

Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism

CONTEMPORARY ANARCHIST STUDIES

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Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism

Laura Portwood-Stacer

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*This book is dedicated to my parents,
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1

Introduction

In March of 2009, I had a long conversation with a young woman named Raychel,¹ a college student and self-identified anarchist. We had met a few weeks previously, at an “anarcha-feminist picnic” in Los Angeles, which she had helped organize. I asked her to meet with me one-on-one for a chat, and we sat down together in a coffee house near her communal home in Long Beach. She rode her bicycle there; she consciously decided not to own a car, a notable choice in Southern California. She sported a short, asymmetrical haircut, had her septum pierced, and wore large plugs in her stretched earlobes. Raychel had spent her adolescence in the Orange County punk scene, and had recently become involved with militant animal rights organizing. We talked for almost 2 hours about her experiences doing activism for anarchist, feminist, vegan, and “genderqueer” causes, and how she tried to integrate her radical politics into her everyday life. Toward the end of our conversation, she commented:

... it gets abstract sometimes, because it's like, where do I attack it, where do I attack patriarchy, where do I attack capitalism? And that's why I think lifestylism is so important, cuz I think that you do attack it by being vegan, or by not buying from Walmart, or not being subjected by the beauty standards. Like, by building those alternative communities and alternative infrastructure, we're not paying attention to them, so we're not demanding anything from them.

Raychel seemed to evince a faith in the power of individual choices to make a difference in political realities. She felt she had a responsibility to resist oppressive forces in her daily life, and she also felt she could empower herself and her peers by refusing to engage with the cultural practices engendered by patriarchy and capitalism.

As an anarchist, Raychel's critique of existing power structures is far-reaching, and separates her from the mainstream in the contemporary United

States. Anarchism is a *radical* political philosophy, meaning that its vision for an ideal society involves a drastic restructuring of the fundamental institutions of power, including but not limited to an overturning of capitalism and the state. Yet, anarchists like Raychel have something important in common with more mainstream citizens—the cherished belief that “one person can make a difference” in the pursuit of a better society. When individuals who desire social or political change are compelled to shape their own personal behaviors and choices toward the ideals they envision, this is known as *lifestyle politics*. While the stakes of each specific episode of activism may be low, the moments of confrontation are multiplied for radical lifestyle activists because every minute decision one makes is implicated in a fight for a new society. The way one dresses, the food one eats, even the people one chooses to have sex with, can become overtly political acts. Radical lifestyle politics reconfigures the everyday life of the individual into an ongoing struggle against domination.

Writing in the 1970s, anarchist ecologist Murray Bookchin (1979: 265) argued:

. . . the revolutionary movement is profoundly concerned with lifestyle. It must try to live the revolution in all its totality, not only participate in it. It must be deeply concerned with the way the revolutionist lives, his relations with the surrounding environment, and his degree of self-emancipation.

Like the counterculturalists with whom he was in dialogue, Bookchin felt that activists had a responsibility both to live according to their political ideals and to visibly demonstrate the viability of radically different ways of life. With this view, he implicitly subscribed to the feminist adage that “the personal is political” (Evans 1979). Four decades later, this principle has become a truism of contemporary citizenship, and not just for self-identified revolutionaries. It’s the premise upon which corporations are able to market “ethical” products to consumers and people regularly include their political beliefs in their personal profiles on online social networks. A cultural study of the practices and discourses of lifestyle-based activism (what Raychel called “lifestylism”) can thus illuminate what it means to do politics and to be political today. This book asks, what are the effects of this kind of lifestyle politics? What does it really mean that people are trying to do politics in this way, and what are they accomplishing through their efforts?

I argue that some of the most significant “effects” of lifestyle activism are personal and cultural, and may not be recognizable within narrow understandings of the political. The many personal and cultural needs served by lifestyle politics within contemporary society mean that this form of activism cannot be dismissed as simply ineffective for radical movements. Lifestyle is a major site for the constitution of identity and

community among anarchist activists. Shared ways of life bring together diffuse collections of political subjects, and symbolically represent them as a unified movement seeking changes in existing political conditions. The lifestyle practices of contemporary anarchists are also meaningful in so far as they materially enact (or violate) anarchic social relations. Lifestyles may reinforce boundaries between radicals and non-radicals, and among radical activists themselves. The effects of anarchists' ways of life are multifaceted and at times contradictory. A lifestyle practice like veganism may shore up an individual's sense of moral integrity, but it may also be easily co-opted by a capitalist consumer market. A uniquely anarchist style of dress may foster an internal sense of community within the movement, but may also alienate outsiders. A sexual arrangement like polyamory may provide an alternative to state-sponsored monogamous marriage, but it may also prove emotionally daunting for the individuals involved. Even using the term "anarchist" to refer to oneself may prove to be confusing, even while it is simultaneously empowering. These contradictory outcomes suggest that lifestyle activism cannot be fully successful at achieving all the goals that radicals might hold.

While one response to this failure might be to reject lifestyle politics altogether (as some critics have done),² a more practical move for activists is to embrace an attitude of trial and error in which outcomes are understood to be context dependent. Any strategic assessment of lifestyle tactics must take into account the range of its potential functions. Assessments must also examine the conditions under which different effects are likely to be realized, and for whom. What is at stake is an understanding of how to effect political change, and how the effects activists sometimes imagine may be more or less achieved, or may be counteracted by effects they haven't quite stopped to think about yet. The question is not, "Is lifestyle an effective site for radical political activism?" Rather, this book offers answers to the questions, "what kinds of political acts are possible within the sphere of lifestyle?" and "how do particular conditions enable lifestyle activism to be effective in those ways?"

A through line in each of the cases presented in this book is the communicative dimension of all political lifestyle practices. Lifestyle activism is premised, both explicitly and implicitly, on the performative and propagandistic effects of its practices. Sociologist Alberto Melucci (1985: 812) suggests that practitioners of cultural resistance are themselves a form of "new media," who, through their activities, "enlighten what every system doesn't say of itself, the amount of silence, violence, irrationality, which is always hidden in dominant codes." Melucci goes on to say that, "through what they do, or rather through how they do it, movements announce to society that something 'else' is possible." This book examines how, and under what conditions, radical activists are able to make their lifestyles into communicative performances that effectively make the kind of "announcement" that Melucci suggests.

A life that is completely free from hierarchical power relations is impossible to achieve within contemporary material and ideological conditions—no individual can achieve anarchist purity. Despite this, the individuals discussed in this book still *try* to make their everyday lives congruent with their utopian political ideals. Here, I describe their attempts, in order to understand what they *do* accomplish, and how this might guide other ongoing struggles to make a better world. This book also reveals the intense labor of trying to “live one’s politics,” especially when those politics are oppositional to the status quo. Although I take a critical approach to radical activists’ use of lifestyle politics, this critique should be understood as a way of “caring for and even renewing the object in question” (Brown 2005: x). I approach this project from a position of sympathy and solidarity with radical activists. While I do not personally self-identify as an anarchist, I take anarchism seriously as a political philosophy, and feel it has much to offer in the way of alternatives to hierarchical distributions of power.³

Definitions: Lifestyle, lifestyle politics, lifestyle activism, and lifestyleism

Lifestyle is a set of routine choices an individual makes about practices as various as dress, diet, housing, leisure activities, and more (Weber 1978).⁴ These lifestyle choices signify who people are and who they want to be (Featherstone 1987). For instance, participants in “ethical consumption” communicate through their choices that they are environmentally conscious or sensitive to social justice issues.⁵ Lifestyle also extends beyond consumption activities to the language one uses, the choices one makes about marriage and family, the career path one pursues, and so on. These are all elements of what sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991: 5) has called the “reflexive project of the self” which arises when individuals attempt to create coherent narratives of their lives while choosing from what lifestyle scholar Sam Binkley (2007a: 116) describes as the “overwhelming range of options” made available to them in consumer societies.

Lifestyle choices that depart from the mainstream are particularly noticeable and they seem to indicate an active effort to differentiate from the status quo. Such alternative lifestyles often bespeak alternative ways of thinking about society, sometimes extending to radical visions for how society should change. Individuals who hold radical political beliefs may see their cumulative daily choices as a reflection of their political integrity and authenticity (Haenfler et al. 2012: 9). A “lifestyle anarchist,” for example, is someone who intentionally lives one’s life according to specifically anarchist principles, attempting to incorporate their political philosophy into the minute activities of everyday life (Purkis and Bowen 2004: 8). When culture

is seen as a site of domination, the direct alteration of cultural forms—including lifestyle habits—makes sense as a means of liberation from dominant ideologies (Marcuse 2001; Whittier 1995). I use the term *lifestyle politics* to refer to the whole cultural formation around individuals' use of everyday choices as a legitimate site of political expression. The discourse of lifestyle politics reaches beyond radical movements; indeed, it is a feature of mainstream contemporary politics in the United States as well.

Politically inflected lifestyle practices contest divisions between what counts as “the personal” and “the political.” Since personal acts hold political meaning for people, it becomes necessary to rethink what it means to engage in political activism. This book looks at the times in people's lives that occur *between* discretely identifiable moments of political involvement and action, since many people who identify as radical activists “integrate movement values into a holistic way of life” (Haenfler et al. 2012: 7). It's also important to recognize that what counts as activism is a discursive construction. I argue that whether a practice can be considered activism does not depend on the measurable *effects* of the action, but rather on the *meaning* people attribute to it. The concept of political communication, too, must be enlarged to account for the symbolic messages that individuals are sending on an everyday basis, outside of “official” political institutions. This book intervenes in previous discussions of political activism and political communication by offering sustained attention to lifestyle as a site where social actors implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, understand these processes to be taking place.

Many sociological accounts of the role of lifestyle in social movements position activists' turn toward lifestyle as a personalistic retreat from previous forms of political action which were aimed directly at the state (see Beuchler 1995; Kauffman 1990). But many contemporary activist movements (such as the queer and global justice movements) *both* place heavy investments in personal issues *and* retain a radical critique of capitalism and the state (Feixa et al. 2009). The conditions of the neoliberal consumer culture that have matured over the past two decades cultivate a climate in which lifestyle activism is a common-sense part of the path toward radical change. There is a need for theory and empirical research that accounts for radicals' deployment of lifestyle for activist purposes, which I will call *lifestyle activism*.

It is the case that while political citizenship in general is often enacted within the private sphere of consumption (Cohen 2003), radical political positions *in particular* are strongly enmeshed within private lifestyle practices. Histories of US activist movements show that radicals have a long tradition of making connections between their political ideologies and their habits of everyday life.⁶ A repressive political environment—one in which active disruption of capitalist processes is strictly policed, for example—pushes radical movements toward private efforts at expressing their dissent, even while engendering that dissent *through* its repression. Geographer David

Harvey (2007) argues that the neoliberal state sees itself as the guarantor of the smooth functioning of consumer markets, given its ideological commitments to private property rights and free markets. This ideology spawns policies under which radical dissent is often quickly squashed in the name of protecting free trade; activists face less threat of repression when they pursue resistance in private, cultural realms.⁷

Harvey and other critics of neoliberalism (e.g. Rose 1999) point out that the same ideology also calls upon individuals to see themselves as “entrepreneurs,” to pursue their own projects of self-enterprise, often in lieu of state welfare provision. The emergence of what cultural scholars Sarah Banet-Weiser and Roopali Mukherjee (2012) term “commodity activism” speaks to the overall cultural environment in which individualized tactics—such as the consumption of commodities—are widely accepted as logical solutions to collective problems. Lifestyle activism has been recognized as an instantiation of this “responsibilization” of individuals to take ownership not only of their own personal well-being, but also of the well-being of society at large (Littler 2009). The emergence of activist projects that seem to have much in common with individualized pursuits of consumer satisfaction is one manifestation of neoliberalism’s effect on culture. Yet, as I will show, the strategic deployment of lifestyle tactics pursued by radical activists is not the same as the astrategic preoccupation with the self encouraged by neoliberal ideology.

As I demonstrate in this book, rather than participating in *either* lifestyle activism *or* radical dissent, many anarchists do both, and do not see attention to their lifestyles as separate from their concerns with altering state power and mounting strategic protest. On the contrary, lifestyle practices are heavily politicized among anarchists, and are taken up by them alongside other forms of activism. Anarchists bridge a divide between cultural movements which are oriented toward personal change and political movements which are oriented toward social change. This book therefore fills what sociologists of lifestyle movements Ross Haenfler, Brett Johnson, and Ellis Jones (2012: 2) have called “a scholarly blind spot concealing the intersections of private action and movement participation.” By examining how lifestyle politics works within a radical political formation like anarchism, we can understand the contradictions introduced by modes of activism that both grow out of the conditions of neoliberal consumer culture and attempt to resist these very conditions. Scholars of political activism need to attend to the specific processes and outcomes of lifestyle tactics, in order to understand how these tactics are both empowered and limited by the contexts in which they have emerged.

Isolated tactics of resistance may coalesce into a radical activist *strategy* when they are discursively articulated to a recognizable way of life with which many individuals can identify.⁸ Subcultural formations enable such recognition—people who feel affinity with a subculture can see themselves

and their activities as part of a larger collective of individuals who are living in similar ways and working toward shared goals. The anarchists who are the subject of this book are part of a subcultural formation. They have their own patterns of consumption, sociality, and identity that unite them with each other and set them apart from the mainstream. They are also part of a radical political movement. They collectively wish to resist and someday replace the political system in which they find themselves. I argue that anarchists—and others in today's society who hold a commitment to oppositional lifestyle politics—can only be understood through both lenses at once, as both subculture and movement.

The utility of the concept of subculture has been much debated in recent years (see, e.g. Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Haenfler et al. 2012: 7). I find it useful for thinking about anarchists because they are often unified by conventions of style and taste that symbolize and enact their opposition to the dominant culture and its attendant ideologies, which is the definition of subculture elaborated by Hall and others in a landmark collection, *Resistance through Rituals* (2005), and by Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1981). The use of the terms “subculture” and “movement” can also be contentious within activist social formations. For example, one of the first people I interviewed for this project took issue with my referring to anarchists as a “subculture,” due to his perception that the term has been used by outsiders to misrepresent anarchists in some way. Presumably, he was apprehensive about anarchism being dismissed as a youthful trend or phase, rather than a serious force of resistance. Another interviewee later decried the fact that anarchism can sometimes seem like a “scene,” used purely for socializing and stylistic performance rather than organized resistance. I use the terms “subculture” and “scene” throughout this book, in reference to the sociological literature that defines these terms (see Gelder [2007] for an overview of how each of these terms is defined and used in this literature). I also use the terms “milieu”, “community”, and “movement” to refer to anarchists' social formations. All of these terms have utility for highlighting various aspects of anarchists' social formations, and so I use each of them in this book when appropriate to capture the aspect I wish to emphasize. (During my fieldwork, I only used the latter terms, so as to avoid creating a false impression among participants that I took a negative or condescending view of their political views and activities).

An understanding of how activism happens must take into account, first, that cultural work is necessary to produce political resistance and, second, that resistant practices perform cultural work as well. Shared norms and discourses of identity enable individuals to coordinate their behavior into collective practices that resist dominant ideologies and structures. At the same time, these collective practices of resistance performatively reproduce the same norms and identities that enabled them. Lifestyle activists make clear that culture and politics are co-constitutive; to resist one is to resist

the other. Yet, there is a tension here, because cultural resistance—the characteristic activity of subcultures—is often seen as a retreat from more direct, “effective” forms of political confrontation. Also, despite the strength that comes from collective recognition and cultural unity, anarchists’ subculturalism threatens to undermine their status as a political movement that can reach beyond a constricted cultural milieu. Anarchists who are perceived to be too preoccupied with individual, cultural resistance are derided by other anarchists, often branded with the pejorative label “lifestylist.” In such situations, the figure of the “lifestyle anarchist” takes on negative connotations and such an individual may be suspected of believing that lifestyle change is the *only* necessary means to social change. So, while the subculture and movement dimensions of contemporary anarchism draw strength from each other, they also pose seemingly irreconcilable conflict.

Some cultural theorists have argued that under neoliberalism, lifestyle projects have become experienced purely as the products of individual choice and pleasure, rather than “tests of character or expression of devotion to long-term goals requiring the control of impulse and postponement of gratification” (Binkley 2007a: 8). However, the lifestyles of the anarchists in this book tell a slightly different story. As we will see, many radicals do take ethical commitments and visions of social change as motivators for their lifestyle practices, and often defer personal gratification in the interest of their utopian political ideals. That said, the sense of responsibility and empowerment they feel, as individuals, to effect social change through their own lifestyles, is in part the product of neoliberal ideological conditions. For this reason, there is widespread concern, among both radical activists and cultural scholars, that a focus on lifestyle constitutes an evasion of the project of radical social transformation.

An irony inheres in the fact that those radicals who are able to freely make “choices” about how to live their lives might, in fact, be seen as the greatest beneficiaries of the policies and ideologies to which they are so strongly opposed. Critics argue that lifestyle tactics are only available to the very privileged who have the freedom and means to make agentic choices for themselves among many options (e.g. Braunstein and Doyle 2002; Littler 2009; Schutz 2009a, 2009b). Yet, cultural and stylistic resistance has never been the exclusive purview of those with social and economic privilege. Studies of working class youth in mid twentieth-century Britain (e.g. Hall and Jefferson 2005; Hebdige 1981) and politicized ethnic movements in the United States (e.g. Cosgrove 1984; Kelley 1996; Mercer 1987; Ogbar 2004; Van Deburg 1992) convincingly show how style has been an important tool of resistance for those who are disempowered by official social and political institutions (Duncombe 2002). However, it *is* the case that highly visible forms of consumption-based activism *have* either favored the affluent, or, more often, been co-opted by corporate interests who have used the imagery of resistance and rebellion for their own campaigns *targeting* the affluent

consumer. The history of the commodification of Black Power iconography, for instance, provides a key case of symbols that once signified a militant threat to US capitalism and white supremacy being incorporated into the advertising of products that fit seamlessly into these oppressive systems (Mercer 1987). The cycle of politically informed subcultural innovation and subsequent commercial co-optation has intensified as the US economy has increasingly transitioned to conditions of flexible production and niche branding. In this context, critics argue that desires for cultural alternatives are catered to and contained within the capitalist market itself (see Frank and Weiland 1997; Heath and Potter 2004; Klein 1999).

The idea that lifestyle activism might favor those coming from privileged positions is a troubling one for radical activists. There is a conflict here between privileged individuals needing to act on the terrain in which they find themselves, and their desire to avoid playing into the dynamics engendered by that terrain, thereby reinforcing those dynamics. This conflict haunts each of the practices that will be documented in the pages of this book.

I use the term *lifestyle politics* to refer to the whole cultural formation around individuals' use of everyday choices as a legitimate site of political expression. The discourse of lifestyle politics is common sense in contemporary US society. The belief that "one person can make a difference" with the choices that one makes is pervasive not only among radicals such as anarchists, but also among all who are interpellated by the ideology of neoliberalism. When individuals' lifestyle practices are mobilized toward the goal of "making a difference" in the direction of a strategic political project, we can say that lifestyle choices are functioning as *lifestyle tactics*, which are collectively and repeatedly wielded for resistant ends.

Another aspect of the conflict that arises from lifestyle politics is the status hierarchies that often form within movements around individuals' lifestyle practices. This aspect of lifestyle politics might usefully be thought of as what I call *politicking over lifestyle*. Because lifestyles take on such ethical significance among radical activists, lifestyle practices often become targets of self-righteous moralizing and other forms of social policing. In this sense, the larger discourse of lifestyle politics includes the relations of power that arise between individuals based on their own performances of lifestyle as well as the ways in which individuals discipline themselves and their peers in line with accepted lifestyle norms. This is related to the idea of "political correctness" which developed in social movements of the 1970s and 1980s as a discursive mechanism through which activists regulated each other's "personal conduct in everyday life" (Kauffman 1990: 78). Within the regime of political correctness, those who are perceived as failing to prefigure the political goals of their movement within their own lives may be assumed to be weak in their beliefs and commitment, labeled hypocrites, or otherwise socially ostracized (Epstein 1991; Veysey 1973). Within radical

movements, such individuals may even be suspected of being infiltrators and informants, working on behalf of law enforcement to surveil and undermine activist communities (Jeppesen 2003: 70).

Politicking over lifestyle can fracture bonds of solidarity among activists who make different lifestyle choices. Movements may also end up failing to recruit individuals who, for various reasons beyond their control, are unprepared to fully commit to a particular lifestyle. While many participants in and scholars of social movement culture celebrate the potential for cultural practices to bring cohesion to political movements (e.g. Gordon 2008; Purkis and Bowen 2004), cultural preferences can just as readily lead to division and exclusion. Important critiques of countercultural persuasions within activist scenes have questioned whether people of color, especially, are implicitly excluded from movements whose adherents fail to account for what sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1986) terms the “interlocking nature of oppressions.”⁹ The very idea that lifestyle is completely open to individual choice is an ideologically biased one, which does not take into account the way symbolic boundaries work to reproduce pre-existing sociological stratifications (Binkley 2007b; Bourdieu 1984; Chaney 1996). Among anarchists, these dynamics become even more complicated: one is at risk of being judged for not having the “correct” activist lifestyle, yet one is negatively labeled a lifestyle if one is seen as being *too* focused on lifestyle. So-called lifestyleists are also criticized for being disproportionately drawn from socially privileged identity categories, namely male, white, straight, and middle class. In fact, the topic of lifestyle anarchism has proven so controversial among anarchists that it was expressly *banned* as a topic of discussion on one internet forum.¹⁰

Looking at the lifestyles of people who identify with a philosophy like anarchism highlights the political and cultural implications of what I call “identities we choose,” drawing on anthropologist Kath Weston’s (1997) concept of “families we choose.” Weston’s idea captures the destabilization but continued importance of a construct—family—that has traditionally been understood as “naturally” given but is more accurately understood as both sociologically and ideologically *achieved*. Similarly, there is nothing “given” about anarchist identity; it is something that must be established and maintained through behavior and performance. Yet, radical political identity is a tricky thing to perform since, as a mental construct, it is not immediately evident on one’s physical body, and because radicalism is by definition outside the recognizable narratives available in mainstream society. This is where lifestyle emerges as a site of political subject formation and an expression of political identity. As writer and activist L. A. Kauffman (1990: 78) puts it, lifestyle choices project “a sense of ‘being’ political at a time when the options for doing politics may seem limited.” While performativity theorists (e.g. Butler 1990; Sedgwick 1990) have argued that, in fact, *all* types of identity may be constituted through performance,

the case of anarchist political identity is a useful one since it can expose the obviously performative dimensions of subject and movement formation. As a political identity, anarchism has no intrinsic link to a pre-constituted social position such as race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, or religion. Yet, the commitment and identification that activists bring to anarchism make clear that such pre-constituted positions are not necessary for mobilizing political activism.

“De-essentialized” identities—those which are not assumed to be naturally given (Mohanty 2003)—highlight the importance of meaning and interpretation in the construction of political identity. It is not just the commonality of experience that is important—it is a commonality of *interpretation* of experience through a critical, political lens that forms the basis of political identification (Scott 1992). The dynamics of anarchist movements also show that the absence of more conventional identity narratives does not preclude some of the problems of identity politics that have dogged other movements, such as debates over who can claim authentic membership (as discussed above). And, despite the potential for openness and diversity among those who join anarchist movements, people do not simply leave behind their other social identities when they take up radical activism. By showing how issues like essentialism and authenticity play out even within a movement based on a de-essentialized identity, I offer a perspective on how these concepts operate within social movements at large. The conflicts over which lifestyle practices anarchists should adopt and the extent to which lifestyle should figure in activist strategy at all, highlight how important it is to consider issues of power and privilege when studying the formation of political identities and movements. This book examines and explains these dynamics, as they play out within contemporary US anarchism. In examining how one set of radical activists attempts to navigate the conflicts introduced by lifestyle politics, this book offers insight into the challenges faced by many contemporary formations which exist at the intersection of subculture and social movement.

The culture of contemporary US anarchism

I undertook the research for this book as a “strategic ethnography,” which looks at one particular aspect of anarchist culture¹¹—in this case, lifestyle politics. There is much more to contemporary anarchism than the lifestyle choices its adherents make, so this book should be seen as *one* story about anarchists, rather than a definitive, exhaustive account of an entire movement. In the interest of looking at the use of lifestyle within anarchist movements, I employed a combination of methods, which included interviews with individuals who either self-identified as anarchists or claimed an affinity with anarchist politics, participant observation at formal and informal anarchist

events, and discourse analysis of anarchist print culture. In recognition of the diversity of contemporary anarchists, I gathered data from a variety of sites, interviewing individuals and attending events in dispersed geographic locations around the United States. While I did gather evidence of what some anarchists' everyday practices are like, I was most interested in understanding the *meaning* everyday practices hold for dissident individuals and the ways cultural and subcultural discourses around the politics of lifestyle impact those individuals' subjective experience of everyday life. The book provides some descriptive accounts of what some anarchists *do*, but its focus is more on the ways that anarchists think and talk about what they do.

My fieldwork involved attending several anarchist events between 2007 and 2010. These included book fairs, conferences, organizing meetings, and social events such as potlucks and parties. Often, these were public events; otherwise, I attended on the invitation of an interviewee or other contact. Whenever feasible, I made my role as a researcher known. Most of the events I attended took place in Los Angeles, where I lived, but I also traveled to other locations (such as Vermont and Northern California) for conferences and book fairs. Attending anarchist events proved to be useful for observing some specific trends in behavior across time and place, and for corroborating some of the accounts of reality found in anarchist texts and given by my interviewees. I did, however, limit the types of events I attended to those I felt were appropriate for a researcher to attend. The notion of "security culture" influenced the types of events I attended and the individuals I approached for interviews. Security culture refers to the norms of privacy and information control developed by anarchists in response to regular infiltration of their groups and surveillance by law enforcement personnel.¹² Though many subcultures may be hard to observe carefully because they are resistant to "gawkers" (Thornton 1996: 87), the stakes are often much higher for anarchist activists, because they are a frequent target of state surveillance and repression. For this reason, I restricted my observation to public and otherwise innocuous activities, so that I would never be in a position to expose sensitive or potentially threatening information about what I was observing. I also avoided asking for interviews with individuals whom I knew had been frequently targeted by the police. In fact, I tended only to approach people for interviews if I had met them personally or had an acquaintance in common who could vouch for my not being a cop. Though it is possible that the data I gathered were skewed by these self-imposed restrictions on my fieldwork, I do think that I was able to observe a great deal that was relevant to my research focus on lifestyle.

Currently, there are thousands of anarchists in the United States, but as a stigmatized identity with no clear "criteria for membership," it is impossible to collect accurate data as to their numbers and demographic make-up (Stein 1997: 6); this, in turn, makes it impossible to construct a "representative sample" of anarchists. I conducted a total of 39 interviews.

The format of the interviews varied. With interviewees located in Los Angeles, where I lived, I conducted the interviews in person, recording them so that I could transcribe them later. The rest of the interviews were conducted electronically, either via email or instant messenger. In all cases, I attempted to make the interviews as open and conversational as possible. When the interviews were conducted via email, I preferred to send a question or two at a time and then follow up on the responses before moving on to new topics. Usually, this meant exchanging several messages over the course of a few days. I began each interview with a question about where the person first learned about anarchism, because I felt it was a question that could be definitively answered, rather than requiring too much introspection or subjective analysis from the interviewee. At times, I purposely asked questions that were not strictly relevant to my research, because I thought they would put the interviewees at ease, or allow them to perform their anarchist identities in a way that felt comfortable for them. For example, one of my first interviewees expressed surprise that I hadn't asked him more about his organized activism, as he thought of that as crucial to his political identity as an anarchist. In subsequent interviews, I generally asked what kind of activism and organizing work the interviewees were involved with, even if I didn't expect to find this information to be within the scope of my definition of lifestyle politics. As interviewees became more comfortable with the conversation, I asked more personal questions. I nearly always reserved questions about potentially sensitive issues—sexuality, ethnicity, personal appearance—for the end of the interview, or did not ask them at all, if I got the impression that the interviewee would find them offensive. Although I aimed to make the interview format feel somewhat conversational, I said relatively little, in order to let the interviewees follow their own trains of thought and not feel that I was judging them or foreclosing certain topics or opinions.

Contemporary anarchists are often geographically mobile and electronically connected across national and cultural borders. Many of my interviewees, for instance, had participated in anarchist movements in locations outside North America, including Central and South America, Europe, and Australia, though they were all living in the United States or Canada when I met them. Yet, the particularities of US culture, and the specific history of political resistance in the United States, have a definite effect on the way lifestyle functions within contemporary anarchism here, and perhaps accounts for the perception (expressed to me on multiple occasions) that American anarchists are more preoccupied with lifestyle issues than their counterparts elsewhere. Even within the United States, there is no monolithic way to characterize all anarchists or anarchist organizations. There are commonalities of culture and collective identification across the US context however, and this book focuses on those, in the interest of providing an analysis that is somewhat generalizable to contemporary

American radical movements. I hope too that activists and scholars in other parts of the world find this research useful, though it may be less reflective of their own observations and experiences.

The core philosophy of anarchism is that human well-being is best ensured by a decentralized, non-hierarchical, radically democratic society. Anarchists seek revolutionary change to existing society in the pursuit of a more just world. Although anarchy is often misperceived as being synonymous with chaos or violence, it denotes only an absence of hierarchy. Anarchists are not against organization or structure; rather, they object to organizations or structures that are based on unequal relations of power or are maintained coercively. Because of their critique of hierarchy, anarchists often work in solidarity with feminists, anti-racists, socialists, environmentalists, and any number of other radical and progressive movements that share this critique. Capitalism and the state are chief among anarchists' targets of critique, since these structures are seen as centralizing authority in people and institutions that are unaccountable to the people who are subject to their power. Anarchists are also critical of other systems of oppression, such as patriarchy and colonialism. Thus, they are interested in mounting challenges to authoritarianism in many cultural spheres, not just in the capitalist market or in state governments. To put the anarchist project more positively, anarchists try to cultivate social forms that will foster egalitarian relationships of voluntary association and freedom of creative expression for all. While anarchism is clearly a utopian philosophy, it is also a philosophy for the here and now. As anarchist activist and scholar Uri Gordon (2008: 41) explains, anarchy is "a lived reality that pops up everywhere in new guises, adapts to different cultural climates, and should be extended and developed experimentally for its own sake, whether or not we believe it can become, in some sense, the prevailing mode of society."

Gordon also points out that contemporary anarchism is a "political culture," which entails "a family of shared orientations to doing and talking about politics and to living everyday life" (2008: 4). In this, anarchism is typical of contemporary social movements in which a very blurry line separates everyday life and political orientation, if any such line exists at all. Anarchists present a rather extreme case, since, as anarchist writer Cindy Milstein (2010: 41) suggests, "Embracing anarchism is a process of reevaluating every assumption, everything one thinks about and does, and indeed who one is, and then basically turning one's life upside-down." The radical subversiveness of anarchist political philosophy translates to the striking contrast between the ways of life pursued by anarchists and those in the mainstream, hence the idea that one's life is turned "upside-down" in the process of shifting from mainstream ideology to the ideals of anarchism. Although, as I argued above, the discourse of lifestyle politics is not unique to anarchists, they do provide a vivid illustration of the way this discourse manifests in material practices.

Today's anarchist lifestyles must be understood as partially continuous with the efforts of earlier radical and utopian movements that attempted to put principles of anti-authoritarianism into practice at the most minute levels of everyday life, dating back at least to the nineteenth century in the United States.¹³ Many of these movements explicitly identified with anarchist principles; others were implicitly aligned with anarchist philosophy. The hippie counterculture of the late 1960s, for example, had significant anarchist elements and became one of the most culturally resonant alternative lifestyle movements in modern history. Many of these groups experimented with the lifestyle practices still adopted by anarchists today and discussed in this book, such as communal living, veganism, alternative styles of dress, and sexual non-conformity. The most direct influence on the cultural texture of contemporary anarchism is probably the punk subculture that emerged in the late 1970s and rose in popularity through the 1980s. Certain bands and publications (namely Crass, the Dead Kennedys, *MaximumRockNRoll*, and *Profane Existence*) helped to link punk music, lifestyles, and attitudes to a whole set of political philosophies closely aligned with anarchism, often explicitly (O'Hara 1999; Thompson 2004).

It is clear that few if any of the specific lifestyle practices that will be discussed in this book can be fairly described as truly unique to the contemporary moment. Yet, the practice of lifestyle politics today does occur amid historically specific conditions. These conditions include the nearly complete interpenetration of the capitalist market into processes of everyday life, the broad incorporation of alternative cultural movements into commodity culture, the transfer of social and environmental welfare projects away from the state and into the private sector, intense class and race stratification masked by rhetorics of meritocracy and equal access, and the simultaneous liberal advancement of some women and sexual minorities alongside the draconian disenfranchisement of others. Contemporary anarchist lifestyle tactics certainly bear the traces of earlier countercultural movements but they are also shaped by and respond to the forces of their own time.

As noted briefly above, contemporary anarchism is far from a monolithic movement, philosophy, or social formation. Anarchist historian Andrew Cornell (2011a: 41) concisely explains, "It is more accurate to talk about an array of continuously evolving, sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting *anarchisms* or anarchist tendencies." The diversity of contemporary anarchism is germane to a critical analysis of anarchist lifestyle politics, since different subformations may deploy lifestyle in different ways. The divergent goals of various types of anarchists may also be differently compatible with an activist strategy that draws on lifestyle tactics. In this book, I draw on various strands of contemporary anarchism in the United States in order to paint a general picture of the way lifestyle functions in the anarchist scene, broadly conceived. I study practices of culture and collective identity that

can be found across contexts, rather than focusing on specific organizations or institutions.¹⁴

I would argue that culture and collective identification are, in fact, the primary basis upon which an anarchist “movement” coheres at all.¹⁵ Investment in anarchism is a basis upon which individuals form community and think of themselves as part of a distinct group (Gordon 2008). People identify as anarchists, recognize that there are others who also identify that way, and experience actual and imagined bonds with those people because of this shared identification. In keeping with social movement scholars Verta Taylor and Nancy Wittier’s (1995: 173) sociological definition of collective identities, the identity anarchist is something that is recognizable across specific communities and settings, and is “widely available for adoption.” As individuals become involved with the political and cultural activities of anarchism, they may develop a “movement identity,” which further solidifies anarchists’ collective identification and solidarity with each other (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 291).

Yet, complicating this picture of anarchism as a coherent collective identity is the skepticism of identity and identity politics that many activists bring with them to contemporary anarchism. Anarchist anthropologist David Graeber (2002: 62) points out that “there are some who take anarchist principles of anti-sectarianism and open-endedness so seriously that they are sometimes reluctant to call themselves ‘anarchists’ for that very reason.” Furthermore, anarchist organizers doggedly resist centralized institutionalization and incorporation into mainstream political structures. Anthropologist Jeffrey Juris (2009: 213), drawing on the work of Manuel Castells (1996), describes the structure of the anarchist movement as driven by the “cultural logic of networking,” meaning that it is made up of autonomous entities (individuals and local groups) that are horizontally connected through information circuits and may voluntarily come together through physical or discursive means to organize around particular issues and events. This decentralized structure, which has its roots in the autonomous networks of anarchists involved in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s, is meant to keep power from becoming concentrated in the hands of a movement elite and to keep recognizable leaders from emerging who might attempt to speak for anarchists as a whole (Sheehan 2003). As I will show, the commitment to a lack of formal structure can unintentionally foster informal hierarchies of power, in which individuals’ tastes and lifestyle practices are used as status markers.¹⁶

The lifestyle practices and discourses I will be discussing in this book are crucial to contemporary anarchism as a movement, because they are key sites for the maintenance of anarchist culture and identity. Suffice it to say here that contemporary anarchism can be both a kind of “politics of identity,” to the extent that some people invest in their identities *as* anarchists, and a “politics of articulation,” in that the identity and the community that form

around anarchism are seen as always in process, contestable, and negotiable.¹⁷ The movement culture¹⁸ of contemporary anarchism attempts to reflect anarchists' philosophical commitments to decentralization, egalitarianism, cultural freedom, and positive social transformation. Anarchists form what social historian Sharif Gemie (1994: 357) calls "counter-communities," in which anarchist political theories are developed and practiced in the interest of modeling a more general social formation and inspiring confidence in the achievability of anarchist ideals. Like other radical movements, anarchists aim for a political culture out of which actions and affinity groups might arise as needed, rather than as directed by a centralized institution (Epstein 1991: 118).

Local affinity groups and collectives undertake ongoing projects and provide a general sense of community through both formal meetings and spontaneous, informal gatherings. Collectives may form around fixed sites such as group houses, community centers, cafés, or "infoshops" (an anarchist infoshop is something like a radical bookstore or library and is also usually used as an event space for the local anarchist community).¹⁹ These institutions may endure for months or even years, or they may be designed to be more temporary. Collectives may also convene to facilitate more sporadic events, including protests, book fairs, festivals, conferences, speaking events, reading groups, music performances, film screenings, and art showings. Consumption often plays a central role in these events (a point of contestation among anarchists that I will discuss in Chapter 2).

Events such as protests and book fairs bring anarchists out of their local situations, fostering a sense of a larger activist community that transcends geographical space (Juris 2004: 244; see also Juris 2008b). While the events themselves may be sporadic, the lifestyle practices observable at these events (e.g. styles of dress and consumption) are understood to be ongoing aspects of daily life for the individuals involved. For anarchists, events like these are what ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1993) would call "paradigmatic," in that they are key occasions for performing the ethos of anarchist movement culture. The spectacle of dozens or hundreds of people engaged in typical anarchist lifestyle practices normalizes those practices and reinforces their status as constitutive of anarchist identity and activism. The actual bodies of attendees at events also create a visual spectacle. The sight of hundreds of similarly styled strangers in one place contributes to the sense of a unified anarchist culture that extends across geographic space as these individuals disperse after the event.

Events and meetings serve as sites for the cultivation of a distinctive "habitus" among participants in anarchist activism. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of the habitus refers to a regular set of dispositions among members of a social group that directs those individuals' everyday choices into patterned, empirically observable lifestyle trends. These common tastes among social group members become what Bourdieu calls

“a unitary set of distinctive preferences” (1984: 173). For example, the Bay Area Anarchist Book Fair annually features a Bike Valet where attendees can park their bicycles. The hundreds of bicycles parked outside during the fair sends the message to participants that it is normal and even preferable to use a bicycle as a means of transportation. Similarly, the food provided at such events is usually entirely vegan (or at least there will always be readily available vegan options), establishing the normalcy of a vegan diet in one’s daily life.

More isolated convergences also give anarchists the chance to try out lifestyle practices they may not yet have experienced or figured out how to implement in their daily lives. Anarchist geographer Gavin Brown (2007) describes how at mass protests, to which activists may travel long distances, temporary communal housing is usually set up near the convergence site for the duration of the protest. Here, individuals experience what it is like to work collectively to meet everyone’s basic food and shelter needs in financially and environmentally sustainable ways (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, and McCurdy, forthcoming). These spaces also often actively encourage consensus decision making and other forms of interpersonal interaction that are important to anarchists. For those who have never had the opportunity to incorporate such practices into their everyday lifestyles, these experiences are crucial for demonstrating the viability of these practices.

Organizing spaces, conferences, and festivals are not only sites of performance and practice, but also home to explicit discussions and debate about lifestyle and its relevance to anarchist principles. Formal presentations on specific lifestyle practices teach the uninitiated how to partake in these activities and provide ideological justification for why one should incorporate them into one’s everyday life. For example, I attended a workshop on DIY (“do-it-yourself”) gynecology, in which the facilitator explained anarcho-feminist principles and provided space for the women (and men) in attendance to learn methods of monitoring their own health and treating common ailments with at-home remedies. The personal implementation of such a lifestyle practice might be quite intimidating for some women, due to mainstream norms and taboos around health and sexuality. Formal presentations like the one I attended help make such practices feel familiar and practicable, thus making them accessible to newcomers to the subculture. The presentations are also explicitly focused on deconstructing the ideologies behind the norms and taboos of women’s health care and sexuality, giving attendees reasons to feel attracted to anarchist philosophies and practices.

The culture of contemporary anarchism extends beyond physical interactions into a rich print culture as well, in the form of books, newsletters, and photocopied booklets—known as “zines”—which are ubiquitous at anarchist gatherings and infoshops.²⁰ Anarchists also communicate with each other via websites, blogs, and posts on social media networks. As with other subcultures, there is a sense that one can go anywhere in the country, and

some parts of the world, and find other anarchists, especially if one is willing to do a little exploring on the internet or put out some feelers among one's social networks (Gordon 2008; Juris 2004). For those anarchists who have the means and inclination to travel, and even for those who never come into physical contact with the far-flung members of their imagined community, these electronically networked connections are key to the understanding of anarchism as a movement with real political potential (Rupp and Taylor 1987). As Cornell (2011a) shows, anarchist movements have always been heavily sustained by their print cultures, particularly in times and places where public airing of anarchist philosophy has been unwelcome and where activists have been separated from each other by geographic distance. Because of this, I supplemented my interview and observational research by immersing myself in the textual world of the broad anarchist movement, consuming written material published by and about anarchists.

In these texts lies an expression of the shared values of the movement subculture, in which anarchists document their own culture for an anarchist audience, representing themselves to themselves (Duncombe 2008). Texts often impart explicit information about specific lifestyle practices, including in some cases detailed instructions for how individuals might implement them.²¹ These representations both shore up the self-identity of the authors and provide models for others to imitate. The circulation of these texts also solidifies the sense of a cohesive subculture, a fact about which the authors and distributors of these texts are self-reflexive. For example, one book produced by the anarchist collective CrimethInc. (2005a: 16) suggests that even texts such as graffiti or wheatpasted posters serve an important cultural function in that they “help others who share this [political] sentiment to feel that they are not entirely alone and insane, and [they] might inspire them to turn their silent rancor into expressive projects of their own.”

Commitments to certain fundamental principles of anarchist praxis run across all incarnations of contemporary anarchist culture. Praxis refers to the way in which political, philosophical ideals are strategically put into activist practice to bring about material change (Amster et al. 2009: 181). *Direct action* and *propaganda by deed* are two aspects of anarchist praxis that bear directly on the contemporary use of lifestyle as a site of activism. Anarchist strategists differ in the extent to which they believe lifestyle politics are mandated by these principles of praxis (I will say much more about these debates in Chapter 6). As a precursor, my discussion here will explain why *some* anarchists find lifestyle tactics to be consistent with their activist principles.

Direct action expresses the anarchist ideal that power should not solely reside in a centralized institution, such as the state, which must be appealed to in order to effect change. According to the principle of direct action, if one desires a change in one's conditions, one should empower oneself to do whatever is necessary to actively bring about that change (de Cleyre

2004a). If one is successful, then one has accomplished change without working within and legitimizing hierarchical institutions. But even if one is unsuccessful, one has at least not reinforced the legitimacy of the institution by appealing to it for the results one desires. While direct action sometimes refers to acts of destruction undertaken in order to bring down an existing institution or event, it also refers to the coordination of efforts to establish new, anarchist organizations and activities. A strike in which workers attempt to seize and collectivize the means of production is a classic example of direct action (Goldman 1969). But direct action can also refer to, for example, a group of anarchists who come together to provide baskets of food to needy people in a park each week, as a group called Revolutionary Autonomous Communities does in Los Angeles's MacArthur Park each Sunday (Imani 2011). These people act because they see the operations of the liberal state and the free market neglecting to ensure that everyone in their community has enough to eat.

Lifestyle practices can be understood as direct action because they attempt to materially change one's everyday experience without appealing to a central entity. When an individual attempts to put anarchist principles into action in one's everyday life, one acts on the assumption that one has the capacity to determine the shape of one's personal experience. One may be more or less successful at actually putting anarchist principles into effect. For example, one may try to live without participating in capitalist exchange relations, but one will probably have to engage with capitalism at some point in order to survive, given its dominance and pervasiveness in contemporary societies. Nevertheless, any attempt to reduce one's complicity through one's own purchasing habits could be a form of direct action, however limited the outcome may be.

Gordon (2008: 38) suggests that the alternative lifestyles of anarchists might function as a kind of "propaganda by deed," by setting an example for others to follow in attempting to free their own lives of oppressive forces. Originally developed by European anarchists of the late nineteenth century, propaganda by deed was a concept referring to spectacular acts of insurrectionary violence, undertaken with the intent to rouse the masses to action (Sheehan 2003). These acts, including attempted assassinations of world leaders and businessmen, were supposed to expose as irrational the ideological dichotomy between "legitimate" uses of force (exercised by state rulers and capitalists) and "illegitimate" uses of force (exercised by the insurrectionists). The idea was that where people were systematically oppressed by hierarchical institutions, they had a responsibility to rise up against their oppressors.

That the concept of propaganda by deed might be applied to lifestyle practices owes to a historical shift in the meaning of the concept. Cornell (2011a) shows how intense repression of anarchists by the state in the early twentieth century stamped out activists' aims of inciting revolution

through class warfare. Social theory also developed such that state and class oppression were no longer the only targets of anarchist critique. Cornell suggests that the recognition that mass insurrection was both unlikely to happen and inadequate to address all the forms of oppression they opposed pushed anarchists toward projects of “practical anarchism,” such as building utopian communities in which life could be lived more anarchistically without facing violent repression by the state.

Practical projects, such as utopian communities, were thought to be useful because they would, first, serve as experimental incubators for anarchist lifestyles, and second, prove that such ways of life were possible and desirable (for a litany of specific examples of such projects and the strategic philosophies behind them, see Cornell [2011a]). Anarchists see the achievement of alternative, anti-oppression lifestyles not just as an end itself, but as a means toward expanding the public appeal of revolutionary projects. The term “prefigurative politics” (Breines 1982) is often used in reference to organizing structures and processes taken up by activist movements (e.g. the use of consensus decision making within anarchist organizations), but it may also be applied to patterns of everyday life among members of those movements as well. The capacity for activists’ personal practices to communicate about the viability and appeal of anarchism is what makes lifestyle a potential tool of propaganda and prefiguration.

Tactics of direct action and prefigurative politics are especially salient for anarchist activists within the contemporary conditions of receding state responsibility and new sites of civic participation. Within neoliberalism, power is understood to operate outside the narrow structures of the state. Thus, radical change must also be effected outside the state as well. Anthropologist Marianne Maeckelbergh (2011: 2) points out that “the veritable obsession with process found within the alterglobalization movement is indicative of a crucial shift in the way movement actors understand how social change can be enacted.”²² By process, Maeckelbergh is referring to the processes of democratic participation and agenda setting within activist organizations. As she explains, many radical organizations since the 1990s have made fundamental commitments to enacting principles of democracy, diversity, and horizontalism within movement structures. Enacting these principles is so important she says, because movements are attempting to “build a new world in the shell of the old.”²³ These movements desire a radical alternative to neoliberal modes of citizenship and thus attempt to realize this alternative for themselves in their own organizations, which for them *are* the public sphere apart from the state and the market. I argue that lifestyle has also become a “veritable obsession” for contemporary radical activists, in part for precisely the same reasons that process has become central in radical organizations. We might thus see the lifestyles of radical activists as responses to and proposed remedies for the failure of neoliberal societies to actually ensure the everyday health and happiness of their members.

As stated earlier, my research was strategic in that I attempted to focus on one particular aspect of anarchist culture. Another strategic move I made was to seek out interviewees, events, and texts that would destabilize some of the enduring stereotypes that have characterized previous portrayals of anarchists and their subcultures. From the nineteenth century to the present, mainstream media representations have oversimplified, vilified, and sensationalized anarchists and their aims, usually painting anarchists as pathologically violent and irrational.²⁴ In contemporary times, portrayals that are more sympathetic to the political philosophy of anarchism—usually only appearing in niche or underground media outlets—frequently criticize the contemporary anarchist movement for its homogeneity. To be more specific, anarchism is critiqued for its apparently disproportionate appeal to white, straight, middle-class men. This book gives particular attention to the perspectives of the many women, queer people, people of color, and working-class people who embrace anarchist politics. In doing so, I attempt to amplify these voices and to show that contemporary anarchism is actually *not* homogeneous at all. My analysis shows that lifestyle politics may reproduce white, male, heterosexual, middle-class privilege, leading to increased *visibility* and *status* for individuals who bring these kinds of privileges with them to activist scenes. The point here is that anarchism is a more heterogeneous movement than it has frequently been *represented* or recognized as, and lifestyle politics may be to blame for these representational distortions in some instances. By accounting for some of the specific processes by which mainstream dynamics of privilege are replicated within activist movements, I hope this book might prove illuminating for those looking to interrupt such processes.

Each of the individual chapters of this book has a dual purpose: (1) to provide rich description of practices and discourses of lifestyle politics which are central to contemporary US anarchism in particular, and (2) to make a theoretical argument that can be applied to lifestyle politics as a broader phenomenon. All the chapters consider the motivations and consequences of a wide range of lifestyle practices undertaken by anarchists as part of their radical activism. Together, they build an argument that lifestyle-based activist tactics are complex cultural phenomena which must be considered from many angles in order to arrive at a full understanding of the way they function in activist movements and in the lives of individual activists. Furthermore, analyses of activist tactics must consider how power relationships shape the ways several tactical practices get enacted and taken up, as well as how power relationships may be reproduced or unsettled through those processes. Such assessments of power are important, not only for analytical clarity, but also because they can inform future activist strategy.

In Chapter 2, I describe anarchists' practices of "anti-consumption" in which they avoid participating in mainstream consumer culture, or at least

discursively position themselves as having done so. This chapter argues that lifestyle tactics, such as anti-consumption, “do” more than simply fulfill material, strategic goals, such as subverting capitalism. Thus, they need to be analyzed, critiqued, and evaluated for *all* their potential effects. I make this argument by showing how individuals may be motivated by many factors, not just straightforward activist outcomes. Specifically, I identify five distinct types of motivation for anti-consumption practices: personal, moral, activist, identificatory, and social motivations. My analysis focuses especially on the social motivations and effects of anarchist consumption patterns. I then illustrate how this typology can be usefully applied to specific practices and the effects thereof, in order to arrive at a strategic assessment of any given lifestyle-based tactic.

The third chapter describes several self-presentation practices of anarchists. I argue that the meaning of subcultural stylistic practices is context dependent, and travels in a circuit among producers and consumers (wearers and observers) of stylistic practices. The meanings assigned to anarchists’ self-presentation in various contexts, and the practical implications of these meanings (such as social prejudice, in-group boundary policing, and even mainstream co-optation through commodification), are important to consider in assessing self-presentation as an activist tactic. I present perspectives from individuals who adopt typical practices of anarchist self-presentation, and from those who choose not to. I also apply theories of representation, performance, and power to the production and consumption of embodied, stylistic “texts.”

Chapter 4 describes how individuals relate to the identity category “anarchist,” what attractions it holds, and what problems it presents as a category of identity. I argue that subcultural commitments to “authenticity” are both productive—in that they engender self-discipline and community accountability among activists—and destructive—in that they often lead to internecine drama and boundary policing within movements. These phenomena relate to lifestyle in that lifestyle practices are often the means by which an individual’s sincere commitment to the principles and goals of anarchist movements is gauged by one’s peers/comrades. This gauging of sincerity proves problematic when the individual lifestyle habits of anarchist subcultures are recontextualized within the dominant culture under which all individuals must live. Differential levels of privilege within the dominant culture may translate to differential abilities to undertake the practices which serve as measures of subcultural authenticity. Some anarchists attempt to cope with this problem through a kind of ironic stance toward authentic anarchist identity, which tries to balance the benefits of cohesive group identity with an awareness of its limitations.

In Chapter 5, I show that lifestyle practices may be symbolic *and* material, and that both dimensions can be considered when assessing the strategic fitness of a given tactical practice in a given personal and historical context.

I make this argument by comparing three sexual lifestyle practices adopted by anarchists as part of their anarchist orientations—polyamory, queer self-identification, and consent-seeking—and considering the expressive and instrumental motivations for each. This chapter also argues that while sexual identities may be performatively constituted through everyday, embodied practice, the symbolic act of sexual identification is also seen as a kind of activist practice in itself.

The sixth chapter addresses self-reflexive attitudes toward lifestyle politics within anarchist movement culture. I discuss how the terms “lifestyle anarchist” and “lifestylism” are sometimes used as epithets within movement discourse to separate supposedly worthwhile forms of activism from illegitimate, superficial forms of activism. The discourse around lifestylism highlights the many issues at stake when individual, everyday practices become significant—even prioritized—for a political movement. This chapter surveys those issues as they are manifest within contemporary anarchism. The book’s conclusion remarks upon the significance of lifestyle politics within the broader contemporary culture, specifically its relation to neoliberal political subjectivity.