Anarchism and Sexuality

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The ways in which questions of sexuality have been taken up by anarchist thinkers and movements are often close to those of other political tendencies, including socialism, Marxism, and even bourgeois libertinism, and many of these different discourses have inspired one another; hence, it is not always easy to differentiate between them. Theoretically, anarchists were from the beginning concerned about the private and domestic sphere in a very specific way, because in their anti-statism, they could not rely on the statist solutions of Marxists and others (crèches, public kitchens, and so on). Also, most anarchists did not believe that consciousness could be transformed by historical changes such as the mass integration of women into the industrial workforce, instead conceptualizing human nature as relatively stable. Therefore, they saw the liberation of sexuality as taking place not within the totality of society but in small local units such as families, communes, or partnerships.

Some anarchists practiced alternatives to conventional sexual institutions, such as Lillian Harman's (1869–1929) "autonomistic marriage" in 1886; however, the total refusal of institutionalized relationships seems to have been the most common answer. In contrast to the often merely rhetorical permissiveness of the 1960s student revolt and others, anarchist advocacy of "free love" often did not include the idea of polygamy or multiple changing sex partners, instead idealizing a stable, loving relationship based on companionship.

ROOTS: SEXUALITY IN THE LABOR AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Anarchists' debates on the social meaning of sexuality are closely linked to if not even originate from two important and highly affinitive branches of social movement of the nineteenth century: the labor movement and the women's movement. Though there certainly were liberal and even utopian thoughts on the liberation of sexuality before (amongst others, Roper 1991), it is not until the early twentieth century that the discourse intensifies from the political and intellectual margins to the center of social debate.

Working-class sexuality, in explicit dichotomy to bourgeois discourses on love, marriage, and sexuality, has been of special interest to social politics from the late nineteenth century on, and later to early psychoanalysts (Freud 191617–17) as well as ethnographers (Rühle 1930). This interest is rooted in a public debate in the aftermath of Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society* (1798), which was itself a conservative rebuttal of William Godwin's proto-anarchist tract, the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Malthusianism, which assumed workers to be more libidinous and less morally reliable, nonetheless came to attract the interest of labor radicals, including anarchists. Poverty, the "neo-Malthusians" argued, was to a large part due to the many children sprung from workers' uncontrolled sex life; for anarchist neo-Malthusians such as Paul Robin (1837–1912), this implied the need for workers to control their sexuality in their own interest, via birth control and contraception – concerns shared with the women's movement – as well as the possibility of eugenics (McLaren 1976: 490–2; also Cleminson 2000a: 35ff., 159ff.).

While many working-class anarchists did not question hierarchy in the family or rethink the role of marriage, anarchist feminists such as Joseph Déjacque (1821–64) did. Research on the impact of early feminism (and of feminism *per se*) on anarchism is – with some few exceptions, such as the Spanish Mujeres Libres – still surprisingly sparse (Gemie 1996). Still, the "sex ques-

tion" (Goldman 1896: 3) was very important to the early activists, among whom one of the most famous probably was Emma Goldman (1869–1940), whose life and works have been subject to countless biographies and studies within the recent decades. Other important thinkers of early anarchist feminism were Lucy Parsons (1853–1942) and Voltairine de Cleyre (1866–1912). In her 1895 lecture, "Sex Slavery," de Cleyre – according to Goldman, "the most gifted and brilliant anarchist woman America ever produced" – encouraged women to alter child socialization practices in order to create "unnatural" gender roles and thereby break up traditional gender hierarchies (Brigati 2004).

Although some historians have claimed that commitment to feminism was intrinsic to anarchism (e.g., Junco 1976: 281–91), many anarchists especially of the early period, such as Proudhon (1857) or Sorel (1906), had rigidly fixed, anti-feminist ideas about the role of women and sexuality (Gemie 1996: 421–8). Sexualities other than the heteronormative did not enter into debate for most anarchists until the second half of the twentieth century; influential anarchist writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries promoting the acceptance of homosexuality, such as John Henry MacKay (1864– 1933), Benedikt Friedländer (1866–1908), or Emma Goldman herself, were in that respect widely ignored (Fähnders 1995), while others, such as Senna Hoy (1882–1914), were openly disdained.

Nonetheless, sexuality played an important role in anarchist imagery during the earlier periods. Lily Litvak (1981), in her exhaustive study of Spanish anarchist propaganda, has shown that the motif of working-class girls being raped by bourgeois men was one of the most popular, as were images of female prostitutes and beggars.

INTELLECTUALS, BOHEMIANS, AND THE RISE OF SEXOLOGY

Thinkers of what might be called the bohemian or intellectual-academic branch of anarchism, who were not actively involved in the labor movement, often had different concerns about sexuality and its role in anarchist theory.

Sexuality had barely begun to emerge as a topic in intellectual debates during the Enlightenment. Still, these were not ideas of liberation or discourses on power and gender hierarchies (Vila 2002). The rise of pornography and arty pornographic prose, most popular in the writings of the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814), might be seen as an indication for a rising intellectuals' interest in matters of deviant sexuality (see Cleminson 2000a: 145–52 for an anarchist reading of de Sade by Karen Goaman and Mo Dodson). But only few, such as early socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837), cast such ideas into political programmatic writings. In his *Nouveau monde amoureux* ("The New World of Love," written ca. 1820, first fully published in 1967), he was one of the first to depict a society totally free from the bonds of marriage, with free love as its main impetus. Fourier was rediscovered in the 1960s by the intellectual anarchists surrounding the "sexual revolution" (Daniel Guérin wrote the preface to the 1977 edition).

From the turn of the twentieth century through the 1920s, Erich Mühsam (1878– 1934) and Freud's renegade disciple Otto Gross (1877–1920) were most prominent advocates of a libertine claim for "free love." Gross idealized the return to a non-hierarchical golden age and, unlike his teacher, rejected the necessity of psychological repression for civilization. Both Gross and Mühsam heartily favored polygamy, in contrast to many contemporary anarchist thinkers, especially those within the labor movement.

Individualist anarchists such as Gross and Mühsam contributed strongly to constructing the image of anarchism as "ostentatious promiscuity" (a term that Mühsam used himself; Linse 1999: 135) in the bourgeois media and public perception. Still, most active anarchists' intellectual movements for the freedom of sexuality were of merely local importance, such as the "Sydney Push," a loose group of bohemian intellectuals who are said to have been an important critical factor in the development of Australian society, especially in the conservative 1950s, but who had actually little impact outside the Sydney area and none overseas (Coombs 1996). In general, it seems that in most cases it was not conservative restriction against libertine dangers that quietened anarchist intellectuals' discourses on freedom in sexuality, but rather that most of these discourses had only a brief life and scarcely infected or conjoined one another, remaining the delicate utopias of marginalized thinkers.

This changed when matters of sexuality, its nature and its functioning in human relationships, namely between the two sexes, gained wider public attention with the rise of its scientific exploration in the first half of the twentieth century. In the aftermath of psychoanalysis, armed with new empirical methods of medical investigation, sexology emerged as a new science, rooted in the works of Austrian and German intellectuals such as Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), who also actively engaged in the homosexual movement (Fähnders 1995), and Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), whose "sexpol" combined Freud with Marx (Johler 2008), and popularized by American liberals such as Alfred Charles Kinsey (1894–1956).

Reich was first to use the term "sexual revolution" programmatically, as the title of the English edition of his *Die Sexualität im Kulturkampf* (1936/1945). It reads mostly as a work of social criticism fighting the double standard of contemporary morals – mainly in the Stalinist Soviet Union – which, he believed, suppresses the vital sexual energies and therefore leads to frustration and aggression. Reich remained concerned about setting rules and environments to frame "free" sexuality. Therefore Paul Goodman (1911–72) has tried to provide a more radical anarchist reading in Reich's footsteps (1977; Stoehr 1994). Though Reich himself insistently dissociated from anarchist movements, he gained a wide readership among members of the anarchist movement such as Daniel Guérin (1904–88), who wrote extensively on matters of sexuality, especially homosexuality, and its oppression in capitalist societies (e.g., Guérin 1969) and took part in contemporary sexology debates (Guérin 1955).

THE "SEXUAL REVOLUTION" OF THE 1960S

Guérin's call for "power to the imagination," referring directly to Fourier's ideas, carried over to what is commonly referred to as the "Sexual Revolution" of the 1960s, when it became a popular saying. Another thinker of great impact on anarchists' debates of the 1960s was Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), who rejected the institutionalized patriarchal concept of the nuclear family. Social analyses such as Max Horkheimer's (1895–1973) and Theodor Adorno's (1903–69), as well as Reich's *Massenpsychologie*, shaped a new awareness for structures and their aggressive extrapolation by means of traditional values ("structural violence").

During the Sexual Revolution, living together without families or hierarchies, in egalitarian communes based on mutual consensus, became increasingly popular among anarchists (as among other leftists). Such anarchist communities date back well before the 1960s. For instance, the Home Colony commune formed near Tacoma, Washington (1895–1919), the Swiss commune

at Ascona (1900–20), and the French milieu libre or anarchist commune of Aiglemont (1903–8), all experimented with practices of free love and naturisme.

Anarchists participated in developing the popular sexology that played an important role in the Sexual Revolution. Among the many best-selling works published these days are the writings of anarchist Alex Comfort (1920–2000), who wrote several studies and pamphlets on sexuality and society analysis (e.g., 1948, 1950), but got most popular with his guidebook *The Joy of Sex* (1972) and its two sequels.

In the later 1970s, with the quieting of political debate and the loosening of censorship, the commercialization of sex expanded, drawing the criticism of the emerging new feminism and feminist studies of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

NEW FEMINISM, THE GAY/LESBIAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT, AND THE "QUEER" DEBATE

Works of "second-wave" feminist theory, from Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), a comprehensive critique of western society's patriarchy as mirrored in its literature, to Andrea Dworkin's *Intercourse* (1987), which argues that heterosexual intercourse as depicted and normalized in mainstream culture is consistently thought in terms of penetration, invasiveness, and – eventually – violence, have inspired a multitude of anarchist feminists to reconsider sexuality. Dworkin, a writer who temporarily claimed a certain nearness to anarchist ideas, argues that male-centric experiences of intercourse as the penetration and occupation of a woman's body help to consolidate the subordination of women in a male-centric, and ultimately sexist, society.

A third wave in feminist theory, typified by the works of academics such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler and drawing heavily on the ideas of Michel Foucault's ground-breaking *Histoire de la sexualité* (unfinished, 3 vols., 1976–84; English translation, 1978ff.), gave birth to a new discourse on sexuality, "queer theory," which has also entered into anarchist debates. Rooted mainly in the gay and lesbian movement, and perhaps foreshadowed by Hirschfeld's much earlier attempts to overcome the dichotomy of the two sexes, queer theory emphasizes the blurriness and fluidity of interpretations and identities. Culturally constructed identities of sexuality, queer theorists argue, keep the process of exclusion, labeling, and making characters within the violence of hierarchies and different levels of domination between people running. In this respect, the affinity of queer theory to anarchist discourse is evident, since the imposition of paradigms of "normal" sexuality or the restriction of sexual practices by means of power stand in opposition not only to queer thinking, but also to anarchist convictions.

More recently, however, Jamie Heckert (2004, 2005) has criticized the concept of "queer" identity and its role in identity politics from an anarchist standpoint, seeking to overcome its still inherent exclusivity. Sexual orientation identity, he suggests, in terms drawn from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, can be understood in terms of the "stateform," in which certain "nomadic" sexualities are systematically rendered incomprehensible or deviant. Similarly, Daniel Colson has argued that for anarchism, sexuality is not a "first principle" but a "resultant," merely one existential "force" among others that is subjected to constraint, and that a genuinely radical anarchism would seek neither to express nor repress this force, but to "invent new bodies in which the forces constitutive of that which is conventionally called sexuality would change in meaning and quality … within other *arrangements*, other *associations*" (2001: 301–2).

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