines and the subtext of tens of thousands of pages. Unless one has a battalion of research assistants or limitless time (both rare commodities), the normal scholarly response to these situations is to browse through, say, dozens of linear meters of newspapers focusing on the material worthy of note and skimming over the rest. But this is a treacherous, if not entirely arbitrary, distinction. Eye-catching and “juicy” items are not necessarily the most telling. What did the heaps of “duller” material that we skimmed over or were not even able to

read contain? This method also undermines any argument based on the notion that what is left unsaid may be as significant as what is stated since “silences” can simply reflect the limits of the research. Even if something was truly omitted its significance can only be determined within a context that would make it expected. Such context, in turn, can only be determined by a systematic analysis of texts across time and across ideological boundaries, both intra-anarchist strands and external.

To accomplish this I have attempted to integrate methodologies from the social sciences and humanities. The first component here is a database containing every surviving issue of anarchist newspapers published in Argentina during the period (3246 issues of 87 different publications). For comparative purposes, the database also contains samples from socialist, syndicalist, anti-clerical, and labor union newspapers in Argentina (300 issues of 30 different publications), and samples from anarchist newspapers in Uruguay, Brazil, Cuba, the U.S., Italy, France, and Spain (400 issues of 72 different journals). Each entry contains fifty-two fields of information summarizing the thematic content of the newspaper issue. The second methodological component examines the entire text of an item. For this, I scanned or filmed thousands of newspapers, pamphlets, plays, and songs with the intent of transferring these images into digital text. But the OCR (optical character recognition) programs accurately recognize only about half of the text in these old and cheaply-produced anarchist broadsides and periodicals. Because so much of the text had to be re-typed, I included all of the songs and settled for newspaper samples representative of different ideological tendencies and periods. The Argentine

“mainstream” press was used in a traditional way, browsing through the newspapers for articles on anarchism and related issues.

This attempt to integrate hermeneutics and cliometrics may appear as quixotic as the anarchists’ effort to fuse the ideological opposites mentioned above. It probably has even more limitations, which I will discuss as I use the method. But, other than the laboriousness of the process, I cannot find any drawback in it. It broadens and deepens exegesis by expanding the documentary base and diminishing the need to select material on its presumed significance. It can turn deconstruction from an a priori theoretical stance into an inductive method by systematically capturing intended and unintended polarities, subtexts, and meaningful silences rather than mere omissions. It adds methodological muscle to semiotics by revealing discursive molds and trends that are not always apparent to the naked eye. For example, the so-called “women’s issue” appeared to be a constant concern of all leftist groups. But the combined use of the two methods mentioned above revealed important differences and trends. Anarchist newspapers were three times as likely to discuss the issue as their socialist and syndicalist counterparts, four times as likely to discuss it in the front page, and six times as likely to expand the discussion beyond workshop concerns to include domestic and sexual politics. Within anarchism itself, concern with gender inequality tended to diminish during periods of intense labor or insurrectionary activity and to decline with time, as trade unions became a more dominant part of the movement. Using the same combination of methods, I analyze anarchist discourses on liberty, equality, revolution, violence, religion, morality,

science, Darwinism, and other elements of the ideology across time and across ideological lines.

The second element in this study shifts the focus from the formal ideology to the participants themselves. The main question here is: who were the anarchists and in what ways did they differ from other workers in Argentina in general, from socialists and syndicalists in particular, and from their own coreligionists in other centers of libertarian activism in South America and Europe. This section also links to the first by examining the role that the age, sex, class, and nationality of participants played in ideological production and predilections, adding thus a sociological analysis of ideology to the previous text-oriented inquiry. In doing so, it also addresses broad questions regarding the interplay of ideology, class, ethnicity and gender, and the formation of "identity." Back in Europe, anarchism and nationalism were theoretically antithetical. In the multi-national atmosphere of Buenos Aires (or of other New World cities) where different ethnic groups coexisted and competed with each other, such cosmopolitan purity proved difficult to sustain at times and identities became more contested.

The information for this section comes from a prosopographical database of over 9,000 anarchists and other leftist militants active in Argentina during the period culled from police records in Argentina, Italy, Spain, France, and Germany. The material from European archives allowed me to link information about the pre- and post-migratory experiences of the mostly immigrant anarchists. Once the basic database had been constructed, I added information about the individuals in it, and new cases, from all sorts of

qualitative sources, from diplomatic dispatches and newspapers to personal correspondence and diaries. Now the database contains 38 information fields plus a general narrative. I have also constructed another prosopographical set with six variables and close to four thousand cases of anarchists living in Europe from police files in Rome, Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, London, and Hamburg which permits a socio-demographic comparison of anarchists in Buenos Aires and their counterparts in the Old World. The large number of cases and the richness of the information has allowed me to reconstruct veritable biographies of hundreds of people who left very little organized information behind and to uncover patterns in what at first seemed random processes. Together with the material from non-Argentine newspapers, this information also facilitated the examination of the transnational networks anarchists in Buenos Aires formed with their counterparts in Europe and elsewhere in the diasporas. The contemporary police often declared that anarchism had no borders and that only a concerted international approach could halt it. Replacing "halt" with "understand" would make this an unerring admonition. So although this book focuses on the Argentine capital, it also aims to reconstruct the transatlantic world of belle époque anarchism.

The third component of this book studies anarchism as social practice and culture. The first chapter in this section uses two particularly radical unions (the bakers' and stevedores') as case studies to explore from within the functioning of anarchist "societies of resistance." Neither of these two unions—and none that I have found—have kept minutes of their meetings going back to the early 1900s. But I have located two types of alternative sources: sporadic union newspapers and circulars, and the reports of police informers

within the unions. From different perspectives, both sources agree in their portrayal of these unions' meetings as examples of anarchy as chaos rather than utopia. Nobody seemed in charge. Everyone had the right to speak at any time and apparently every single member exercised that right with gusto and ad nauseam. Statutes, rules of assembly, membership fees, directive commissions, and at times even elections, were denounced as authoritarian practices, examples of the bourgeois penchant for regimentation. And yet these two unions mustered the organizational puissance to win most of their conflicts with employers and to lead several general strikes that paralyzed the country. Employing the sources mentioned above and drawing insights from institutional history and theories of management, I try to explain how organizations with an anti-bureaucratic culture and without clear hierarchies and bylaws could achieve such success. This chapter also compares the anarchist's praxis and role in the labor movement with those of socialists, syndicalists, and Catholics.

The next chapter reconstructs the urban ecology of the movement. By locating the union halls, clubs, and homes of thousands of anarchists in Buenos Aires I have shown that the movement was not spread fortuitously among the working-class districts of the city. It concentrated in certain quarters, not necessarily poorer or richer than the others, where popular culture was particularly dense and developed. Not surprisingly, the geography of anarchism and the tango coincided. And its Buenos Airean enclaves resembled, in their working-class cosmopolitanism, anarchist foci elsewhere such as Paris' Montmartre and Belleville, London's Soho, and New York's East Village.

The next two chapters extend this examination of public space by focusing on various

forms of sociability. One examines rallies and parades. In particular, it traces the evolution of May Day from its inconspicuous inception in 1890 to the bloody eruptions of 1909 and 1910. The latter demonstrations offer an opportunity to examine not only anarchist street rituals and violence but also police repression, right wing vigilantism, and the role of xenophobia and anti-Semitism insofar as counterrevolutionary vandalism was particularly directed against Catalans and Jews. The other chapter focuses on gathering places (neighborhood cafes, union halls, plazas, parks and picnics) and soirees that included speeches, debates, plays, poetry declamation, and singing and dancing. To study this more systematically, I have created a database that records all the meetings and gatherings taking place during a period of three non-consecutive years. It includes information about the types of activities, the organizing group and its ideology, the particular speakers, and the size and approximate gender composition of the audience. It also contains the titles of the 340 plays performed, whether they were dramas or comedies, written by renowned playwrights (Ibsen and Mirbeau dominate this category) or unknown amateurs, and how often they were staged.

Because so many of the authors were obscure workers who could not afford to publish the plays, I have been able to locate only 29 of the lesser-known titles. Nonetheless, these, along with the “revolutionary” songs and poems that I have collected, offer appropriate material for the next chapter on the literary elements of the movement and its artistic metaphors and lingo. A series of bi-weekly magazines, which include more than a thousand plays and comedies, allowed me to compare anarchist theater with its popular commercial competition. The next chapter extends the aesthetic query to the graphic and

plastic arts examining illustrations, cartoons, posters, theater stages, graffiti, and banners. Together with the previous one, it also probes into the uneasy relationship between “ouvrierisme” (which accentuated the working-class nature of the movement and asserted proletarian pride and autonomy) and anarchism’s avant-garde and bohemian elements.

The next chapter changes shifts as it explores external attitudes, how society in general and various sectors in particular imaged anarchism and anarchists. To address this I have read Argentine mainstream newspapers and magazines, those published by various political groups (liberals, Catholics, and nationalists) and by the principal immigrant communities (Italians, Spaniards, the French, and the English). I have also perused the private correspondence of members of the Argentine elite to find intimate, unguarded opinions and compare them to the official rhetoric. To learn how outsiders viewed the anarchist movement in Argentina, I have checked diplomatic dispatches at Washington, Paris, London, Madrid, Rome, and Rio de Janeiro. These dispatches also provide one of the few sources of information contemporaneous with the events for periods when anarchist uprisings led to the imposition of state of siege in Argentina. In Berlin's Staatsbibliothek Preussischer I found a rarer collection: over 2,000 pieces of Argentine ephemera compiled by a German anthropologist who taught at La Plata from the 1890s to the early 1920s. These broadsides, potboilers, novelettes, poems, and songs--which appear only sporadically in Argentine libraries because they were considered too trivial to be worth preserving--provide an invaluable source to examine the degree to which, and how, anarchist concepts became embedded in popular art and entertainment. Similarly, a collection of about 1,000 early-twentieth-century jokes sent by readers to contests held by Buenos Aires' illustrated

magazines, has allowed me a rare chance to analyze representations of anarchism in popular humor.

The last chapter is a sort of human epilogue. Instead of describing latter developments in anarchism it tells about the future of the anarchists. During the first decade of the twentieth century the Argentine government expelled about 300 “subversives” from the country. Using the reports of consular agents, informers, the secret police, and some correspondence and memoirs from the anarchists themselves, I was able to trace the story of 160 of them, in many cases almost until the end of their lives. All these people had something in common at the beginning of the narrative besides their ideology: they were deported from their host country. One can say, almost literally, that they were all in the same boat. But they ended up in many different places—both physically and symbolically. This chapter tells of their lives and tribulations pondering along the way about ideological identity, human agency, historical contingency, and the existence of an anarchist psychology or sensibility.