

Anarchism and the Body

Michelle Campbell

August 21, 2018

“The question of souls is old—we demand our bodies, now”
Voltairine de Cleyre,[1914] (2016)

This special edition has its origin story in a conference held at Purdue University in the summer of 2015. Scholarly anarchism still retains a healthy DIY culture, and when I decided many months before that I wanted to get a group of scholars and activists together to talk about anarchism and bodies, all it took was a community and an intellectual hunger. Before I had gotten up the gall to organize a whole conference, I had long wondered: where is the body in our anarchist theory?, how do we account for it?, and how does it figure into our praxis? A motley crew of activists and academics, many of whom consider themselves both, arrived in the heat of the Indiana summer ready to engage in both theory and praxis. The conference program was diverse both in content and approaches. Panels consisted of papers centered on structures of domination and liberation; anarchist publications and cultural artifacts; the laboring body and class organizing; “troubled” reproductions; art, anarchism, and literature; street actions and imprisonment; anarchism and modern humanity; and anarchist theology. There were also roundtables and workshops on anarchist pedagogy, surveillance security, and bodily health and safety during militant actions. I can honestly say I have never attended a conference where, in the same afternoon, I learned about nineteenth-century South American free love, and then I learned how to wash chemical deterrents out of eyes during a street action. Nor have I ever been to a conference—or anywhere, really—where a woman felt comfortable enough to breastfeed her child during the middle of her talk without skipping a beat. It was a rupture in time and space that we all needed.

I went into organizing this conference with the knowledge that very few contemporary anarchist scholars connect anarchism and the body except through sexuality or sexual experience, often through the domain of gender studies. Although my own research is grounded in gender studies, I wondered what I was missing by viewing the body only through that particular lens, especially as an anarchist scholar. Do contemporary anarchist scholars examine the possibilities of our minds? Yes. The ethics of our souls? Certainly. I wondered: what weren’t we saying about the bodies we lived in and through? How do anarchist activists, theorists, and educators think, act, and exist bodily with themselves and with others? The original call for papers illustrates some of these concerns: “This conference seeks to be the first of its kind that is dedicated to questions of anarchism in conjunction with questions about the body conceived of as real, social, perceived, constructed, or institutionalized. [...] We encourage innovative papers that engage with multiple aspects of anarchism intersecting with multiple disciplines and fields.”

We were certainly not the first to wonder or write on these questions. Classical anarchist feminists like Voltairine de Cleyre and Emma Goldman linked the female body to patriarchal and state domination through labor and marriage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In her essay “Sex Slavery,” de Cleyre writes, “Let Woman ask herself, “Why am I the slave of Man? Why is my brain said not to be the equal of his brain? Why is my work not paid equally with his? Why must my body be controlled by my husband?” (2016: 348–9). Indeed, for de Cleyre, the domination of the mind and the body are of equal importance: “These two things, the mind domination of the Church, and the body domination of the State are the causes of sex slavery” (2016: 352). Likewise, Emma Goldman links marriage and capitalism in her essay, “Marriage and Love” because they are both institutions that poison the body (1910: 241). Similarly, in her definitive essay “Anarchism: What It Stands For,” Goldman explains, “Real wealth consists in things of utility and beauty, in things that help to create strong, beautiful bodies and surroundings inspiring

to live in” (1910: 61). For both de Cleyre and Goldman, consideration of the physical body was not only foundational to their anarchist critiques of domination, but it was also integral to their visions of successful liberation.

Over one hundred years since the time of de Cleyre and Goldman, most contemporary anarchist theorists today connect anarchism and the body through sexuality. Jamie Heckert (2011), in “Sexuality as a State Form,” explores the intersection between queer anarchism and poststructuralist articulations of power and biopolitics. Heckert both critiques and explores the ways in which representation, particularly of the body or its performativity, can enact violence through speaking for an individual rather than allowing the individual to speak for themselves. In her article “Constructing Anarchist Sexuality: Queer Identity, Culture, and Politics in the Anarchist Movement,” Laura Portwood-Stacer (2010) uses interviews with contemporary North American Anarchists to explore how queer critiques are used within anarchist circles and communities. Her goal is to invest in an authentic identity that resists dominant sexual norms as a strategy for anarchist political projects. From her ethnographic evidence, Portwood-Stacer concludes that there are several pitfalls in attempting to create a queer anarchonormativity. The author also concludes that sexual identity politics, when performed collectively, are a useful tool for fighting against social norms. However, the power used to enforce such a sexuality within anarchist communities needs to be wielded in a way that “maximize[s] those effect[s] that contribute to emancipatory political projects, and minimize those that do not” (2010: 491).

Anarchism and sexuality can also be about refusing to participate in hegemonic structures of domination or engaging in participatory actions that subvert or undermine those same structures. Breanne Fahs in her article “Radical Refusals: On the Anarchist Politics of Women Choosing Asexuality” (2010) suggests that asexuality has been a lifestyle and political maneuver for sexual and gender equality that has long been forgotten. She reviews the history of the “sexual liberation” of women during second-wave feminism in order to detail the problems of both sexual repression and sexual “freedom” in a system of state and patriarchal control. Fahs argues that sexually liberated women are still participating in a system of repression when engaging in acts with multiple partners and sex without consequences because women are expected to be sexual. This expectation strips women of the agency to decide their own sexual wants and needs. Fahs argues that asexuality may be helpful “to dismantle the entire institution of sex” (2010: 451). By refusing to participate in any sexual activity, Fahs explains, women are able to rob the institution of its power over bodies and relationships. In “Post-Anarchism and the Contrasexual,” Lena Eckert (2011) connects the metaphor of the dildo from Beatriz Preciado’s *Contrasexual Manifesto* with that of Haraway’s cyborg. Eckert explains that the dildo is effective in undermining “hegemonic structures of desire, pleasure and bodies when applied as a subversive quotation. Quoting or mapping the dildo on any body part (or the entirety of the body) means to question the body as a sexual contest; it questions the possibility of framing or defining the context” (2011: 81).

A notable exception to the scholarship linking anarchism and sexuality is Richard Cleminson’s “Making Sense of the Body: Anarchism, Nudism and Subjective Experience” (2004). For early twentieth Spanish anarchists in particular, Cleminson argues, “the body [...] and the social relations that emanated from it and around it, came to be a material resource as well as a discursive device on which anarchists bestowed significations that allowed them to denounce capitalist social relations” (2004: 715). For these anarchists, the body and its experiential processes were deeply ingrained in their political becoming. These influential essays began the conversation

about what anarchist scholarship can bring to bear on the question of the body. This special edition aims to continue and complicate that conversation.

Two essays included in this special edition, which were original to the “Anarchism and the Body” Conference, expand our understanding of the gendered and the geographical body, moving away from a white North American or Western European understanding of anarchism and the body. Benjamin H. Abbot’s “‘That Monster Cannot Be a Woman’: Queerness and Treason in the Partido Liberal Mexicano” and Mariel M. Acosta Matos’s “Graphic Representations of Grammatical Gender in Spanish Language Anarchist Publications” are new voices in the study of anarchism and the body. For Abbot, an important part of recovering anarchist history is to show the ways in which anarchist narratives both reinforced and complicated gender roles in the early nineteenth century Mexico. Ey examines the ways in which this played out in Ricardo Flores Magón’s Partido Liberal Mexicano (the Mexican Liberal Party), the first coordinated movement against the Mexican dictator, Porfirio Díaz, especially through the gendered rhetoric used in dissident newspaper *Regeneración*, a publication Magón wrote for while jailed. Along the same lines, Acosta investigates what she has coined as “Graphic Alternatives to Grammatical Gender,” or “GAGG” in Spanish language anarchist publications in the last fifty years. Through a linguistic and rhetorical study, Acosta finds numerous graphic representations that both subvert and reject linguistic sexism that has encoded gender norms into orthography. Not only are textual artifacts important for our study of the history of anarchism and the body, but they can also help to shape the possibilities of our future through suggesting possibilities of becoming.

Lewis Call’s “‘A Thought Thinking Itself’: Postanarchism in Grant Morrison’s *The Invisibles*” is an important analysis of the ways in which a text can both exemplify and influence postanarchism through subversion, fragmentation, the imaginary, and the symbolic. Call’s emphasis on the visual imaginary to resist the symbolic as well as the fragmentation of subjectivity to recuperate the Symbolic serves to illustrate the ways in which literary and graphic representations (or subversions thereof) can create a roadmap for thinking anarchistically about bodies, their performativity, and their elusiveness.

Bodily inquiry doesn’t need to stay in the realm of feminism and gender studies; the final two papers are a few steps away from that stricture. Jesse Cohn’s translations of “Christopher’s” “The Affective Bases of Domination” and Daniel Colson’s “Proudhon, Lacan, et les points de capiton” help point us in a different, more theoretical direction. “Christopher” argues for a libertarian pedagogy that incorporates emotional education in order to heal the fragmentation of mind and body. Such a pedagogy, he explains, can serve to help subvert systems of domination while taking into account both psychoanalytic thought and contemporary neurobiological research. This affective treatment would enable individuals to resist hegemonic ideology and affirm the basic tenets of an anarchist communist community through an “interdependent individuality” grounded in empathy. The second translated work was written by Daniel Colson. It brings the Lacanian concept of *les points de capiton* (quilting points) to bear on Proudhonian interpretations of the individual. In his introduction to the Colson translation, Jesse Cohn aptly describes the result of Colson’s essay as revealing a Proudhon who “in fact launches a pluralistic assault on all the utopias that aim to reduce human diversity to a single normative image, an inevitably despotic ‘Absolute.’” Colson’s argument will hopefully renew interest in Proudhon as an important theorist from whom we still have much to learn.

This special edition of *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* serves, I hope, as a beginning for anarchist and radical scholars to continue to reach beyond or build on an already estab-

lished body of work. Much work remains to be done not only to work through, postulate, and discover/recover anarchist accounts of the body, but to use methodologies and theories particular to anarchist studies that can help us consider bodily difference, its artefactual representations, and possibilities for future (in)habitation.

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Michelle M. Campbell is a doctoral candidate in nineteenth-century American literature at Purdue University. Her dissertation examines nineteenth-century Midwestern Anarchist women writers, including Lucy Parsons, Voltairine de Cleyre, Lizzie Swank Holmes, and Lois Waisbrooker. Her scholarship can be found in *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, *MidAmerica*, and the introduction to Lizzie Swank Holme's recovered 1893 anarchist-feminist novel *Hagar Lyndon: Or, A Woman's Rebellion*, which is forthcoming in 2018 from Hastings College Press.

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Originally published in the 2018 issue of Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies. The full
issue is available here: <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/adcs/issue/view/1267>

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