

do make think: anarchy and culture.

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hello. i'm sandra jeppesen and i'm an anarchist. i'm also a writer and an academic. this three-pronged focus in my own life got me thinking that a lot of what anarchist culture is about can be broken down into one of these three groupings: do (anarchist action) make (anarchist texts) and think (anarchist theory).

david graeber's article "The New Anarchists" identifies a "gulf between intellectuals and activists" (61) or in my simplistic formulation, between thinking and doing, or theory and practice. and while i think he may be correct in this observation—a lot of on-the-ground anarchist activity is overlooked by academics, and conversely, a lot of good thinking and ideas can be missed by the anti-academic attitude of some anarchists—this old binary is perhaps less useful than it perhaps once was in talking about political movements, and in particular the contemporary north american anarchist movement.

rather than a binary, i'd like to use a trilogy—do / make / think—and spend the time *thinking* or theorizing the relationship between the things we do as anarchists (our actions, events and collectives where we build what van eigem called "the revolution of everyday life") and the things we make (including zines, books, comics, art, videos, etc.). i'd also like to be somewhat self-reflexive and as well investigate the relationship between these two things and how we think about them. we may see that this trilogy comes with its own set of inadequacies, and that it explodes into a much more complex rhizomatic network (deleuze and guattari) with many decentralized nodes of culture and cultural production.

in starting to theorize the ways in which anarchist texts (primarily books, but also videos, art, zines, film, etc.) are put into circulation and accomplish certain cultural work, pierre bourdieu's book *The Field of Cultural Production* is useful, particularly because he talks about the 'disavowal of the economic', which is a large part of anarchist anti-capitalist social culture. bourdieu suggests that there are certain genres or forms, established groupings of texts that he calls "the space of positions" (30) within the field of literary production, and that writers or writing movements open up "the space of the position-takings in which they are expressed" (30). in terms of anarchist culture, the 'space of

positions' is somewhat different than that of mainstream or even radical left non-anarchist culture. in simple terms we can see this in the anarchist text of choice: the zine. of course not all zines are anarchist, and not all anarchists who make stuff make zines. but there are lots of anarchist zines out there, like *Harbinger*, *North-Eastern Anarchist*, *Green Anarchy*, *Arsenal*, *EVAH*, etc.. the zine producers are creating 'possible spaces of position-takings' both within anarchist culture, but also in a relationship of cultural absence to mainstream culture. what does this mean? zine producers appear in anarchist culture, a culture that has no real permanent space of its own, and is rather what the arsenal collective calls "a perpetual absence of anarchist culture" (*Arsenal* 1, p4). there are few permanent cultural institutions that regulate our daily lives, such as free schools, free universities, workers co-ops, movie theatres, etc., so as anarchists we grow up and live surrounded by and implicated in other institutions: catholic schools, mcjobs, hollywood movies, name brands, big box stores, fast food, censorship, etc., all of which replicate and transmit relations of domination (including patriarchy, capitalism, racism, heterosexism, consumerism, etc). in direct contrast to these types of relationships, anarchist zinesters appear in spaces like anarchist bookfairs or distros, or at tables at political events; for the most part the zines are produced in small numbers by the person who sells them, and they are distributed hand to hand. the person or people who produced the zine gives it or sells it for a nominal amount to another person, talking to them about what's in the zine, what kinds of actions they've each done, how they live their lives, as well as sharing other personal information. through this conversation, the person receiving and consuming the zine develops a kind of relationship to the cultural artefact that includes knowledge of the person who produced it, and is not strictly mediated by an economic exchange, or a one-way exchange. zines are often traded too, circulating in the gift economy (Van Eigem 75-82), so that economics is removed entirely from the picture. instead cultural activity, as it is represented in the zines, is put into circulation in a non-alienated way which in turn forms part of anarchist culture. the position-taking of the audience becomes much more important in anarchist culture than it is in avant-garde literary culture.

a zine like *Elaho Valley Anarchist Horde: A Journal of Sasquatchology* (*EVAH*), to take an example, was produced after two years of anti-logging actions in the Elaho Valley near Squamish BC. i was part of this group for several weeks,

so i'm talking about it as at least a partial insider, and i think that this is a critical fact that enables me to theorize the zine accurately (i'll talk about more about this when i get to the concept of legitimization). the zine was produced collectively by members of the 'horde' who were in vancouver after the actions closed down for the winter. it contains articles on: the importance of preserving old-growth forests and their ecosystems, indigenous sovereignty, wilderness skills, herbal remedies, direct action and monkey wrenching, security culture, how to deal with the rcmp, as well as situationist and anarchist philosophy, clippings from newspaper articles, original artwork and one or two poems.

the zine is anti-copyrighted, photocopied for free whenever possible, and circulated by passing it from person to person. horde members sell it at tables at various bookfairs, including last year's montreal anarchist bookfair. an excerpt was published in *Broken Pencil* magazine (issue 17), and a subsequent letter from the horde was published (as well as an article that i wrote about the politics of accountability in independent media reporting on other independent media). the zine is also available by mail order from black cat distro.

the position-taking of the EVAH collective then is articulated both through the zine's content (for example in the horde's demand for the return of all unceded indigenous land, as opposed to the liberal environmentalists who want to make the elaho valley into a nature park), through its aesthetic, which is avant-garde as well as working within both zine culture and indie book publishing aesthetics, and also through the way the zine (and the horde) gets put into circulation at bookfairs, anarchist events and through an anarchist mail-order distro. its position-taking is further articulated via articles about it in indie media, as it is juxtaposed to other zines in the field of zine production, and its politics are articulated through its similarities to and differences from other zines, anarchist or otherwise.

fundamental to the circulation of anarchist zines is the building of relationships of trust, rather than relationships of economics. pierre bourdieu, in *The Field of Cultural Production*, looks at the way culture enters the field of production through an analysis of the avant-garde literary and art movement. he develops the concept of symbolic or cultural capital that results in a field or universe in which money is not the most important factor in the creation and exchange of goods. he calls this the *disavowal of the economic*: it is "this economic

universe, whose very functioning is defined by a 'refusal' of the 'commercial' which is in fact a collective disavowal of commercial interests and profits," (75) that was espoused by the avant-garde in the late nineteenth century in France, that also is the basis of anarchist cultural production and circulation. Anarchists are not interested in profit, indeed they are explicitly anti-capitalist. Producers of texts like the *Drunken Boat* anthology, various zines and comix, such as Fly's *Fuck the Shut Up*, videos like the Earth Liberation Front's (ELF) *Igniting the Revolution*, or the *Drawing Resistance* traveling art exhibition (which opened in Edmonton the weekend of the conference), are more interested in getting their ideas and art into circulation, among other anarchists, and also sometimes among the more mainstream left, than they are in making money. They produce texts for other textual producers to a certain extent, not art for art's sake, nor what Bourdieu calls "producing for the producers", but rather art or writing about anarchism that is meant to be consumed by other people with anarchist tendencies or interests. In Bourdieu, it is the shared connection of avant-garde artistic or literary production that makes the connection among artists and writers, so that the audience is other like-minded cultural producers, whereas in anarchy it is the shared connection of a political direction or way of life that makes the connection among anarchists and revolutionaries, through texts about revolution or other kinds of insurrectionary movements. This connection is nonetheless, still based on the disavowal of the economic.

The avant-garde, Bourdieu argues, simultaneous to their disavowal of the accumulation of economic capital, were accumulating cultural or symbolic capital. "Symbolic capital," he writes, "is to be understood as economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a 'credit' which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees 'economic' profits" (75). Symbolic capital, or cultural capital, works differently in anarchist circles, although the principle is still there, I would argue. Symbolic capital is not accumulated in the literary field, but rather in the anarchist milieu. Zines such as *EVAH* become well known not because of challenges they issue to literary traditions (although they do that as well, in terms of format, content, collective production, etc and with a great deal of aesthetic and publishing expertise), but rather because of challenges they offer to the state, to capitalism, to sexism, to environmental destruction, as well as to the reformist green left, and

also—and this is an important distinction—through their documentation of the effectiveness of their anti-logging actions, their knowledge of the issues and their commitment to the project.

in this case, we can see how the accumulation of symbolic capital is therefore based not just on the ‘making’ of the zine, but also on the ‘doing’ of the collective or horde that produced it.

bourdieu states that the accumulation of symbolic capital by the literary avant-garde requires “a practical mastery of the laws of the functioning of the field in which cultural goods are produced and circulate” (76). in anarchist culture, however, the disavowal of the economic is a way of life rather than an approach to or negation of the culture industry. relationships are forged on trust and shared actions, and these actions are then shared through zines, which are then passed along in ways that foster further trust and further collective action.

the legitimacy of the text as an anarchist text then, is not based on the writers or producers proving that they are textually avant-garde, rather it is based on the actions behind the writing, about which the text has been produced. the doing and the making are inextricably linked here: there would be no text without action, and i would further argue that there can be no text or action without the ideas, thinking and theorizing that came before the actions, or that developed simultaneously with the actions. in the case of the *EVAH* zine, for example, a radical analysis of indigenous sovereignty rights was important to the horde, and was much discussed during action preparations. it appears in a graphic on the cover of the zine that reads, “no justice on stolen land,” it is crucial in their action communiques, and an excerpted article written by indigenous sovereigntist gord hill is reproduced in their zine. although this article informs the horde’s understanding of indigenous sovereignty, the discussions during the action, and other texts various members of the horde were reading or had read previous to the action are not represented in the zine, although they were critical to the horde’s collective understanding and motivation of the action, as well as to their production of the zine. the relationship between theory, action and textual production is thus more complex than it may at first seem. but it is clear that the series of actions about which the text is written, and how well-informed they were theoretically, is what gives the text its legitimacy.

the symbolic or cultural capital of the *EVAH* zine, then, is not really as

bourdieu describes it, that is, it is not likely that the *EVAH* zine will one day become worth a lot of money, nor will the symbolic capital of having been a member of *EVAH* ever translate in the long-term into economic capital. rather there is a sense of legitimacy associated with the zine (the cultural position) and the elaho valley anarchist horde (the cultural position-taking), based on their actions and the way in which they both conceive of them beforehand and represent them after the fact, that makes other activists and anarchists take their work seriously.

according to bourdieu, there are “three competing principles of legitimacy. First, there is the specific principle of legitimacy, i.e., the recognition granted by the set of producers who produce for other producers, their competitors, i.e. by the autonomous self-sufficient world of ‘art for art’s sake’, meaning art for artists” (50-1). this translates, rather than anarchist writing for writing’s sake, or for other writers, into anarchist writing for the sake of anarchy, for the sake of other anarchists or leftist anarchist allies.

“Secondly, there is the principle of legitimacy corresponding to ‘bourgeois’ taste and to the consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class and by private tribunals, such as *salons*, or public, state-guaranteed ones, such as academies, which sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant” (51). if we are to understand the space of consecration in anarchist culture to be temporary or semi-permanent autonomous spaces in which anarchist culture is produced, such as black cat cafes (anarchist spoken word events), reclaim the streets (rts), direct actions, anarchist gatherings, etc.—which are mutually exclusive to these public and private spaces controlled by the dominant class—then what consecrates anarchist texts, rather than how avant-garde they are, is how *anarchist* they are. anarchist texts must break with tradition, not just in aesthetic modes, as the avant-garde does, but also in terms of their content, which must be radically politicized, and in terms of their modes of distribution, which must be anti-capitalist to the extent that is possible within an overbearing capitalist state.

a text with a liberal, reformist, or marxist slant to it, is much less likely to be accepted or consecrated by the anarchist milieu, although there are many spaces of overlap, such as the maoist guerrilla hip-hop group dead prez, the Black Panther Party and their radical ten-point program which has been adopted (in

revised form) by anarchist organizations, or the ontario coalition against poverty (OCAP), which does anarchist-like explicitly anti-capitalist direct action casework but has a centralized elected leadership. the writing and actions of groups such as these also tend to be well-known among anarchists, as is the case with the work of many other non-anarchist groups that may even have anarchists organizing within them. in spite of some of their superficial political or ideological differences, there are enough similarities for these groups to be positive anarchist allies, and their cultural artifacts to be at least partially consecrated (although not without critical analysis) in the anarchist milieu. in this sense, we can also start to think about anarchy as a category separate from ideological taxonomies, a category that resists being a bounded category as it were, and see anarchy more as a mode of thinking making and doing things. and also, as a mode of being in the world. the way anarchist texts are consecrated relates to this breakdown, which we are starting to see, of the boundaries produced by this trilogy.

“Finally, there is the principle of legitimacy which its advocates call ‘popular’, i.e. the consecration bestowed by the choice of ordinary consumers, the ‘mass audience’” (bourdieu 51). anarchists are not appealing to any kind of mass audience for the most part, although there is an interesting tension here. anarchist culture, because it can be based in illegal activities, is one of security and trust, so that there is a kind of informal requirement to somehow prove your credentials before you can join an anarchist affinity group. in this sense, certain texts (e.g. ELF’s *Setting Fires with Electrical Timers*) are produced for an audience that is already self-identified as anarchist. in another sense, though, within anarchist organizing there is the recognized need to do outreach to other segments of the population, so that anarchists don’t become a stagnant isolated community. this requires a text to be somewhat different. CrimethInc’s texts such as *Fighting for our Lives* or *Days of War, Nights of Love* are aimed at a more mainstream or ‘mass audience’, trying to rile up regular people enough that they take action and actually make radical (anarchy-styled) transformations in their lives. these texts are produced in much larger numbers and are more widely distributed. they can be seen, at least to a certain extent, as being subject to consecration by a ‘mass audience’. although, to be perfectly clear, they are not books that will show up at a big box book store, nor will they ever appear on any kind of mainstream best-seller list. so even these kind of ‘popular’ anarchist texts are only subject to a

limited mass audience consecration. texts can move from this limited consecration to a wider mass audience as well. *adbusters* is a perfect example of a magazine that had its roots in anarchist-style content, production and distribution, but that has grown beyond those roots (some would say, has sold out) and is now the interesting paradox: a major mainstream anti-media media source. consecration by a mass audience (like we would see with a hollywood film), however, for the most part does not happen with anarchist texts. most modes of anarchist cultural production, which are anti-mass-production, almost preclude the possibility.

the legitimacy to produce anarchist texts, and the source of these three kinds of consecration, lies within anarchist culture, and it comes from several places. one is the producer's lived experience as an anarchist. this may be based on their adherence to certain principles, their anarchist organizing work, their street cred as a punk or freight hopper or shoplifter, or the fact that they live in an anarchist collective house or a squat, are (or were) part of an anarchist collective space, or they've gone to jail for direct action protests. anarchist social culture continually questions and challenges people's politics, and in a way, the anarchist milieu or community is a space in which legitimacy to produce anarchist texts is consecrated (or not) on an on-going basis.

the second place legitimacy may come from is whether the texts an individual produces are accepted as 'authentic' by other anarchists, if they really have something to say that is simultaneously new and original in terms of content or form, and also old and familiar in relation to the lived experience of other anarchists; in this sense the legitimacy criteria is similar to the 'art for artists' that Bourdieu discusses, or anarchist texts for anarchists. the authenticity of an anarchist text, with few exceptions, cannot be determined, therefore, by someone who is not or has not lived within an anarchist milieu. (roughly translated, this is the old "it takes one to know one" principle we all learned in grade school.)

the third place legitimacy may come from is its mode of entering the field of cultural production, with an emphasis on self-produced autonomous texts. a text that is produced by one person or group and then consecrated externally is seen not as more legitimate, as it would be by the mainstream (ie. the publisher bought the manuscript so it must be good), but almost as somehow suspect, as it has entered into the capitalist marketplace. in order to be legitimate, anarchist texts as much as possible should not enter into the capitalist marketplace for they

risk commodification and co-optation, both of the text itself as commodity—someone who did not produce the text is making profit from selling it—and also of the content—the descriptions of anarchist culture contained within the text may also be commodified. for example, after the quebec city anti-FTAA protests, in which anarchist graffiti appeared all over the city, The GAP™ used faux graffiti of the word “denim” in red letters hung with black and red curtains (like faux black flags) in their windows to sell their jeans. obviously the red and black anti-capitalist graffiti and the anarchist black flags were decontextualized from the politics of anarchy (a window begging to be broken). nonetheless, because of the widespread media coverage of the protests, and the appeal of protest to a young target market, shoppers were able to recognize the graffiti, and thus, it is assumed, buy the jeans. the black flag, which in anarchist culture symbolizes the absence of state rule particularly, and any form of domination more generally, has been emptied of its symbolic meaning. in this sense, symbolic capital, as soon as it is converted into economic capital, is emptied of its original meaning as it becomes commodified and decontextualized. but i would argue that there is no feedback loop here from the mainstream into anarchist culture, which is often the problem with commodification—something radical is divested of its power when it is sold back to the consumer with the politics missing. the black flag, however, still has its meaning intact when it is flown in an anarchist milieu, regardless of the stupid way it was used by The GAP™. and anarchists, needless to say, are not suddenly shopping at The GAP™ either.

the *disavowal of the economic* thus works differently in anarchist culture than it does in bourdieu’s analysis of the avant-garde. the accumulation of symbolic capital in anarchist circles facilitates relationships among anarchists, as people’s activities and actions are translated into the production of cultural artefacts (texts). when the symbolic capital is converted to economic capital, it is the very defeat of the symbol, and we are on baudrillardian territory where signs of the real start to stand in for the real itself. signs of the revolution, however, in anarchist culture, can never come to stand in for the revolution itself.

this is not possible. anarchist culture has a built-in defense against this: it greatly privileges action or doing over making and thinking. actions are always considered more important than what is written about them before or after the fact. this emphasis on action can be a double-edged sword. although good actions

are bolstered by good analysis, often a group will not produce a zine such as the elaho valley anarchist horde did. the actions of militant groups are often thus not reported in-depth anywhere. on the positive side, this makes their members less vulnerable to arrest, and makes the actions difficult to co-opt, because their symbolic capital never materializes into a cultural good (do never becomes make). the negative of this built-in defense to co-optation is that there is a missing or hard-to-find history of anarchy and anarchist actions. this applies especially to events that border on the illegal, where innovative techniques for the dissemination of information have to be invented, such as the ELF press office, whereby a press officer receives anonymous communiques after illegal ELF cell actions, and then speaks about them to the press, thus obfuscating the so-called 'crime' trail. be that as it may, the emphasis on effective radical transformative and revolutionary action is a mainstay of anarchist culture, past and present.

anarchist culture is comprised of much more than just do / make / think. it is comprised of the networks of friends and political comrades that form our close circles, our affinity groups, our collectives and organizing groups, all of which are building sustainable revolutionary movements on multiple fronts. it is comprised of an analysis of and resistance to the many types of oppression we struggle against: sexism, heterosexism, imperialism and colonialism, racism, environmental destruction, capitalism, ableism, etc. it is comprised of our political ideas and the way we use them to transform our lives and the lives of others. it is comprised of our personal pasts, our historical pasts, our present, our dreams and visions for the future. it is comprised of the autonomous spaces in which we organize, whether they are permanent or temporary zones, and the events that we organize, from bookfairs to conferences and workshops, teach-ins, street parties, direct action protests, tree sits, radical parenting networks, etc.

there are endless interwoven layers and networks of culture that grow as we interact with each other, that grow around actions and texts and thinking and being and many other nodes in what deleuze and guattari call a *rhizome*. "In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system" (deleuze and guattari 21). while the trilogy do / make / think is useful in starting to theorize the field of anarchist cultural production, the concept of the rhizome will enable this theorizing to travel

a very different path that more closely resembles models of anarchist organizing in its decentered nonhierarchical architecture.

as we build networks of anarchist culture that traverse time and space, that transgress mainstream culture, and that transform our own lives and those of the people around us, it is important to develop this growing awareness of the complexities of anarchist culture, not just in terms of what we do make and think, but also in terms of the international rhizomatic networks of anarchy that are rising up against authority and domination in our everyday lives. radical groups and zines such as EVAH are crucial in the way they accomplish anarchist projects through action, cultural production and developing anarchist theory.

this is how we come to know
 we are actually here
 doing things
 in the world
 with others.

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