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**Ecological Direct Action and the Nature of Anarchism:  
Explorations from 1992 to 2005**

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## **Abstract**

### **Ecological Direct Action and the Nature of Anarchism in the UK: Explorations from 1992 to 2005.**

In this thesis I study the radical environmental movement, of which I am part, by combining the analysis of texts and the textual record of discussions with my own extensive participant observation. More specifically, I look at the direct action undertaken by radical eco-activists and examine the relationship between this and the anarchist tradition.

My research demonstrates, first, that anarchism is alive and well, albeit in a somewhat modified form from the ‘classical anarchism’ of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In researching today’s direct activists, therefore, I have also been examining the nature of anarchism itself. I show that anarchism is to be found most strongly in the dialogue that takes place between activists on the ground, engaged in practical struggles. It is from here, in the strategic debates, self-produced pamphlets, and open-ended discussions of radical environmentalists focussed on practical and immediate issues, that I draw much of my data and ideas.

In pursuing this project, I present an understanding of anarchism as a pluralistic and dynamic discourse in which there is no single, correct line on each issue. Instead, the vigour of anarchism is revealed through the dissent and reflexive debate of its practitioners. This understanding of anarchism, while contrary to a static project of ideological mapping or comprehensive summary of a tradition, may be in keeping with both contemporary theory, and also the anarchist tradition itself. To pursue this understanding of anarchism, I elaborate an ‘anarchist methodology of research’ which is both collective and subjective, ethically-bounded and reflexive. This draws on the experience of politically engaged researchers who have sought to draw lines of consistency between their ideals and the practice of research.

The various forms of ecological direct action manifested in the UK between 1992 and 2005 provide the main source material for this thesis. I survey the practice and proclamations of anti-roads protesters, Earth First!, GM crop-trashers, peat saboteurs, Reclaim the Streets and others, particularly my own local group, ‘Tyneside Action for People and Planet’. Also considered are the explicitly anarchist organisations of the UK, and the direct action wings of related social movements. Comparison with these non-ecological movements serves to highlight influences, alternatives and criticisms across the cultures of anarchistic direct action, and contributes to the overall diversity of the anarchism studied.



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## Acronyms

ACF	Anarchist Communist Federation ( until 1999 )
AF	Anarchist Federation ( formerly Anarchist Communist Federation )
ALF	Animal Liberation Front
CD	Civil Disobedience
CJB	Criminal Justice Bill
CJA	Criminal Justice Act
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CNT	Spanish Anarcho-Syndicalist Union
CPRE	Campaign for the Protection of Rural England
CW	Class War
DA	Direct Action, magazine of the Solidarity Federation
DD	Discussion Document
DAN	Direct Action Network
DANE	Disabled Action North East
DIY	Do It Yourself
DOT	Department of Transport
DSEI	Defence Systems Equipment International ( arms fair )
DTEF!	Dead Trees Earth First! ( Publishing Collective )
EDA	Ecological Direct Action
EF!	Earth First!
<i>EF!AU</i>	Earth First! Action Update ( UK )
<i>EF!J</i>	Earth First! Journal ( USA )
EF!SG	Earth First! Summer Gathering ( UK)
EF!US	Earth First! USA
ELF	Earth Liberation Front
ENGO	Environmental Non-Governmental Organisation
EZLN	Zapatista Army of National Liberation
FoE	Friends of the Earth
<i>GAy</i>	Green Anarchy, US anarchist magazine
<i>GA</i>	Green Anarchist, UK anarchist magazine
GE	Genetic Engineering / Genetically Engineered
GEN	Genetic Engineering Network
GM	Genetically Modified
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
GS	Genetix Snowball, accountable direct action campaign against GM crops
GVGS	Gathering Visions, Gathering Strength, activist conference
HLS	Huntingdon Life Sciences, animal experimentation centre
ICFL	International Centre for Life
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IWW	International Workers of the World, Anarcho-Syndicalist Union
J18	June 18 <sup>th</sup> Carnival Against Capitalism, London and around the world
JSA	Job Seekers Allowance
MEF!	Manchester Earth First!
N30	November 30 <sup>th</sup> 1999, International day of action against the WTO summit
NALFO	North American Liberation Front Office
NSM	New Social Movement
NUS	National Union of Students
NVDA	Non Violent Direct Action
OPM	Free Papua Movement
PA!	Peat Alert!
PGA	People's Global Action
RA!	Road Alert!
RBE	Radical British Environmentalism, 1998 activist-academic conference
RMT	Rational Motivations Theory
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RTS	Reclaim the Streets
SDEF	South Downs Earth First!, UK group
SHAC	Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty



<b>SM</b>	<b>Social Movement</b>
<b>SMO</b>	<b>Social Movement Organisation</b>
<b>SolFed</b>	<b>Solidarity Federation</b>
<b>SWP</b>	<b>Socialist Worker Party, UK's largest Leninist-Trotskyist party</b>
<b>TAPP</b>	<b>Tyneside Action for People and Planet</b>
<b>TGAL</b>	<b>Think Globally, Act Locally, activist newsletter</b>
<b>TLIO</b>	<b>The Land is Ours</b>
<b>TMEF</b>	<b>Toxic Mutants Earth First!</b>
<b>TP</b>	<b>Trident Ploughshares ( formerly Trident Ploughshares 2000 )</b>
<b>TP2000</b>	<b>Trident Ploughshares 2000</b>
<b>WCEF</b>	<b>Working Class Earth First!</b>
<b>WT</b>	<b>Wildlife Trusts</b>
<b>WTO</b>	<b>World Trade Organisation</b>

Other acronyms are titles of texts listed in the bibliography.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1

### Introduction

In this introductory chapter I state the aims and central themes of my project of research into environmental direct action and its relationship to anarchism. I consider the reasons why I got interested in the topic, and the approaches I have taken to it. I situate my own project in relation to seven flawed approaches to combining environmentalism and anarchism. I then introduce the methodology I use, and I ground it in an anarchist ethics, which I introduce in terms of my approach to anarchist theory itself. I present my understanding of anarchism as not a fixed, static system, but a diverse, dynamic flux of arguments, ethics and practice that is constantly re-constituted through debate. I then provide an outline of chapters before moving into Chapter 2, Anarchist Theory, which provides the theoretical background for the thesis.

## 1.2

### The Project: Anarchism in Environmental Direct Action

In this thesis I am treating environmental direct action ( EDA ) as an anarchist phenomenon. I maintain that it belongs in the anarchist tradition and can be best understood according to anarchist terms. This challenges positions both within the anarchist camp, and within standard studies of environmental protest and green radicalism. My thesis refutes those anarchists who consider anarchism to be an outgrowth from and intimately tied to class-struggle, and those who consider the only 'real' anarchism to be that of the explicit anarchist organisations. It also refutes those who consider 'traditional' anarchism to be outdated, and no longer connected to the 'post-anarchist' or new 'pro-anarchy' expressions ( POO 1998: 2 ). I also argue against interpretations of environmental protest that view it in state-centric terms as 'lobbying by other means' - an expression of civil society and NGOs - and those who dismiss green radicalism as a merely single-issue or 'bourgeois' radicalism.

It is my view that anarchism can be found in the dialogue of activists talking and acting together. I am therefore challenging the tendency to conflate anarchism with a 'canon' of recognised thinkers and texts, and anarchist history with a history of the 'official' anarchist movements. I also oppose those who seek to construct a static 'system' of anarchist thought, and those who exclude insufficiently orthodox, 'coherent' or explicit actors from the anarchist fold. My approach stands as the opposite to those who would discount every 'hybrid' or 'woolly' anarchist perspective, and build walls around the accepted anarchist positions. To me, there is no *pure* anarchism, only a *living* anarchism: one that is grounded in real situations and practices, and which can be heard, seen and felt in actual life. I apply a dialogic perspective that maintains it is the meaning produced between actors, between positions, and done so in the real world as applied to practice, that constitutes the strength and substance of anarchism today. I will state more of my view of the existence and theoretical basis of anarchism in section 1.5, and explore it at more length in Chapter 2.

I undertook this thesis project as an environmental activist interested in exploring and interrogating the ideas and practices that, at the end of the twentieth century, I was getting ever more involved in. My background values therefore already included ecological ethics ( low- or anti-consumerism, conservation activities, a 'holism' that seeks congruity between personal and political practices, a prioritisation of 'free' nature over notions of economic 'progress' or 'mankind knows best' ) and proclivities for autonomous, self-directed action ( including an occasionally romantic identification with past heretic, anarchist and alternative movements ). I had read and absorbed much of the basic 'lessons' of anarchism, but my practical experience came more from environmental protest and lifestyle or co-operative ventures than the 'traditional' class-struggle anarchist movement. These background factors undoubtedly influenced my reading of anarchism, and my reading of EDA.

As an interpretative theory, I believe anarchism can hold its own against its rivals today, and provide a framework through which the political events of the world can be viewed. It is from this assumption that I began this research, because in a personal sense I consider myself to be an anarchist. My sensibility, my ethical principles and my critical view of the world are all informed by my reading of anarchist theory. In a certain sense therefore I consider anarchist political theory to be 'true'. So while I did not deliberately undertake this research in order to prove the validity of anarchism, it has naturally resulted in such a consideration. This is not to say that I consider anarchist perspectives ( any more than anarchists themselves ) are automatically correct in every sense. Rather it means that I concur with the general thrust and direction of anarchist inquiry, and I share in many of the underlying values that inform it. I consider that this background 'feel' for anarchism does not blunt the critical eye, but rather informs it and guides it to the salient places of stress, contradiction and innovation.

### 1.3

#### Literature Review

I have integrated my literature review throughout the chapters of this thesis, so my consideration of other writers' views is contained within the chapters for which they are relevant. However, in order to show how my thesis is positioned within the literature, I will now present two brief surveys. First, I present a somewhat abstract and stereotyped outline of seven alternative approaches that have been brought to bear on the relationship between anarchism and environmentalism. I do this in order to highlight the flaws and limitations of these ( necessarily simplified ) approaches, and to position my own approach against them. This is followed by a survey of those contemporary researchers who have studied subjects in a manner most similar to my own approach. My aim in these two surveys is to clarify my approach in relation to what it is not, and what it shares similarities with.

Assessments of the connections and affinities between anarchism and environmentalism tend to shallowness, abstraction or tangentiality. It is not that there is a dearth of such assessments - both celebration and critical analysis - but to those of us engaged and experienced in both anarchist and environmental practice, they often fail to ring 'true'. I will here criticise seven generic attempts to join the two, beginning with the two forms closest to my own perspective.

( 1 ) Attempts to link anarchism and environmentalism that have been advanced by anarchist writers such as Bookchin ( 1971 ), Woodcock ( 1974 ), Purchase ( 1994 ) and the ACF ( c1991 ), have tended to abstraction, reductionist readings, and uncriticality. They speak of 'anarchism' in an overgeneralised and oversimplified way, as if it can be captured within a neat, static characterisation, and they apply it to an equally simplified, indeed bowdlerised version of 'ecological thought'. They tend to rely upon a few quotes and examples from a very limited selection of green texts, and a highly selective reading of 'ecology' which is scientifically suspect and, in its theoretical ungroundedness, fails to add to our appreciation of the actual, real complementarities between the two discourses. I challenge these readings by characterising and operationalising an anarchism and green thought/practice that is defined by a diverse, context-specific and contested interplay of positions, and also by drawing for my sources from a broader and intrinsically diverse range of green, anarchist and activist voices, the context of which I take pains to include.

( 2 ) One might think the above deficits might be remedied from studies coming from within the academy – particularly from theorists sympathetic to the values and intentions of anarchist/green practitioners. It is true that such studies often confirm the potential anarchism of green activists and serve to deepen our understanding of certain aspects of activist practice. Yet they rarely go beyond a recognition of 'these greens are anarchist': they treat this as a conclusion instead of a hypothesis to be demonstrated ( O'Riordan 1981; Hay 1988; Pepper 1993; Eckersley 1992; Dobson 1995 ). In my thesis I seek to establish this affinity early on and then utilise the case studies to draw out 'what happens next': what exactly the recognition of green anarchism might mean, in what ways it is expressed, what consequences it might have for activist strategy and impact, and for our understanding of anarchism itself. I also seek to demonstrate and contextualise specific perspectives and sites of anarchism, constructing a bridge to take specific arguments ( more in-depth than generalised abstractions ) into



new contexts - specifically EDA - to see how and whether they apply, and what can be learnt from the attempt. This is an anarchism of real arguments; an anarchism of ethical context and practical application. It is not an empty rhetorical position hypothesised between other ( Marxist or liberal ) green positions, nor an essentialised label that ignores actual practice and discourse.

( 3 ) Those who seek to 'build' a picture of green thought ( Goldsmith et al, 1972; Porritt 1986; Naess 1991; Hayward 1994; Dobson 1995 ) have earnestly struggled to apply the right words, the right values and the right political perspectives to their project. Many of these values and perspectives are either drawn from anarchism or coincidentally restate anarchist themes, yet the conscious recognition and consequent nuancing of these themes tends to be lacking, and so the anarchism remains archaic, static or incomplete ( not joined together ), and the anarchist perspectives are prone to recontextualisation within a non-anarchist, ahistorical and even mystical theorisation. The structures of green thought thus presented are abstracted from practice, rarefied and generalist like the anarchist models in ( 1 ), above. The political repertoires linked to them, furthermore, have failed to address or accept the anarchist view in its depth: this means they either remain outside my orbit in their electoralist or capitalist liberalism, or they again take the need for anarchist repertoires as conclusion, instead of starting point.<sup>1</sup> I discuss anarchist and green strategies further in sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4.

( 4 ) Others addressing the same topic of green radicalism, having perceived this lack of criticality and historical awareness, have unfortunately tended to utilise not anarchist but Marxist perspectives and lessons to fill the gap, to draw upon for critique, and to provide advice ( Pepper 1993; Martell 1994; Luke 1997; Red-Green Study Group 1995 ). The Marxist heritage ( productivist, anthropocentric, economic ) has proved highly unsuitable for this role, and the strategic lessons it provides are woefully inappropriate ( Bookchin 1971; Atkinson 1991; Eckersley 1992; Marshall 1992b; Carter 1999 ). Anarchism, in taking the question of social relationships and power structures as central, can give us much more insight into the possibilities and problems of grassroots environmental practice.

( 5 ) Über-critical eco-anarchists, seeking to avoid any and all problematic or 'unpure' examples from the anarchist past, have sadly resorted to the simplest but crudest solution: jettison the lot ( *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*; *Green Anarchy*; Black 1997; Jarach 2004 ). Thus the primitivist school, for example, presents us with a confusing and frustrating mixture in which thorough critical analysis and healthy anarchist attitudes are framed within an unnaturally bounded and codified 'ism' ( Moore 1997; Watson 1998; BGN 2002 ). I have found the tendency to precious separation from and hostility to, other anarchist and libertarian green currents particularly frustrating in that much genuine and profound theorising is taking place amongst primitivist or anti-civilisation circles. I discuss the primitivist stream further in section 2.3.3

( 6 ) Others, anarchists of different schools or eco-activists seeking to build their radicalism anew, have also tended to reify and render static their own position/tradition and that of their opponents ( Bradford 1989; Bookchin & Foreman 1991; Bookchin 1995a; Clark [J] 1998; Bonanno c2000 ). In the worst examples, this has resulted in the absurd position of a reductionist, false anarchism being pitted against a reductionist, false eco-radicalism. If nothing else, these examples provide proof that partisan, engaged analysis is not automatically superior to the academic form. Even within UK activist discussions, textual expressions tend to follow the mistakes of this tendency, solidifying and simplifying particular versions of anarchism or 'correct' green practice - which are in reality only possible expressions at one particular time - in order to pit them against even more simplified readings of opponents' views ( EEV 1997; GA 2000 ).

( 7 ) Militant environmental practitioners, who have produced their anarchism spontaneously and intuitively, have failed to appreciate the diversity and roundedness of historical anarchist lessons. Thus US EF! which, in the early nineties, presented the most inspirational, energetic and influential practice for UK EDA, and which developed intuitively anarchist organisational and political practices with remarkable success, allowed stereotype and prejudice to inform its view of anarchism instead of taking a more 'generous' approach: and drawing the best from the tradition ( which I seek to do ). Practical implications of this were seen in its early years when US EF! allowed racist and severely authoritarian statements to go uncombated, not least because it had avoided applying anarchist ethics out of a distinctly American fear of revolutionary leftism. Within the UK grassroots EDA milieu, the tradition of anarchism and radical revolts has more readily been embraced, albeit often in a self-consciously

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<sup>1</sup> Of the books of this type, I consider Alan Carter's to be the exception to the rule ( 1999 ), and I draw upon his work in Chapter 4.

non-industrial version ( in the US, the situation has now also shifted in this direction ), but misunderstandings and simplifications are still widespread.

It is because of the flaws in the above approaches that I consider eco-anarchism to require another assessment, and I have adapted my own approach to seek to remedy these flaws, or at least to avoid repeating them. With this in mind, I feel compelled to note that, in this very survey, I have demonstrated a similar over-generalisation, over-simplification, and general 'over-doing' of the certainty of my critical assessment. It is intended only to clarify the perceived errors that have informed my own approach. I do not wish to suggest that I am somehow above and beyond the above readings, and I do not reject the commentators and texts cited above. Rather I use characterisations and critical tenets presented by them to inform my own work, seeking to take the best and the most useful elements, and re-apply them in a dialogue with activist debate.

Having identified the flaws and limitations in the above approaches, I wish now to look at those individual researchers who have conducted research in a manner which, when viewed together, I would suggest might constitute an appropriate anarchist approach to research, and to theory, and with which I wish to affiliate my own project. I will draw upon their insights at relevant points in the thesis, but my intention in these next few paragraphs is to distinguish their approaches, and topics of concern, from my own.

It is a critical realist ( Wall 1997: 9-10 ) who has produced the most in-depth analysis of nineties EDA ( Wall 1999a ), but in Chapter 3 I distinguish my approach from that of critical realists – including those with some sympathies for anarchism, such as Wall and Cox ( 1998 ). Wall's work, while crucially valuable as a historical document of the processes by which Earth First! and the anti-roads movement developed ( an achievement which I do not seek to repeat here ), has an artificially narrow field of vision when viewed in anarchist terms. I consider it damning of the broader approach of social movement analysis that, as Goaman states, Wall fails to capture the "ethos, spirit and impulse that underpins people's involvement in Earth First!". His deployment of a "Theoretical approach deeply lodged in conventional sociological concepts ... tends to 'suffocate' his account of living movements with irrelevant intellectual baggage" ( Goaman 2002: 15 ). The same could be said of many academic accounts. Plows records that Wall "employs the 'standard toolbox' of social movement theories to explain and contextualise direct action mobilisations" ( 2002b ), and Goaman criticises that this means that "Earth First! ideas, with their profound ethos of libertarianism and the rejection of scientific reason and instrumentalism, are reduced to a set of instrumental scientific processes – diagnosis, prognosis and a calling to action" ( 2002: 16 ). As Plows indicates, however, Wall is by no means the worst offender ( Plows 2002b ), and similar condemnations have been made of overly formal and instrumental SM research - of Jordan by Welsh ( 1997: 77-79 ); of Lent by Plows ( Social Movements List 1998 ); of Melucci by Heller ( 2000: 9 ); and of Gathering Force by *Do or Die* ( 1998: 139-144 ). Such SM approaches show a tendency both for a "theoretical overextension of concepts" and an "empirical overextension ... the tendency to make broad statements about movement dynamics" ( Jasper 1999: 41 ). These critiques, expressive of an anarchist perspective, have all informed my own approach.

Karen Goaman's own thesis focussed on the situationist current within anarchism. She places more emphasis on ideas than on action ( 2002: 58 ), and views texts as the primary location of anarchist ideas and identity ( 2002: 1-5 ), arguing that "It is the critical ideas and their dissemination through texts that form common links between persons who participate in oppositional currents" ( Goaman 2002: 13 ). While I recognise, celebrate and benefit from the texts which, Goaman accurately notes, are commonly produced even for "activist oriented interventions" ( 2002: 58 ), I position these within a broader context of activism, communal endeavour and experience which cannot be completely captured within the text. I share Goaman's view that Wall's study "would have greatly benefited from ... an exploration of key texts, ideas, attitudes and affinities that would have been afforded by periodicals such as *Do or Die* and even the activist-oriented newsletter Action Update" ( 2002: 59 ), but unlike Goaman, I do not prioritise certain 'influential' periodicals within anarchist circles. Instead I seek to utilise a diverse range of the most articulate or 'telling' of the ephemeral pamphlets, 'discussion documents' and gathering debates which arise from the milieus and concerns of EDA: this allows a reading of anarchism that contains more nuance and difference. I would also suggest that a problem with Goaman's project is that it focuses on the individuals involved in producing texts and zines, as if an understanding of their ( self-declared ) biographies explains the ideas. It is, furthermore, dangerous to pin anarchism on a few selected individuals ( although she emphasises she has only used names



already in the public domain ( 2002: 255 ) ), both in terms of their personal safety, and in terms of the ongoing vitality of the movement.

Mick Smith's approach is a little further removed from my own study of direct action, focussing on ethics and the theoretical formalisation of ethics, but I wish to cite him here as an inspiring example of how to take the anarchist approach and use it to engage with and refuse the assumptions of dry theory ( 1995; 2001a; 1997 ). His prioritisation of context, experience and personal intuition against abstract theoretical expressions has informed my understanding of environmentalism. Where Smith writes my intended argument in the language and concerns of ethics, Jeff Ferrell writes it in terms of space, spontaneity and experience ( Ferrell 2001 ). Situating himself as a full participant of the marginal street cultures of his topic, he views the margins of the city – the margins of power – as “locations of radical openness and possibility” ( Soja quoted in Ferrell 2001: 241 ). But while I share an empathy with Ferrell's approach and would ally myself with many of his insights, Ferrell's work is an inspiring celebration not a critical analysis, concerned with an evocation of the anarchist practices of marginal elements in society who practically contest the policing of space. Despite the crossovers, therefore, his project is distinct from mine both in its theoretical concerns, and also in its subject matter ( not least for being a study of the US, not the UK ).

David Heller's ( 2000 ) examination of peace movement direct action, including Faslane Peace Camp and Trident Ploughshares, includes considerations of the links between action and ideology; the symbolic power of material practices; and the concrete effects of symbolism. His study has taken on board many of the anarchist lessons for social movement analysis. The differences from my own project lie in his subject matter- peace movement direct action not environmental direct action - and his anthropological concerns, in which the rich detail of experience takes the place of a closer and more conscious theoretical engagement with the anarchist tradition. But I consider Heller an exemplary anarchist researcher, and he is very useful for many of the concepts he uses, such as intersubjectivity, non-protest forms of resistance, and practical ( and contested ) forms of power-with, and other positive forms of ( anarchist ) power, such as the expression of communal solidarity through song and self-organisation ( 2000: 145 ) ( see section 2.2.5 ). It is not that he has invented these concepts, which are quite widespread in EDA, but he gives them a practical academic application and convincingly contextualises them in real settings.

Alex Plows has produced a plethora of articles and papers that celebrate and examine various forms of EDA. These began with articles speaking from her subject position as Alex Donga the road-protester ( *Do or Die* 1995: 88-89; Plows 1995; 1997 ), and developed according to an ever-greater immersion in the language of SM theory ( 2002a; Wall, Doherty & Plows 2002 ). She is perhaps the researcher who I have referenced most frequently and been inspired by most regularly, although the shift toward ever-greater technicality in utilising SM theories at first appeared, to me, to erode much of the power in her earlier work. As with the case of Wall, I found that the dry language created a distance from the ground-level of EDA, and that the frameworks were often more concerned with their own theoretical and disciplinary disagreements than an engagement with the dialogue and practice on the ground: it was in reaction to this, and similar SM-framed approaches to EDA that I immersed myself deeper in an anarchist and not an SM approach. However, more recent papers Plows has undertaken with Doherty and Wall have succeeded in re-transcribing SM language onto what I view as anarchist concerns and anarchist arguments, particularly through the application of Welsh's ( 2000 ) concept of 'capacity building' to EDA, and by supporting the anarchist ( not liberal ) conceptualisation of direct action which I consider in section 6.2.1 ( Doherty, Plows & Wall 2003 ).

Jonathan Purkis is another of the researchers whose research into EF!'s practice has positively informed my own work. Purkis has focussed particularly on the holistic and micro-political aspects of EF! practice, providing a corrective to studies that view direct action solely in terms of moments of conflict. In Chapter 5 I draw upon some of his insights, particularly with regard to the radicality or revolutionary quality of EF!. Purkis' subject matter differs from mine practically, in that he focussed on EF!ers in a different part of the country, and at a period that was at some remove from the bulk of my own fieldwork ( 2001 ). He also pursued a sociological line of inquiry which, while similarly grounded in anarchist tenets, was expressive of a discipline and language to which I have had relatively little engagement. I consider some of his, and other writers' analysis of the social ecology – deep ecology variations in EDA to be 'done', accepted, and requiring no further academic explanation. Indeed the pursuit of this and similar academic investigations into green ideology ( such as 'post-materialism' or green consumerism ) has enabled me to choose my own area of concern much more finely.

Purkis is identified with those academically-situated anarchists committed to a pluralistic and activist-supporting anarchism ( Welsh & Purkis 2003: 12; cf Chesters 2003b ), many of whom have written in the journal *Anarchist Studies*. Another of these, Graeme Chesters, presents another exemplary example of a partisan activist-academic ( he is also a member of the *Notes from Nowhere* collective ), for example by contributing his academic authority to the defence and public understanding of Reclaim the Streets ( 2000a; 2000c ). Chesters has engaged more with the anticapitalist movement than EDA, and he has proved more concerned with the application of innovative theories to activist practice, such as Melucci's work on collective identity ( 1998 ), or the resonance between complexity theory and anti-globalisation networking ( 2005 ). I have not found the neologistic or zeitgeisty terms that excite other theorists ( Jordan ( 2002 ) is another example ) to have had such a marked appeal or connection to my research, however. I have remained more firmly grounded ( earthed ) in the interplay between the fields of environmentalism and the terms of the anarchist tradition. It is my combination of academic analysis and investigation with a commitment to the interplay of anarchism and environmentalism that makes my work distinct.

## 1.4

### Methodology

Chapter 3 is the chapter in which I introduce my methodological approach, and consider the links between my experience, anarchist theory, and their relationship to various 'progressive' theoretical approaches to research. I introduce anarchist perspectives on knowledge ( and thus on academic activity ), and ally this with elements of the feminist epistemological challenge. I demonstrate the sophistication of anarchism's traditional hostility to top-down, 'neutral' perspectives, using the critique of law as example. I find myself unable to usefully apply a purist and 'more revolutionary than thou' critique, however, and so I use feminist research tools instead, to chart a path of least-oppressive, least-hierarchical and least-compromised practice. Amongst the qualities cited by feminist researchers, I take the validation of experience over abstract theory to justify my use of practical experience to augment and ground my analysis.

I argue that feminist tools of research, typified by notions of 'partisanship'; the inclusion of the voices of the researched; and their participation in the research process, are characterised by an anarchist ethic. I distinguish my use of such notions from previous feminist frameworks, however, in that EDA activists are not suppressed subjects requiring kid gloves, but active, dynamic and able agents quite capable of critical assessments and interventions themselves. I also distinguish my approach from the radical aspirations of critical theory and what I consider to be over-simplified leftist urges to 'unify thought and practice'. Instead, I embrace reflexivity to support a more open-ended, incomplete dialogue with my research subjects.

I apply anarchist analyses to academia, to my own research and also to the notion of activism itself. This serves to situate my position within the research process, and to prioritise my relationship to the activist group 'TAPP'. Here I ground my ethical considerations by considering how my involvement in the group affected my intellectual development and perspectives; how TAPP's experience of research throws up aspects of the activist critique of research ( such as the irrelevance, the apoliticism, the power relationship, the exploitation of subjects ). I conclude with a consideration of how even the 'best' research strategies ( which I group according to the themes of 'limits' and security; the dilemmas of the insider researcher; usefulness; and dialogue ) remain problematic to a full anarchist ethics.

Ultimately I gave much less attention to fieldwork, ethnographic research and interviews than I had originally considered, but shifted my primary source of 'data' onto publicly available ( or at least 'non-private' ) expressions, such as gathering debates, 'discussion documents', press releases and reports. I then used my extensive insider research and 'observant participation' to *quietly* inform my thesis, and sought to find a liveable, non-disruptive and non-distorting methodology of research. I had to accept an imperfect match, therefore, between the academic urge to record, collate and analyse; and my own life.



## **Anarchism in this Thesis**

In this section I shall state my approach to anarchism, clarify what is not my approach, and consider how we may recognise anarchism. I must insert a disclaimer, however ( the first of many ): this is my particular reading of anarchism, and I claim no greater ‘authority’ for it than that. For me, the recognition of anarchism comes from the recognition of arguments, not of boundaries: there is no tight definition surrounding what is legitimate and what is not legitimate anarchist practice. Rather there is an identifiable and coherent corpus of ethics, argument and strategy that can be applied - to different degrees - to many different situations.

I view anarchism as a mutually supportive matrix of sentiment, critique and practice. Its hallmarks are ( 1 ) an opposition to authority and social domination in all their guises; ( 2 ) an ideal of social freedom: an optimism by which the inequities of currently existing society can be critically judged; ( 3 ) a drive to act freely, to rebel, to refuse to either passively accept exploitation and domination, or to take part in power games; ( 4 ) a faith in the capability of one’s fellow human beings, to agree and to work things out better when there are no interfering state structures; ( 5 ) a view of power as corrosive, and a corresponding injunction to develop ways of working that counteract build-ups of power or the exercise of power over others. There are certain outgrowths of these central tenets ( which I look at in turn in Chapter 2 ), including an opposition to liberal institutions such as parliament; anti-capitalism; and direct action, but such particular doctrines are not definitive in themselves: they are merely conclusions drawn. I consider anarchism to have a compatibility – though not a fixed equivalence – with radical environmentalism. Fundamentally, I consider it to be plural and dynamic, capable of embracing many contested and conflictual positions, and I consider also that anarchism can be revealed through practice as much as it can be through text. In the following paragraphs I will explain how I have approached anarchism as dialogical and plural discourse, evidenced in texts and practice, debate and application.

A key component of my interrogation of the relationship between anarchism and environmental direct action is the belief that anarchism can be found in the dialogue of activists talking and acting together. I argue that this is the same essential anarchism as was formerly expressed in the ‘classical’ anarchist movements – not identical, but akin at its core. Rather than write a monolithic ‘grand narrative’ of anarchism - fixing it for good; speaking of it in a static way; ‘synthesising’ it into a model - I deal with anarchism according to what I consider to be its own values – fluidity, collective criticality, an ‘ethic’ underlying discourse and practice. This approach stands opposed to the idea that anarchism essentially consists of certain fixed tenets which can then, like a rulebook, be systematically and identically applied to every case. In the next chapter I do detail key tenets of anarchism ( anti-authority; freedom; rebellion; human nature; and power, cited above ), but I emphasise the variety of interpretations and combinations that can be assembled out of these. A focus on tenets serves as a way-in to understanding anarchism, not as a conclusion or end-point.

The way I have attempted to present an understanding of dialogic and pluralistic anarchism is by presenting and sourcing my argument on the debates of activists. I therefore present opposed voices from newsletters, activist reports, photocopied and re-distributed pamphlets, discussions at gatherings, email discussions, and ‘discussion documents’. These are ephemeral texts rarely covered in the ‘above ground’ literature, ie. they are rarely repeated in their ‘original’ form outside the campaigns and activist circles they come from, despite the fact that they strikingly and consistently reproduce central anarchist concerns, arguments and understandings. The discussions and the activist intelligence and ethos communicated in these circles is distinct from how anarchists ( or anarchist ‘interpreters’ ) tend to ‘present’ anarchism to the outside/public world. Yet these discussions – even though they might be narrowly strategic and tactical; exaggerated and overblown; or rooted to obscure points or miniscule sites of struggle - are precisely where anarchism may be found revealed. I strive to present these debates ‘in context’, so far as possible, because decontextualised they become meaningless. The above points do not mean that I relegate anarchist texts or anarchist history to irrelevance, however. Rather, I consciously re-apply perspectives from these sources, and I emphasise how traditional anarchist arguments are re-articulated from within EDA.

EDA also shows many conscious links with anarchist history, and I consider these of inestimable importance. If EDA is to have relevance for future anarchism it needs to keep this interaction/continuity going – to take part in the historical thread of hope, generosity and anger that is the anarchist tradition. I am reintegrating EDA into the anarchist frame, and not in an abstract irrelevant way but through the *actual*, expressed, recognised and restated demonstrations. I use historical anarchism as a critical judge for EDA practice and attitudes, identify the contrasts in context, and assess what *remains* linked. This may be seen as a reconstruction of anarchism. Because – I argue – anarchism is being constructed/reconstructed all the time, that process by which the construction/reconstruction is demonstrated *is* the anarchist tradition.

Instead of talking about anarchism in the abstract, I take voices from different contexts and see how they fit. Much of the editing of these is obviously ‘pre-chosen’ by myself – I have chosen those which I think fit, support, add depth to, or bring up an interesting clash. I believe they tell a truer, closer story of anarchism than an overarching or a uniform framework – to allow the voices available to guide my structure and argument. I celebrate this diversity and draw out the shared, in-common lessons it has for our understanding of anarchism.

There are many positions on anarchism that I distance myself from: I will here list three of the most simple of these. First, I refute those eco-anarchists who say ‘ecology is anarchist’, as if that clears up the matter once and for all. True the two streams appear very sympathetic, and there is enough common ground to allow activists to perform eco-anarchism, but it is worthless ( false ) to speak of it in the abstract.

Second, instead of high theory – whether critical or ‘postmodern’ - I focus on actual practising eco-anarchists. This indicates that I refuse to conflate anarchism with trendy contemporary theorisations, but rather keep anarchism’s priority – from which position some themes and tools of postmodern theory may then be used ( but within an anarchist framework ).

I do not ( as some class-strugglists do ) say anarchism is only the movement – that anarchist practice equates to the explicit anarchist movement only – and that anarchism emerged, as if spontaneously, from the movement. But nor do I exclude those classical/historical/class struggle voices as inherently dead or irrelevant ( as some ‘post-left’ anarchists do ). Instead I utilise statements from these sources to critically engage with EDA and other anarchist positions. They are a vital part of the whole - legitimate voices within anarchist debate ( which, in my view, is close to synonymous with anarchism per se ).

I do not think that all anarchisms are equal ( ie. that all viewpoints on anarchism are fine ). Rather some arguments are superior in some contexts; more impressively coherent; avoid contradictions and pitfalls of other arguments; relate more closely to ( what I view as ) central anarchist themes and values; and some practices and organisational methods have proved more successful in some contexts ( those which have related best to ‘working class’ needs do gain extra merit here ). There is a tendency for all sides to overblow their positions – and all of these exaggerations can be pricked as I endeavour to do.

Everything can be criticised ( and super-criticality is another of the avowed characteristics of anarchism ), but some arguments are more valid than others – I plump for these as I go. However, this never means the argument is ‘done, finished’ – the other voices in the argument are not invalid if they also reflect anarchist themes and feelings, and intuitive arguments of the anarchist ethos. When one position or tendency appears the weaker, it may, under another light or in another context, appear the stronger, and it can ( and does ) modify and strengthen its position in the light of the opposition and criticism it faces. I do not suggest there is a developmental ‘progress’ in anarchism – on the contrary, the earlier arguments are often the stronger ( and frustratingly, often the weaker arguments have demonstrated most appeal and applicability ).

To judge whether an argument or practice is anarchist, certain criteria do apply ( see for example Bowen & Purkis ( 2005: 7 ) ). The study of the anarchist conception of direct action as the most useful handle/portal to anarchism is especially useful here, as it contains the ethical tenets of means-ends congruity, self-valorisation, direct not indirect, social not political or bureaucratic, collective and capable of being extended by both existing and other actors. A checklist should include the questions: is anyone being repressed/manipulated? Was the organisation free/ spontaneous/ bottom-up? Are there ulterior motives? Does the practice extend the practice and possibilities of freedom or does it close them down for others? These are themes that I explore in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, where I examine the



contemporary expressions of eco-activism in terms of the anarchist conceptualisation of direct action as the best guide for assessing the EDA of the case studies.

My reading of anarchism allows large margins – not every voice needs to be consistent with every other, hybrids and contradictory or woolly expressions may all float within the space. So long as they are engaged in dialogue on anarchist terms, share an understanding that reveals key anarchist themes ( whatever their particular conclusions ), and keep this anarchist argument and dialogue going, I include them. Others – perhaps the majority of explicit anarchists – would disavow such an approach, arguing that only those who are consistently, coherently, tightly anarchist ( on their particular readings ) deserve to be so called. This is a reasonable position to take, and may be strategically crucial ( to keep out misguided, misleading or recuperative tendencies ), yet for my academic ( non-strategic ) reading a broader approach is required.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.6

### Outline of Chapters

The theoretical grounds of the reading of anarchism I presented in section 1.5 are explored and interrogated in Chapter 2, Anarchist Theory. Chapter 2 provides the background and theoretical support for the thesis as a whole, identifying both the key concepts within anarchist ideology ( sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.5 ), and also the nature of anarchism in a broader, more philosophical sense ( sections 2.3.1 to 2.3.6 ). In the first band of sections ( those that begin with '2.2' ) I consider the distinctive anarchist conceptualisations, or key ideological tenets, of anti-authoritarianism; freedom; rebellion; human nature; and power. I consider some of the implications of these tenets for our analysis and understanding of anarchism, and in the sections of the second band ( beginning with 2.3 ), I argue that all these conceptualisations are interrelated in a matrix of mutually supporting – but not tightly systematised and static – values, arguments and attitudes. The theoretical groundwork established in Chapter 2 introduces the approach and values within which this thesis has been conducted. It justifies my attention to the practice, of diverse ( non-orthodox ) forms of anarchism and affirms a notion of pluralistic anarchism; of anarchism-as-practice; and the ethos and argumentative 'spirit' of anarchism. This chapter, therefore, justifies my placing of EDA within anarchism, and introduces the critical tools with which we 'think about' anarchism in this thesis. I endeavour in this chapter to move away from conventional or static mappings of ideology, and instead lay out a basis on which a fully dialogic and enacted anarchism of multiple sites and voices may be understood. Instead of practice being deformed to fit the theory, the practice can be shown to demonstrate and explore the meaning of the theory.

Chapter 3, Methodology, provides the first demonstration of my anarchist approach, as I consider how feminist, postmodern, critical realist and other politically-engaged perspectives may be used to develop research that challenges and is less saturated by statist, capitalist and faux-objective norms. I situate myself within my own research and I introduce the local Newcastle group, TAPP, as the context in which much of my activism and research was situated. I emphasise that I could not conduct research which is either 'pure' ( free from negative impacts, free from negative power dynamics ) or 'transformatory' of my subjects, but I do argue that my research has remained true to anarchist ethics. Considerations for a libertarian research methodology characterised by anarchist ethics include a sensitivity to the dangers of 'representation' and exploitation, and a commitment to genuine dialogue with actors who are not streamlined to fit hypotheses, but are recognised as rational and complex actors.

Chapter 4, Green Radicalism, considers the legitimacy of saying greens are anarchist by reviewing the relations between anarchist thought ( and practice ) and green thought ( and practice ). It also introduces the impact of anarchist analysis on practice by detailing the anarchist critique of most green

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<sup>2</sup> In organising the Projectile festival of anarchist film and ideas in Newcastle ( 11-13 February 2005 ), we provoked comments from both directions of this issue. Firstly, our inclusion of one speaker led to comments such as 'he's no anarchist. He doesn't deserve a platform, he deserves a good kicking'. From the other direction, a prominent member of the IWW speaking at our event was criticised by others in the IWW for identifying himself with an anarchist event, along the lines of 'I thought we were avoiding being associated with narrow anarchism.' I maintain that practical anarchist positions are *always* situated between such critical perspectives, and so they are always subject to critique from both sides.



strategies, and then marking out the strategic thinking of anarchism in terms of 'revolutionary' and 'direct' action. Environmentalism may be understood and identified through its practice as well as through recognised 'green texts', and the thought and practice of anarchism and environmentalism are engaged in a process of dialogue, hybridisation and contestation: it is within this process that grounds are provided for eco-anarchism to exist. Environmentalism and anarchism are broadly compatible, and each gains by the application of the insights and ethos of the other ( although no final synthesis is possible – they exist in an *ongoing* process of dialogue ). I consider what radicalism is inherent to ecological thinking, and assess the relationship of environmentalism to different traditions: specifically anarchism. In the latter part of the chapter, I then outline the eco-anarchist critiques of capitalism, the state, and all green strategies that fail to systematically oppose those factors. This is followed by a presentation of the anarchist approach to 'true' revolutionary action. Here I emphasis the place of freedom at the heart of all legitimate anarchist approaches to change: a point that will follow us through the ensuing chapters.

In Chapter 5, *Activist Anarchism: the case of Earth First!*, I provide a detailed assessment of an actual example of experiential, ecologically-motivated activism, one that defines itself on anarchist terms and holds its debates according to recognisably anarchist terms. I first consider the dynamics involved in the creation of anarchistic activists and activist organisations such as Earth First! The chief two factors here are the institutionalisation – the co-option, neutralisation, bureaucratisation and state-ification of environmental organisations - and the radicalisation ( both alienation and empowerment ) of activists engaged in extra-institutional struggle to defend the places they love. I also introduce DIY Culture, as the counter-cultural milieu out of which EF! emerged, and as the clearest example of an informal anarchist movement that was bound by deeds not words, and was therefore able to accommodate difference at its very heart. In the second band of sections I assess Earth First! as the most clearly eco-anarchist organisation in the UK. I characterise the activist anarchism of Earth First! as a compound of many varieties, none overbearing, and I demonstrate that the arguments of many anarchist currents have been practically re-expressed in the EF! network. I chart Earth First!'s 'revolutionary' qualities through a critical examination of notions of 'success'; I note its strategic rationale and note how it demonstrated traditional dualisms of individualism vs community, red vs green and lifestyle changes vs social objectives, to be irrelevant to an anarchist practice. Finally, I look most fully at Earth First!'s organisation and identity, as expressed through an anarchist process of dialogue and dissensus at the 1999 Winter Moot. Here we may glimpse many traditional and divergent elements of anarchist ideology, and witness how they are accommodated to a contemporary ecological context.

Chapter 6, *Conflictual Strategies of Action: Violence, GM Crops, and Peat*, moves to questions of strategy, violence, and the tensions that arise between some of the divergent strategic frameworks that co-exist within an activist anarchist plurality. I begin by clarifying the definition of anarchist direct action, first by contrasting it to liberal or indirect forms, and second by drawing out some of its positive ethos from the context of anarcho-syndicalism. I then move to look at the issue of violence in direct action, beginning with the polarised and unhelpful 'fluffy'-'spiky' opposition that was held in EDA. I gain a more nuanced approach by assessing views of violence in the historical anarchist tradition as expressed, for example, through refutations of the of 'propaganda of the deed'. Having distinguished anarchism from pacifism, I conduct a dialogue between anarchism and CD discourse, the dominant theoretical influence on the peace movement which has, in turn, had a positive influence on EDA. I then look at sabotage, viewing it as the marker point between liberal and radical environmentalisms, but itself surrounded by issues of violence and noncompatibility with certain other EDA strategies.

In the second half of the chapter I move to concrete examples of debates concerning strategy, elitism and violence within nineties EDA. First, with Anti-GM direct action, I consider the forms of anti-GM activism that hold most relevance to an anarchist strategy. Centrally, I present the covert-overt debate as a case of dialogue between ideological and strategic positions that, despite their marked opposition, are both able to exist *within* a broad field of anarchism, sharing and expressing anarchist values even as they contest each other. Secondly, with Peat and the ELF, I consider the place of sabotage in EDA, and evaluate it according to the terms of anarchist ethics and principles. I contrast two organisational forms of ecosabotage, characterising the ELF as 'representative' and founded upon a social division, and Peat Alert! as participatory, grounded and fully in keeping with my anarchist assessment of EDA.

Chapter 7, *Reclaim the Streets and the Limits of Activist Anarchism*, turns to the forms of nineties EDA most celebrated by anarchists, and then most criticised and commented upon by press, politicians,

and EDA practitioners. Reclaim the Streets was the site of 1990s EDA that was most celebrated by anarchists, for holding the most promise of a truly confrontational, anti-authoritarian challenge in society. I establish the anarchist basis of the critical mass and street party tactics deployed by RTS in London and then spread around the world ( using Newcastle as a provincial example ). In addition to drawing out the anarchism contained in the practice, I also look at the anarchism contained in the diverse ideology promoted by RTS, including elaborations such as the revolutionary carnival, the TAZ and the Street Party of Street Parties. I argue that their development into a more abstract, static and repetitive practice of anticapitalism eroded many of the grounds of their success. This demonstrates the tension that still pertains between ideological anarchism and EDA practices, and between the ideals of anarchist organisation and the practicalities of 'successful' action. I conclude by utilising the example of Mayday 2000 as the much-heralded conjoining of traditional ideological anarchism and the looser activist anarchism of EDA. I focus mostly on the problems that were perceived to arise on this occasion, and I return to the strengths of earlier EDA to identify reasons what had been lost.



## Chapter 2 Anarchist Theory

### 2.1

#### Introduction

This chapter introduces the theory with which - and *within* which - I will be working throughout the thesis. This involves ( a ) grounding the reader in the central tenets of anarchist discourse, ( b ) evaluating the idea of 'anarchism' itself and ( c ) introducing some of the critical tools of anarchism. The subject of this thesis is not just the counter-cultural activists engaged in environmental defence, but also the body of arguments, values and experience termed anarchism.

The first part of this chapter looks at the distinctive conceptualisations or key tenets held by anarchists, and explores some of the implications for our study of anarchism. 2.2.1, Against Authority, Against Definition, negotiates the initial problems faced when gaining a grasp of anarchism's identity. I introduce the 'sources' of anarchism that I shall be drawing on in this thesis, and use the first principle of anarchism ( anti-authority ) to sound a note of caution concerning our ability to authoritatively define anarchism. The next four sections establish a further four key tenets and hallmarks of anarchism, namely 2.2.2 Freedom, 2.2.3, Rebellion, 2.2.4, Human Nature and 2.2.5, Power. I present a case for anarchism in which these tenets are interrelated, distinctive and, I argue, both coherent and accurate. The distinctive anarchist perspectives on these issues go a long way to revealing the essence of anarchism. Yet it is not my aim to fix these tenets, but rather to use them to aid the exploration of possibilities later in the thesis. Moving to the nature of anarchism, the next three sections, 2.3.1, Strength in Flexibility, 2.3.2, History and the Idea, and 2.3.3 Orthodoxy and Second Wave Anarchism, identify apparent inconsistencies and problems of a closer definition of what anarchism is. I argue for anarchism's flexibility – its fundamental simplicity making it capable of great complexity when applied. I also argue for an anarchism that it is practical not purist, and I argue that it manages to be both diverse, yet coherent, and I insist that it should not be simplistically equated with any of its particular historical or doctrinal versions. By understanding these aspects of anarchist ideological 'structure', and examining how the construct of 'anarchism' relates to reality, we find ourselves more accurately situated within anarchism, and less likely to make mistakes of reductivism, over-literalism, confusing a part for the whole, and so on. Finally, I assess how anarchism is expressed through 2.3.4, Emotion, 2.3.5, Reason, and 2.3.6, Practice. These are the facets of anarchism that are manifested through EDA, and they are also the *signs* by which we might get to know anarchism.

By working within a broadly anarchist framework, this thesis might run the danger of uncritical self-referentiality. I do note criticisms of anarchism, but when these rest on foundations antithetical to anarchist values, I have generally found they are a case of talking *past* the ideology, rather than to it. This means they can be dismissed by anarchists as either 'reformist' or 'authoritarian', a position I elaborate in the environmentalist context in Chapter 4. Much more severe and hard-hitting critiques have been launched from *within* the anarchist camp, however: between the many different camps-within-the-camp. An incessantly critical and questioning attitude is integral to anarchism. Thus anarcho-syndicalists condemn eco-anarchists, class-struggle anarchists critique anarcho-pacifists, individualist anarchists attack anarcho-communists and so on: anarchism is no placid philosophical scene but a cockpit of competing, impassioned and vigorous viewpoints, and it is tested daily *on-the-ground*. It is this lively and contested terrain that forms the substance of this thesis.

In studying the forms of anarchism deployed by today's environmental activists, I shall also be noting which elements of 'classical' anarchism have been left behind, and which have re-emphasised. In so doing, I will be considering what constitutes the 'core' of anarchism – what cannot be left behind without losing the title. I will also be paying strict attention to the manner in which the 'key tenets' are adapted to their environment-of-use and how, in so doing, they become modified – sometimes almost completely estranged – from their nineteenth-century or early-twentieth-century meanings. The concept of 'direct action' constitutes the main object of study in this regard, but I shall also consider such conceptualisations as sabotage, revolution, organisation, solidarity and anticapitalism. This thesis presents an exploration of the nature of ideological continuity and coherence in the context of almost

wholesale change. This chapter provides a foundation for this process by exploring the central tenets and key aspects of the anarchist doctrine.

## 2.2 Key Tenets of Anarchism

### 2.2.1

#### Against Authority – Against Definition

“Beware of believing anarchism to be a dogma, a doctrine above question or debate, to be venerated by its adepts as is the Koran by devout Moslems, No! the absolute freedom which we demand constantly develops our thinking and raises it towards new horizons ... takes it out of the narrow framework of regulation and codification” ( Emile Henry, written before his execution, quoted in Calendar Riots c2002: 8<sup>th</sup> November ).

Defining anarchism is a difficult task: whatever definition I adopt will be given the lie by one or other variety of anarchist. Almost every attempt at definition begins with a disclaimer, such as the following from the first ‘Anarchist Encyclopaedia’: “There is not, and there cannot be, a libertarian Creed or Catechism. That which exists and constitutes what one might call the anarchist doctrine is a cluster of general principles, fundamental conceptions and practical applications” ( Faure in Woodcock 1980: 62; cf Bonanno 1998: 2 ). We must limit the ambitions of what is being attempted here. Even the most standard definition of ‘Anarchism’ is only the definition of *one type* of anarchism.

There are nevertheless certain statements that can be made about anarchism, as the Encyclopaedia goes on to do: the “many varieties of anarchist ... all have a common characteristic that separates them from the rest of humankind. This uniting point is the negation of the principle of Authority in social organisations and the hatred of all constraints that originate in institutions founded on this principle” ( in Woodcock 1980: 62; cf Sylvan 1993: 216; Walter 2002: 27; *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 27; Makhno et al. 1989: General Section ). Anti-authoritarianism will be our first point of contact with anarchism.

Anarchy is opposed to authority, as demonstrated by the etymology of the word “‘an-archy’: ‘without government’: the state of a people without any constituted authority” ( Malatesta in Woodcock 1980: 62; cf Morland 2004: 24 ). Others may translate the Greek slightly differently, as ‘against authority’, ‘without rule’ or ‘absence of domination’, but the gist at least is clear. Woodcock notes that Faure’s statement in the Encyclopaedia ( ‘Whoever denies authority and fights against it is an anarchist’ ) “marks out the area in which anarchism exists...[ but ] by no means all who deny authority and fight against it can reasonably be called anarchists”. Thus he states that both ‘unthinking revolt’ and ‘philosophical or religious rejection of earthly power’ cannot be called anarchism. In this thesis we will encounter many claims of what does and does not make an anarchist, and it will be clear that I myself am also engaged in various attempts at constructing a border around the term. All such attempts at definition are by their nature problematic and liable to critique, although the family resemblances of the various branches of anarchism are, at least in my view, reasonably clear-cut.

Within the revolutionary socialist tradition, anarchism distinguished itself by declaring “the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be at the same time a war against all institutions of political power”, such as parliament ( Rucker c1938: 17; cf Kropotkin 2001: 49 ). This division was most clearly displayed in history by the “famous, definitive and prognostic” split in 1872 between Marx and Bakunin in the International ( Ruins 2003: 2; 1871 Sonvillier Anarchist Congress, quoted in Woodcock 1986: 229 ), when the anarchists rejected the proto-state being formed within the international revolutionary organisation. In Bakunin’s terms, “The smallest and most inoffensive State is still criminal in its dreams” ( Bakunin quoted in Camus 1951: 126; cf Bakunin 1980: 143 ), and anarchists consistently argue that an instrument of oppression cannot be used for the liberation of the oppressed. For this reason, anarchists rejected revolutionary strategies aimed at ‘capturing the state’ and insisted instead that “Freedom can only be created by freedom, that is, by a universal popular rebellion and the



free organisation of the working masses from below upwards” ( Bakunin 1981: 42-3; cf Goldman 1980: 154 ).

I do not wish to examine traditional anarchist history in any depth, however. In line with the assessment of Woodcock that I shall consider in section 2.3.2, I feel that anarchy is best understood as an *ideal*, which provokes and inspires many different manifestations according to different historical circumstances. None of these is ‘pure’ anarchy - a correct model for all descendants to copy - but an attempt to realise unbounded freedom within a specific context. The historical situation, the technology and culture, the needs and desires of the people of the time and the challenges they face all play a part in the form of anarchism which they develop ( Welsh & Purkis 2003: 5 ). As Purkis & Bowen put it, “Anarchy has many masks which are all important, and this diversity cannot be united under one banner” ( 1997: 1 ). In exploring specific contemporary examples of anarchism in this thesis, and offering insights that affect our understanding of anarchism as a whole, my intention is to enlarge and diversify our understanding of anarchism, and *not* to attempt an everlasting or definitive analysis. There are, however, five recurring tenets of anarchism that may be used to help identify it. We have here introduced the first, anti-authority, and I will now turn to the second, freedom.

### 2.2.2

#### Freedom

“to look for my happiness in the happiness of others, for my own worth in the worth of all those around me, to be free in the freedom of others – that is my whole faith, the aspiration of my whole life” ( Bakunin 1990b: xv-xvi; cf Kropotkin 1987: 222 ).

The one substantive principle we have thus far is that anarchists are opposed to authority. The converse of this is that they are in favour of a type of freedom in which there is no authority. John Henry Mackay sums up what this ideal signifies in a couplet:

“I am an Anarchist! Where I will  
Not rule, and also ruled I will not be!” ( quoted in Goldman 1969: 47 ).

Thus anarchist freedom is not the same as individual license, which can be oppressive and exploitative ( Ritter 1980: 24 ). The libertine or ‘negative’ liberty of individualism may reach its apotheosis in both antisocial egotism, and in neo-liberal, unregulated capitalism. Both of these are antithetical to anarchism ( Chan 2004: 119; *TCA* 7(1) 2005: 31; Zerzan 1991: 5 ).<sup>3</sup> For anarchism to make any sense, one’s individual liberty must be matched by a social freedom, in which no-one is denied their own liberty by, for example, lack of resources and opportunities: “freedom to become what one is”, in Read’s terms ( 1949: 161; cf Berlin 1967: 141; MacCallum 1972). Carter extends this anarchist conceptualisation of freedom into the green sphere, where he argues “the freedom to act so as to compromise ecological integrity is, in the long run, freedom-inhibiting” ( 1999: 302; cf Wieck 1973: 95 ). We shall see this argument deployed particularly in the case of cars ( section 7.4 ), but also underlying much green activism.

Representing the viewpoint of social anarchism, Bakunin argues that our individual freedom is given us by society, and that “this liberty ... far from finding itself checked by the freedom of others, is, on the contrary confirmed by it” ( quoted in Bookchin 1995a: 74; cf ACF c1991: 42; Woodcock 1992: 82<sup>4</sup> ). Such is the hope of social anarchists, summed up by Malatesta when he states that their ideal is “complete liberty with complete solidarity” ( in Woodcock 1980: 64; cf Malatesta 1974: 27; Walter 2002: 29; Ritter 1980: 3; Hill 1973: 35 ). Such is the noblest ideal of anarchism, and it emerges in all

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<sup>3</sup> This point is contested by anarcho-capitalists and some other anarchist individualists, but in line with most anarchists I consider their doctrine as ‘beyond the pale’ ( Meltzer 2000: 50 ).

<sup>4</sup> A recent expression of this approach to ‘freedom’ is given by Toma: “We are born into company, the company of our mothers ... life offers no freedom in the sense modern civilisationary philosophy understands the term. The need to eat, excrete, hug, orgasm and all that’s naturally necessary to achieve them – these leave no room for freedom. Freedom exists only where it doesn’t exist” ( 2002: 2 ).



kinds of ways throughout anarchist theory and practice. In 4.3.4 we will underline the place of freedom within the anarchist method of revolution.

I am only touching here upon an issue that is of the highest importance to some anarchist individualists, who part company with social anarchists on precisely these grounds of individual liberty ( Miller 1984: 14; cf Carroll 1974: 47; Caudwell 1977: 72 ). To my own project, however, this issue has proved largely irrelevant, which perhaps demonstrates how far within the realm of social anarchism ( not individualism ) the eco-activists of my study are. The reason for this could be that the very impulse to and practice of activism is an embodiment of individual social responsibility. Zinn sums this up with the idea that, “To the extent that we feel free, we feel responsible” ( 1997: 632 ).

Brown explains how the anarchist understanding of freedom moves one into an opposition to state power and domination:

“Anarchists understand that freedom is grounded in the refusal of the individual to exercise power over others coupled with the opposition of the individual to restrictions by any external authority. Thus, anarchists challenge any form of organisation or relationship which fosters the exercise of power and domination. For instance, anarchists oppose the state because the act of governing depends upon the exercise of power, whether it be of monarchs over their subjects or, as in the case of a democracy, of the majority over the minority” ( 1996: 150; cf Brown 1989: 8-9 ).

We will examine the anarchist view of power in 2.2.5, but let us for now recognise that the anarchist hostility to government lies not in a grasping desire for personal power, but is based on an *ethical* desire for social freedom. If there are self-proclaimed anarchists who act solely for their own gain, then they have little relation to anarchism as a political theory.

### 2.2.3

#### Rebellion

“As man seeks justice in equality, so society seeks order in anarchy” ( Proudhon in Woodcock 1980: 10 ).

The key belief held by anarchists is that government is at best useless, and more commonly the source of society’s ills and suffering. The converse of this belief is that people without government are able to create a just society that caters to everyone’s needs ( Bookchin 1989a: 174; Barclay 1986 ). Thus Harper states that “Anarchy is pretty simple when you get down to it - people are at their very best when they are living free of authority, co-operating and deciding things among themselves rather than being ordered around” ( 1987: vii ).

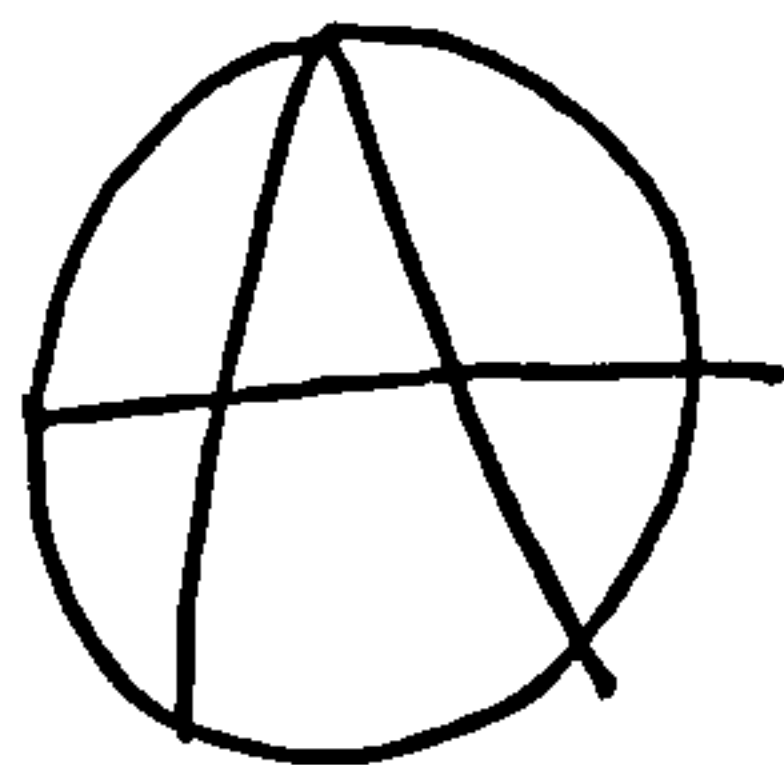


Figure F2.1 The Circled A

This is where the symbol of anarchy, the circled A illustrated in Figure F2.1, acquires one of its interpretations: ‘Anarchy is Order’<sup>5</sup>. This is a counter-intuitive statement when anarchy is so universally associated with chaos and rebellion. But within a society warped by authority and law,

<sup>5</sup> Alternative meanings of the anarchist symbol include ‘The Alpha & the Omega’, wherein liberty is identified as the beginning and the end ( Dubois 1894: 278 ).



anarchists champion spontaneous expressions of revolt and creativity: “Anarchists are forced to become what politicians describe them as: ‘agents of disorder’” ( Meltzer 2000; cf Jasper 1999: 359 ). In a world so upside-down that following normal, everyday life means conniving in oppression and exploitation, the expression of a ‘natural’ or ethical order may well take the form of protest or resistance. As Wilde phrased it: “Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion” ( in Woodcock 1980: 72; cf Chumbawamba in *Schnews* 1999; Heller 1999 [C]: 108-109 ). A demonstration that this theme is still current is demonstrated in Figure F2.2.

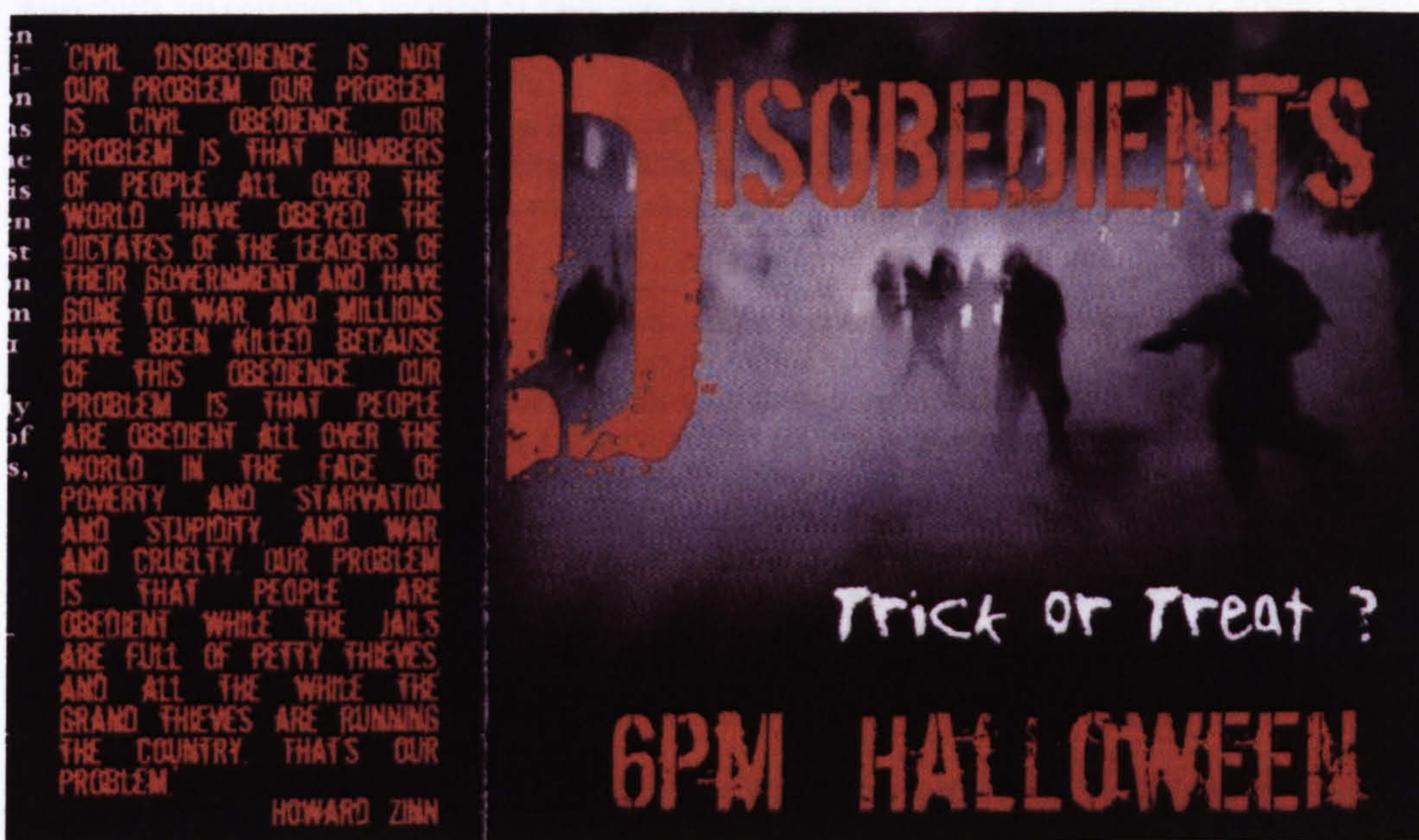


Figure F2.2 ‘Disobedients’ flyer produced for anti-war protests, 31.10.2001

Here we are provided with a justification for focussing on direct action and protest, because this is the place where, according to anarchist theory, the right life of society takes place. In Chapters 4 and 7, however, we will see that protest – and even direct action – is not a sufficient ingredient for anarchism. Values from elsewhere in anarchism may therefore be brought to bear on the practice of activism, and are used to critique it. I clarify this point in my characterisation of ‘anarchism through practice’ in 2.3.6.

While the actual proclivities of anarchists may often be for rebellion and spontaneous creativity, the ultimate goal of a free society is defined by order and peace. With this end in view, Kropotkin in the 1910 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* gives perhaps the most authoritative definition of anarchism<sup>6</sup>:

“a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government - harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilised being” ( 1910: 914 ).

We may note that this is an *organisational* definition: perspectives on organisation occupy a central place within anarchist political theory, and we will encounter the issue of both theoretical and practical organisation in every chapter of this thesis. What I wish to make clear here is that, notwithstanding the many peaceful and constructive attempts to build anarchist structures and cultures in the here and now, anarchism more than any other ideology is one of contestation, opposition and active resistance. As an ideological support for the kind of protests and actions covered in this thesis, from sit-down protests to inner-city street-fighting, anarchism is unsurpassed.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Authoritative’ here indicates the widespread influence and respect which Kropotkin’s definition has accrued: it should of course not be viewed as some kind of Archimedean point, prior to all other expressions.



## 2.2.4

### Human Nature

Anarchists are commonly accused of having an over-optimistic view of human nature ( Adams 1993: 172-3; Heywood 1994: 28 ). This is because they have argued that, left to its own devices, humanity would naturally choose a non-exploitative society based on natural solidarity: “This does not mean that anarchists think that all human beings are naturally good, or identical, or perfectible, or any romantic nonsense of that kind. It means that anarchists think that almost all human beings are sociable, and similar, and capable of living their own lives and helping each other” ( Walter 2002: 28; cf Woodcock 1980: 18; Heller [C] 1999: 85-88<sup>7</sup> ).

Carter states that the supposedly over-optimistic account in anarchism is “an over-simplification” and “a perennial half-truth that deserves to be critically examined” ( 1971: 11-16; cf Miller 1984: 76-7 ). Instead, “Anarchists are proprietors of a double-barrelled conception of human nature”, in which “Egoism is balanced by sociability” ( Morland 1997a: 12-13 ). Humans are neither intrinsically good nor bad, but they have the *potential* for both. As Proudhon writes:

“Authority and liberty are as old as the human race; they are born with us, and live on in each of us. Let us note but one thing, which few readers would notice otherwise: these principles form a couple, so to speak, whose two terms, though indissolubly linked together, are nevertheless irreducible one to the other, and remain, despite all our efforts, perpetually at odds” ( quoted in Purkis & Bowen 1997: 6; cf Marshall 1989: 45; Walter 2002: 53 ).

Even Kropotkin ( generally considered the most optimistic of the classical anarchists ) balances his identification of innate solidarity with an equally natural tendency to ‘self-assertion’ that can lend itself to authoritarianism ( 2001: 110; Miller 1984: 73 ).

The anarchists’ double-barrelled concept of human potential is seen as a “central tension within their ideology”, and has been claimed as a healthy thing and a strength ( Morland 1997a: 16; cf Morland 1997b ). Miller states that the anarchists view ‘human nature’ not as a fixed quality, but rather as something that varies ( within limits ) according to the social and political context in which particular members of the species find themselves ( 1984: 63-69 ). Faith in the potential of human nature is essential to all projects of radical change ( Ball & Dagger 1991: 13-16; Porritt 1986: 195; Pepper 1993: 113; Doherty 2002: 77 ), and is commonly expressed in contemporary EDA: “We are all weapons of mass construction” ( Our Mayday 2003b ). The anarchist position on human nature is what underlies and justifies the anarchist strategies for social change and their vision of a harmonious future society without the need for authority. It is the anarchists’ distrust of power, meanwhile, that explains their distinctive political strategies, and it is this that we will look at now.

## 2.2.5

### Power

“authority depraves, submission to authority debases” ( Bakunin to a nurse on his deathbed, quoted in Skirda 2002: 38 ).

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<sup>7</sup> “We associate and cooperate because that’s how we are” ( Frost 2002: 4 ). Begg notes that in the radical green analysis, too, “Human nature is seen as potentially cooperative and seeking autonomous development” ( 1991: 2 ). Marshall writes that “Many base their optimism on the existence of self-regulation in nature, on the spontaneous harmony of interests in society, and on the potential goodwill of humanity” ( 1992a: 664 ). But such ideas of a ‘natural order’ or the fundamental goodness of humanity hold little respect in the world of theory today. Several anarchist writers have therefore made explicit attempts to re-ground anarchist ideas on a non-essentialist basis ( Brown 1989; Woodcock 1992: 57; Marshall 1989: 138; May 1994 ). I do not consider this necessary for my thesis, as EDA has not grounded itself in such questionable assumptions.

Taken out from its liberal heritage, Lord Acton's statement that "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" ( quoted in Purkis & Bowen 1997: 19 ) is one with which anarchists heartily agree ( Martin 1998 ). In a sense, it sums up the anarchist message, and justifies the anarchist political vision. If the more power one has, the more likely one is to abuse it then, so argue the anarchists, power must be 'destroyed' ( or dispersed ) so that everyone has an equal amount ( TCA 7(1) 2005: 27 ). Bakunin argued on this basis that "Power must be dispersed ... not so much because everyone is always good, but because when power is concentrated some people tend to become extremely evil" ( in Woodcock 1980: 109; cf Carter 1999: 99; May 1994: 13; Kropotkin 1972: 135; Bakunin 1990a: 134-6; Martin 1998 ). We thus have a negative grounding for anarchism even if we cannot hold onto the positive hopes of the nineteenth century: "Nobody is fit to rule anybody else" ( Meltzer 2000: 19 ).<sup>8</sup>

Bakunin expresses most clearly the anarchist position by pinpointing their notion of domination:

"Whoever talks of political power talks of domination ... and those who are dominated quite naturally detest their dominators, while the dominators have no choice but to subdue and oppress those they dominate. This is the eternal history of political power, ever since that power has appeared in the world. This is what also explains why and how the most extreme of democrats, the most raging rebels, become the most cautious of conservatives as soon as they attain to power" ( in Maximoff 1953: 218; cf Bookchin 1980: 76; Winstanley 1973: 78 ).

Anarchists view the state as the most nefarious source of power, but it is not solely against the state that their opposition is directed.<sup>9</sup> Brown states that "Anarchism goes beyond other liberatory movements in opposing oppression in whatever form it takes, without assigning priority to one oppression over another" ( 1996: 154; cf Dominick 1997: 11; ACF 1990; Morland 2004: 28 ). Anarchist writers commonly include in their critique such realms as psychotherapy, criminology, urban planning and technology. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for example, Bakunin was warning of the dangers of 'scientism' in addition to his personal *bête noires* of religion and the state ( 1990a: 210-214 ).

Anarchism's affinity with feminist lines of thinking can be found here. Brown states that, "As anarchism is a political philosophy that opposes *all* relationships of power, it is inherently feminist. An anarchist who supports male domination contradicts the implicit critique of power which is the fundamental principle upon which all of anarchism is built. Sexist anarchists do exist but only by virtue of contradicting their own anarchism" ( 1996: 153 ). Feminist theorists analyse power in manner comparable to anarchists, and to certain postmodernists. Pratt, for example, has written that "Instead of a system of patriarchy, we see more local and specific relations of gender domination that are interlocked but fundamentally fragmented and sometimes working in opposition to each other" ( 1993: 57 ). I will draw on feminist theorisations and practical tools further in Chapter 3.

Todd May has done most to argue that anarchism and post-structuralism make excellent bedfellows ( 1994: 13; cf Amster 1998; Franks 2003: 23 ), and suggests that "Micropolitical theory ... must be seen as carrying through the anarchist critique of representation" ( 1994: 98; cf Best & Kellner 1991: 4 ; cf Bakunin 1990: 37; Proudhon quoted in Hoffman 1973: 52; Morland 2004: 25; *Evading Standards* 1997 ), illustrated in figure F2.3. Others have sought to draw out the affinities between anarchism and Lyotard and Derrida's work ( Gordon 2000 ), and the work of Deleuze & Guattari ( Bey 1994: 1-6; Newman 2001; Call 1999: 100 ).

It is possible to view the development of post-structuralist and deconstructive analysis as providing additional tools for the anarchist tool box. They can reveal hidden forms of domination in places that

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<sup>8</sup> This also applies to working class incumbents, which marks a key difference from Marx, for whom workers remained workers, even in parliament ( Marx quoted in Miller 1984: 197 ). For anarchists, strategies which involve 'seizing power', such as the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' are doomed to fail, and not because of 'betrayal' as in the typical Leninist-Trotskyist analysis ( Wildcat 1985: 2 ) but due to a systematic and "gradual assimilation to the modes and thoughts" of power ( Rucker 1948: 251; Michels 1959: 307; Holloway 2002: 17 ).

<sup>9</sup> Ward defines the state as a *rigidification* of the fluid texture of life into a hierarchical, rule-based structure, which has domination as its aim and substance ( 1988: 6; cf Bakunin 1990a: 36 ). This relates to Landauer's definition of the state as a form of relationship: "a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently" ( quoted in Ward 1988: 19 ). This conceptualisation ( which also applies to capitalism ( Jonathan X 2000: 163 ) ), is important to understand, because a crude conception of the state, which indiscriminately equates it with the modern nation-state, loses the whole thrust of anarchism.



political struggle might miss ( Spivak 1996; Gordon 2000: 2.1 ). The most significant aspect to take onboard is Foucault's view that "Power not only intervenes in many places; its intervention is of different types" ( May 1994: 50; cf Foucault 1990: 11; Welsh & Purkis 2003: 6 ). Foucault states that "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" ( 1990: 93 ). He argues that there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled ( no universal 'class war' ), but that power is exercised from innumerable points and is embedded in every relationship ( 1990: 94 ). Some anarchists have taken Foucault's work to suggest a support for their own attention to multiple forms of domination and power relationships ( Brown 1996: 154; London Anarchist Forum 2000 ), although his politics have not been felt to match anarchism's revolutionary optimism ( Chomsky & Foucault 1971 ).

Moore is one anarchist who defends the traditional anarchist attitude: "Whether power is suppressive or productive, it is still power: that is to say, it still uses force ( whether overtly or insidiously ) to construct and define individuals and make them think or act in particular ways. Whether power says 'thou shalt not...' or 'here are your options...', coercion is involved" ( 1997: 160; cf Carter 1999: 94, 99; Bonanno 1998: 6; SmartMeme Project 2003: 28; Martin 2001: 18; Grassby 2003: 109 ). To the anarchists, a capitalism of consumer choices and manipulated desires is still one of oppression ( X in *Do or Die* 2000: 162; IE 2005: 8; Clark 1981: 4; cf Marcuse 1969: 23; Bauman 1988: 221-223 ). May, while emphasising the common ground between post-structuralists and anarchists in seeing the "political character of social space ... in terms of intersections of power rather than emanations from a source", is also careful not to imply that this undermines the anarchist prioritisation of the state, because "some points of power, for instance the state, may be more determinative for the social configuration than others" ( 1994: 5 ). Heller also raises the activist optimism ( contra his reading of Foucault ), that it *is* possible "to open up *discursive* spaces that do not depend on the use of discourses of domination" ( 2000: 143 ).

Foucault's particular theorisation of power need not be read in such a way that it undermines the anarchist opposition to power concentrations: rather it has been appropriated and interpreted to support it. Thus, while the concept of 'power over' is a zero-sum game, Heller in his study of Faslane Peace Camp has emphasised the many activist manifestations of 'power with': a form of power in which everyone benefits through cooperation ( 2000: 7; cf Cattleprod c2001a: 2; ESI 2001: 2; Starhawk 1990; Clark [H] 1998: 10-11; Arendt 1958: 200; Carter 1999: 91; Marshall 1992b: 452; *AT* 1999; Morris 1998 ). Heller argues that "the process of resistance is not simply the stripping away of domination, or 'power' more generally, to reveal some nascent 'freedom', but involves the active creation of a web of relations distinct from that involved in domination" ( 2000: 8 ). The notion of 'power with' fits perfectly into anarchist frameworks, and can be used to describe the positive developments that emerge from collective sites of protest. The hope exists, therefore, that forms of positive 'empowerment' and collective practices of 'power-with' that are manifested in EDA might serve to develop alternatives to the power-over paradigm ( Holloway 2002: 36 ).





Figure F2.3 The Meaning of 'Representation' ( Bakunin & Warren 1981: 19 ).

Best & Kellner support the anarchist dismissal of 'party, parliamentary, or trade union politics' ( as an outdated 'modern politics' ), in favour of a "postmodern politics' associated with locally based micropolitics that challenge a broad array of discourses and institutionalised forms of power" ( 1991: 5; cf Jordan & Lent 1999: 8; Franks 2003: 29; Brown 1996: 154 ). Such a position not only justifies my focus on activism in this thesis, but also encourages paying attention to the small-scale micro-level ( this is relevant insofar as TAPP, for example, was never a 'big player' on the national political scene ).

May notes that, "as Foucault has seen, the project of political action is not total liberation from oppression, but an expanding of local spaces of situated freedom" ( 1994: 116; cf Bowen & Purkis 2005: 36 ). He interprets Foucault to argue that "The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination" ( May 1994: 123 ). May's reading of Foucault's position that "Liberty is a practice" ( May 1994: 117 ) is used to move the terrain of debate onto ethical grounds. I follow him in this, and consider the ethical content of the anarchist tradition equal to the task here given it. I will explore this in section 4.3.4. Anarchist analysis adds 'bite' to the pluralistic postmodern attempts at an ethics of freedom, and provides a constant reminder not to forget the larger factors of state and capitalism: I look at this further in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. Having looked at the distinctive anarchist views on authority, freedom, rebellion, human nature and power, I will now move away from discussion of the tenets of anarchism to look at the more ideological and existential of anarchism. I will here be addressing such fundamental questions as What is anarchism? What is its source? And how do its ideas relate to reality?

## 2.3 The Nature of Anarchism

### 2.3.1



## Strength in Flexibility

“anarchism is in essence the least sectarian of doctrines” ( Carter 1971: 110 ).

Many people consider anarchism to be an antiquated theory that properly belongs to the nineteenth century and can have no relevance today ( Adams 1993: 321; Suskind 1971: 171; Lichtheim 1967: 264 ). In contrast to other theories, however ( particularly Marxism ), anarchism has never become ossified into one set doctrine. Woodcock notes that “As a doctrine it changes constantly; as a movement it grows and disintegrates, in constant fluctuation” ( 1980: 15; cf Cahill quoted in Goaman 2002: 35 ). The reason for this fluidity lies in the very essence of anarchist theory, as Faure noted in his Encyclopaedia definition quoted in 2.2.1. Anarchism is a flexible array of mutually reinforcing principles that can be applied to any social situation and which can create numerous different applications ( Ritter 1980: 71 ). Greenway writes that, “anarchism ... as an approach, a critique, a set of questions to be asked about power relations, rather than a theory or set of answers ... can escape the fate of yesterday’s discarded ideologies” ( 1997: 177; cf Weir in Bonanno 1990: 11; Cohn & Wilbur 2003 ). It is this sense of anarchism that I am engaged with in this thesis.

In this and the following sections I will argue that the nature of anarchism is practical, not purist; that it is diverse, yet coherent; that it is fundamentally simple, but capable of great complexity, and that it remains a relative approach and not therefore a fixed or essentialised corpus. Unlike the ‘victorious’ ideologies of the twentieth century, “Anarchism can claim ... the equivocal merit of never having really been tried out. Not having come to power, it was never discredited in power, and in this sense it presents an untarnished image” ( Woodcock 1992: 50 ). Carter states that “Their political failure is also the anarchists’ strength” ( 1971: 1 ), and Apter notes that this gives anarchism “exceptional moral power. They are released from the burdens of past error” ( 1971: 4 ). Here, then, anarchism is associated with unworldly ‘purity’ and it is on this basis that critics have condemned it for ineffectuality ( Manuel & Manuel 1979: 740; Carter 1971: 107; Nomad 1968: 402 ). However, the movements covered in this thesis are eminently practical, not averse to getting their hands dirty, and have very specific, historically-grounded perspectives to offer. By identifying these movements as anarchist, and charting how they apply anarchist principles to their contexts, I am also therefore demonstrating anarchism to be alive and well, and *useful*.

Commentators ( particularly Marxists ) have criticised the vagueness and diversity of anarchist doctrine, as “amorphous and full of paradoxes and contradictions” ( Miller 1984: 2 ). Indeed some have considered that “The disagreements and differences between anarchisms ... overwhelm the single point on which they agree” ( Ball & Dagger 1991: 19; cf Miller 1984: 2-3 ). In this thesis I am arguing the case for at least some coherence and continuity of the anarchist tradition: that it is not a mere mish-mash of contradictory romantic ideas. It is nonetheless true that anarchism may be viewed as an exemplar of the definition of ideology made by Adams, who states that

“it is a mistake to regard ideological thinking as a body of accumulating knowledge or wisdom in the manner of science ... ideas that are convincing at one time may come to be outmoded and useless at another, but then may be revived with new vigour at yet another time” ( 1993: 7 ).

Others, furthermore, view anarchism’s lack of a fixed, theoretically complex ideology ( that is complex in the manner that a bureaucracy is complex ) as vital to its success. Thus Woodcock notes that “the very nature of the libertarian attitude – its rejection of dogma, its deliberate avoidance of rigidly systematic theory, and, above all, its stress on extreme freedom of choice and on the primacy of the individual judgement – creates immediately the possibility of a variety of viewpoints inconceivable in a closely dogmatic system” ( 1977: 15; cf Wieck in Hoffman 1973: 95 ). Anarchist theory’s non-rigidity is the reason why more complex applications are made possible on the ground. Anarchism’s lack of a fixed, top-down blueprint is the reason why innumerable grassroots solutions are made possible. Rocker, furthermore, argues that anarchist theory refuses to set itself in stone, because it has a relativistic ( socially contextualised ) basis:

“Anarchism recognises only the relative significance of ideas, institutions, and social forms. It is, therefore, not a fixed, self-enclosed social system, but rather a definite trend in the historic

development of mankind, which, in contrast with the intellectual guardianship of all clerical and governmental institutions, strives for the free unhindered unfolding of all the individual and social forces in life. Even freedom is only a relative, not an absolute concept” ( c1938: 28-29; cf Grassby 2002: 136 ).

While Woodcock explains anarchism’s flexibility with reference to the individual’s centrality ( and creativity ), therefore, Rocker emphasises the position of the theory in providing relative, not absolute guidelines. By contrast, the grand theories of Marxism, with their totalising metaphysics and ‘scientific’ methods, have suffered far more from the verdict of history than has anarchism, with predictions proved false and Marxist scholars anxiously rewriting the textbook every few years ( May 1994: 18; cf Gombin 1979: Holloway 2002: Laclau & Mouffe 1985; Hall & Jacques 1989: 14-15; Waterman 2002: 6-7; Kellner 1981 ). Those strands of anarchism that adopted Marxist theories most wholeheartedly have also suffered, and are under attack from ecological and post-left anarchists, as we shall note in 2.3.3 and 4.2.4.

It is important to note that this flexibility is *inherent* in the essential nature of anarchism, and not a convenient side-effect of having a loose and contradictory bundle of ideas: “a jumble of beliefs without rhyme or reason” in Miller’s terms ( 1984: 3; cf Sylvan 1993: 233 ). Anarchism is the negation of all authority, and the antithesis of fixed systems. As a theory, therefore, anarchism can be applied not only to the political world but also to the very world of theory itself, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. It will be seen that this anarchist approach does not result in an ‘anything goes’ position, but a deeply ethical matrix of drives. In 2.3.6 I will also present a contrast between practical and ideological anarchisms, in which the latter form is critiqued by the former. The fact that such a critique is possible is an indication of the overflowing of anarchist attitudes and arguments beyond any fixed theoretical basis. It is my argument and assumption within this thesis that anarchism is the antithesis of abstraction: it is dynamic, it is lived and it only has substance through its relationship to the real world. Any exposition of anarchism that is removed from this reality is not really about anarchism at all.

### 2.3.2

#### History and the Idea

“Anarchism properly has no history - i.e. in the sense of continuity and development. It is a spontaneous movement of people in particular times and circumstances. A history of anarchism would not be in the nature of political history, it would be analogous to a history of the heart-beat. One may make new discoveries about it, one may compare its reactions under varying conditions, but there is nothing new of itself” ( Spark quoted in Harper 1987: vi ).

Anarchism claims to be relevant to every age, from the time before history began to the unimaginable worlds of the future. The ideal of complete freedom, and the use of that yardstick to judge contemporary structures/strictures inadequate to the full realisation of humanity, is a perspective that cannot age with time. Only its particular manifestations and historical expressions alter. Despite its flexibility and fluidity, anarchism nonetheless constitutes a tradition still. Apter notes that “Anarchism may appear to be dead when it is dormant and exceptionally fresh when it springs to life” ( 1971: 2 ). Even critical commentators like Green recognise that “Anarchism has had more lives than the proverbial cat. It is as old as resistance to oppression” ( 1971: 19; cf Woodcock 1980: 453 ).

In 1961, Woodcock wrote an obituary of the ‘classical’ anarchist movement whose greatest moment had been Spain, and whose irrelevance to the modern world was being made apparent by its ever-dwindling following ( 1992: 42 ). In 1968, however, he returned to these words in a state of astonishment, because the late sixties had witnessed an upsurge in the popularity of anarchism amongst a new constituency ( ‘second-wave anarchism’ ). This renewed enthusiasm for anarchist ideals might appear to have rendered his gloomy prediction false, yet it actually underlined an important point he had made. As he explains, “The anarchists of the 1960s were not the historic anarchist movement resurrected; they were something quite different, a new manifestation of the idea” ( 1992: 45; cf Perlin 1979: 27; Bonanno 1998: 15 ). We may view the EDA of this thesis in the same light.



The anarchist view of history is quite different from that of Marxism, because for anarchists, history is ultimately a matter of will ( Miller 1984: 79; Clark 1981: 3; Pouget 2003: 7-8 ). Morland writes that “The course of history cannot be mapped out according to the development of the relations and the forces of production” ( 1997a: 14 ), and Marshall states that there “is no pre-ordained pattern to history, no iron law of capitalist development, no straight railroad which we have to follow. Although it is always made on prior circumstances, history is what we make it; and the future, as the past, can be either authoritarian or libertarian depending on our choices and actions” ( 1992b: 144; cf IE 2005: 6; Routledge & Simons 1995: 481 ). This, in common with much anarchist theory, is remarkably simple as a basic idea, but it becomes highly complex once applied, as the strategic debates of EDA activists considered later in the thesis will reveal.

Even in a nineteenth century ‘modernist’ world, anarchists rejected any simple faith in ‘progress’, so that “the anarchist theory of history is not linear but dualistic” ( Miller 1984: 73-75 ). The dualism lies between authority and freedom. Proudhon, for example, disagreed with Hegel, holding that thesis and antithesis are *not* be resolved in a synthesis, but rather exist in an unstable balance ( Proudhon 1970: 229; cf Gordon 2000 : 4.2 ). Woodcock suggests that “the formula is almost Heraclitean; it suggest the flux of never-ending change rather than the dialectical forward movement of the Hegelians and the Marxists... it suggests contradiction as a positive and productive element, and equilibrium as a dynamic condition in a world that changes constantly and never reaches the stillness of perfection because imperfection is a cause and consequence of its everlasting movement” ( 1977: 27; cf Best & Kellner 1991: 81; Deleuze & Guattari 1983: 157 ). I take this notion of non-stillness and the acceptance of difference on board for this thesis – both for the practice of EDA, whose acceptance of difference is demonstrated in section 5.2.3, and in theory, as I will consider further in Chapter 4.

The anarchist perspective on history sees a constant struggle between liberation and authority, between freedom and oppression ( Bookchin 1971: 211; cf Mumford 1973: 465 ). The role of the anarchist in each age is therefore to seek to extend freedom in every way possible, because if freedom is not practised and tested, it will be taken away. As Morland writes, “History has taught anarchists that they should be prepared to grasp any opportunity that presents itself for moving in the direction of a freer society, whilst paying attention to human nature and avoiding any repetition of past mistakes in the twenty-first century” ( 1997a: 21 ). The chief ‘mistake’ in this regard ( and the historical trump card traditionally raised against Marxists in debate ), is the corruption of the Russian Revolution into a party dictatorship. In Chapter 5 I will explore these perspectives in the terms of institutionalisation and radicalisation.

Anarchist theory thus supports a strategy which continually presses against society in search of its weak-points, trying to open up areas that would make revolutionary change possible ( Kropotkin 2001: 143 ). The view of history as determined by will is logically an activist standpoint – it justifies action, on however small a scale. Anarchists thus hold onto their belief in the infinite possibility of mankind. “Given the right circumstances, human nature can be transformed from that which corresponds to the climate of economic liberalism to that which maintains the establishment of an anarchist-communist society” ( Morland 1997a: 15 ). This perspective has been criticised as ‘the voluntarist fallacy’ by both internal and external critics ( *CW* 1997: 12; *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 14; *Schnews* 2004: 1; Thompson 1978: 99; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 197; Atkinson 1991: 214 ), yet it stands at the heart of activist anarchism and it has often achieved what the critical commentators are unable to predict. As an EF!er has argued, “it is only by attempting the impossible that real progress has been achieved” ( Jeff 1998 ).

### 2.3.3

#### Orthodoxy and ‘Second Wave’ Anarchism

“It might naively have been imagined that anarchism would be the one school of thought where the very grounds for ... proprietoriality were necessarily absent, but apparently not” ( Gordon 2000: 4 ).



In this chapter, I have been utilising points made by a range of anarchist writers, but these do not all recognise each other as legitimate. Class-struggle anarchists denigrate Woodcock, for example, as the embodiment of mid-twentieth century ‘liberal’ anarchism ( AF 1996a: 15; cf Franks 2003: 36 ), and insist that “Now, as circumstances within capitalist society change, class struggle anarchism is reasserting itself” ( AF 1996c: 17 ). But the AF’s claim is as controversial as that of Woodcock. All claims regarding the truth or orthodoxy of anarchism are *actively contested* by other anarchists: I mustn’t allow this heterogeneity to be subsumed under my *own* viewpoint and authorial decisions. Indeed, the idea of ‘orthodoxy’ within anarchism is a contradiction within its own terms ( Henderson 1998 ). Yet, frequently anarchists of various stripes *are* accused of attempting to impose such orthodoxies on the rest, and there are innumerable debates over what counts as legitimate anarchism and what does not. It is this range of anarchist streams that I wish to clarify now.

When a particular stream of anarchism achieves dominance, however, this is only a relative dominance, based on numbers and persuasive power. It will almost immediately generate critics and opposition - hence the frequent cries of ‘ideologist!’ - and any bubble of ‘orthodoxy’ will quickly be pricked. In this way, the ongoing ( and tempestuous ) movement of ‘anarchism’ is perpetually rebuilt and reconstituted. Thus Kropotkin writes that anarchism “comprises in its midst an infinite variety of capacities, temperaments and individual energies: it excludes none. It even calls for struggles and contentions” ( quoted in Gordon 2000 : 4.1 ). This ongoing dispute and dissensus hones the criticality of anarchism, but such conflict can also be damaging, as Plows notes in the case of the eco-activist movement ( 2002a ).

There are, then, many formulations of anarchism, or ‘anarchisms’ ( Franks 2003: 18; Bowen & Purkis 2005: 11 ). I do not wish to spend much time over the separate schools. The historical differences that lie between Bakunin’s anarchist collectivism and Kropotkin’s anarcho-communism, or Proudhon’s mutualism and Rocker’s anarcho-syndicalism, are irrelevant to this thesis. As a rough guide, however, I feel it is useful to distinguish classical or class-struggle anarchism from ‘second wave’ currents of anarchism developed from the mid twentieth century, for which “The Situationists represent a convenient marker of the transition point” ( Moore 1997:157; cf Goaman 2002: 242 ). Second wave anarchism “is characterised, not by the narrow focus on class, the State and capitalism, but by a project which questions the totality, which seeks the abolition of all forms of control” ( Moore letter to *Organise!* 44 1997: 17; cf Moore 1997 :157; Goaman 2002: 62; Bowen & Purkis 2005: 12 ). The ‘anti-civilisation’ or ‘primitivist’ currents of anarchism, which have moved away from a concern for state and capital toward the aim of dismantling industrial capitalism, most technology, most agricultural systems, and city-scale human habitation ( for starters ), may be placed in this latter bracket. I will look at distinctive aspects of primitivism in 2.3.5 ( primitivism as ideology, and primitivism’s claims for being more radical than anarchism ), 4.3.1 ( views on technology ), 4.3.4 ( identification with the wild ) and 6.5.3 ( attitudes to violence ). In general, however, I do not believe schools such as primitivism to have moved outside the anarchist orbit: they express recognisably anarchist arguments, engage in recognisably anarchist practice, and within the schools themselves they contain a diversity of views on all the issues dear to anarchists.

I consider it questionable whether the ‘second wave’ tendency is in any way *superior* to classical anarchism. Bookchin implies that classical anarchists have had their day when he states that “Despite their many insights, anarcho-syndicalism, Proudhonianism, and Bakuninism belong to an irrecoverable past. They do not lack ideological coherence and meaning ... but they speak to epochs that have faded into history. There is much that they can teach us, but their significance has long been transcended by historically new issues” ( 1996: 24 ). But ‘second wave’ anarchism has not, in my view, demonstrated itself to be more appropriate to contemporary conditions ( Bowen & Purkis 2005: 13 ), and it has certainly not eclipsed the ‘classical’ anarchism that it opposes. In the UK, class-struggle anarchism of the ‘classical’ kind still appears to be dominant<sup>10</sup>: the written contributions of ‘second-wave’ anarchists, for example, are generally disappointing. Representatives of both ‘classical’ and ‘second wave’ anarchism are, furthermore, involved in eco-activism ( and contribute to the debates which I assess in this thesis ), but neither define it<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> This is evidenced, for example, in the extant anarchist magazines, in the bookstalls at Anarchist Bookfairs, and in the debates at explicitly-titled ‘anarchist’ events, such as the Bradford discussions of 1998, the Mayday 2000 conference and our own ‘Projectile Festival of Anarchist Film and Ideas’ in Newcastle, February 2005. It is also demonstrated by the attitude of other anarchist streams, such as the ‘evolutionary anarchists’ of Total Liberty who self-consciously perceive themselves as a minority current valiantly braving the dominant class-struggle norms.

<sup>11</sup> There is also extant a three-phase periodisation, with a ‘third wave’ of anarchism identified as appearing in the late nineties ( Adams 2002 ). We might view this as equivalent to the contemporary anarchism in this thesis, but I have not adopted the term as

Nevertheless, there are some ( non-essential and non-defining ) elements of historical anarchism that have been dropped in recent decades. As I have noted, a view of human nature as essentially 'good' is both peripheral and discredited, and may accordingly be rejected. Also, in my view, the degree to which anarchists drew their succour from Marxist ideas, is the degree to which they have become outdated, specifically with regard to 'productivism'; class-struggle as the over-riding theme; and the proletariat as revolutionary subject: see 4.2.4. Any "a-priori assumptions" and reductive elements in anarchism may also be criticised ( May 1994: 61 ). I should note, however, that classical anarchism held a much stronger and more flexible notion of, for example, revolutionary change than the version critiqued by recent commentators. I shall consider something of this in later sections, where I shall also make clear that the really significant conflicts and disagreements amongst anarchists are those relating, not to ideology, but to strategy ( Epstein 1991: 17 ). Now, I wish to move away from the 'fixing' of such streams to a more fruitful exploration of the *sources* of anarchism. I argue that anarchism is found in an emotion of 'love and rage', a super-criticality, and a distinctive practice.

### 2.3.4

#### Emotion

"The rationalist discourse of Enlightenment political philosophy can only hope to address the rational faculties ... If anarchism is to touch people then it must reach into their unconscious, and activate their repressed desires for freedom" ( Moore 1998; cf Thompson 1978: 367; Zinn 1997: 655 ).

I wish to state something of what I consider to be the core 'spirit', or 'mood' of anarchism. I do this because no purely theoretical elaboration of anarchism will capture its essence. I feel it is legitimate to address the question of what anarchism is in this way, furthermore, because anarchism allots an important place to the emotional and affective element of thinking. It is a doctrine of the heart as well as of the head.

Joll notes that "The rationalist streak in anarchism is balanced through the history of anarchism by an anti-rationalist one" ( 1971: 213; cf Ritter 1980: 68 ). Not all anarchists view themselves as 'serious'. Rather, anarchists promote 'play' as an alternative paradigm to 'work' ( 'Maybe' 2000: 3; Ward 1988: 88-94; Read 1954; Black 1996; Freedom Press 1997 ): I explore the ludic element of anarchism with the study of 'Reclaim the Streets' in section 7.4.

Of equal importance is the *moral* dimension of anarchism. Woodcock notes that "All anarchism has ... a moral-religious element which distinguishes it from ordinary political movements" ( 1977: 359; cf AF 2001a: 30 ). Apter pins this down for us: "The primitive core of anarchism is not so very different from Christianity. That is, it rests on the notion that man has a need, not just a preference, to love" ( 1971: 3 ). Thus Malatesta, in the speech he made to an Italian courtroom in 1921 after 10 months in jail, defended his faith in "The idea of liberty, of justice, and of *love*" ( in Nomad 1968: 43, my italics; cf Richard Turner quoted in Goaman 2002: 125; Heller [C] 1999: 6 ). The central place of this emotion in anarchist history means it is not just a 'theory' but a movement of much deeper solidarity ( Cohn & Wilbur 2003 ).

Apter explains how most systems of belief prioritise either rationality or emotionality over the subordinated ( and thus distorted ) other. Within anarchism, however, neither the super-rationalism of a Godwin nor the anti-intellectualism of stereotype can be taken as full embodiments of the anarchist stance. Both tendencies exist, in some tension. Yet this tension can be creative when it encourages the stepping out of conventional ways of thinking and doing. Apter states, "For anarchists the appropriate

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I have not found it a particularly useful heuristic concept, unlike the distinction between 'classical' and 'second-wave' anarchisms. A more useful point is made by Adams when he argues that, in the global context, the western anarchism that I deal with in this thesis is only a minority current. On this view the 'classical anarchism' of Bakunin and Kropotkin should not be viewed as representative of anarchism per se ( although it shall remain the touchstone of my thesis ). From this perspective, Adams argues that when we abolish the idea of a homogenous 'classical anarchism', we also do away with any attempt to dismiss anarchism as 'outmoded' ( 2002; cf Mbah & Igariwey 2001 ).



balance between the two is creativity” ( 1971: 3 ). Creativity is central to the tactics used in EDA, as demonstrated by the strong emphasis on innovation and creativity in tactics and expression to be found in movement literature. Therefore, the anarchist ‘mood’ which Joll dismissed as “a desire to push things to extremes”, and to pursue “the act of revolution for its own sake” without concerning oneself with the consequences, is better thought of as an “insistence on spontaneity, on theoretical flexibility, on simplicity of life, on love and anger as complementary and necessary components in social as in individual action” ( Woodcock 1980: 459 ). It is for this reason that some UK Earth First!ers often sign off their emails or communiqués with the words ‘love and rage’: a three-word summation of the anarchist urge.<sup>12</sup>

I agree, therefore, that there is a certain temperament to anarchism, but I disagree that this is standardly one of hot-headed or short-sighted ‘extremism’. The attitude of anarchism is one of fierce independence, and one of extended empathy, it is one of anger, yet also one of love, and it is one in which critical reason is allied to emotion in a perhaps unique way. Anarchism is not opposed to rationality, no matter how strong the degree of emotionalism or play.<sup>13</sup> Apter notes that “Behind the appearance of anti-intellectualism there lies a presumptive belief in an ultimate rationality as the common and unifying property of all men if unfettered by an inappropriate system” ( 1971: 6 ). It is this faith in humanity that underlies the anarchist injunction to allow the spontaneity of the masses to lead the way.<sup>14</sup> This stands in direct contrast to the Leninist conception of a theoretically enlightened vanguard destined to show the way. Anarchists instead talk of the ‘leadership of ideas’ ( by which of course they mean *anarchist* ideas ), and they also demonstrate a sincere faith in the power of dialogue and reason. It is on this basis that they reject state laws, as an imposition of arbitrary violence, in favour of the free dialogue and organisation by the people who, being those affected and nearby, are the ones best able to arrange things in the best way.

### 2.3.5

#### Reason

“for God’s sake, when we have demolished all a priori dogmas, do not let us think of indoctrinating the people in our turn” ( Proudhon, letter to Marx 17<sup>th</sup> May 1846, in 1970: 150-1 ).

It is on grounds of *rationality* that anarchists oppose *theory*. “Theory in the view of anarchists should not be an intellectual contrivance because this will reduce freedom and clutter the will with tempting injunctions” ( Apter 1971: 6; cf Woodcock 1980: 14 ). It is for this reason that there are relatively few theoretical journals for anarchists: “in a future anarchist society we won’t need to read Kropotkin and Malatesta before going out of the house in the morning” ( AF 1996a: 23 ). We might even say that in activist anarchism the place of the theoretical journal is replaced by the critical tool-kit ( examples of which I utilise in each chapter ), and by faith in the enlightenment that comes from experience and dialogue.

In this chapter I have been using the terms ‘theory’, ‘ideology’ and ‘anarchism’ loosely, and I shall continue to do so. I do not accept the complex Marxist definitions of ideology, and instead employ the term in a more narrowly functional capacity, loosely as “action-related systems of beliefs, norms, and ideas” ( Rejai 1984: 7; cf Bell [D.S.A.] 2002 ). When I discuss ‘anarchist theory’ I do so as a matrix of

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<sup>12</sup> The black flag of anarchism symbolised the ‘dark’ emotions of grief and anger ( Ehrlich, ed, 1996: 229; *Anarchist Faq* 2 2005 ), and in 5.2.3 and 7.4 I shall note the more jolly symbolism employed by contemporary EDA, but we should not forget the importance of rage as a motivation for activism ( Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2001: 16 ).

<sup>13</sup> Within EDA, also, we might take on board the point made by Jasper and others that “most emotions are part of rational action, not opposed to it” ( Jasper 1999: 109 ), and “Emotions can be strategically used by activists and be the basis for strategic thought” ( Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001: 9 ).

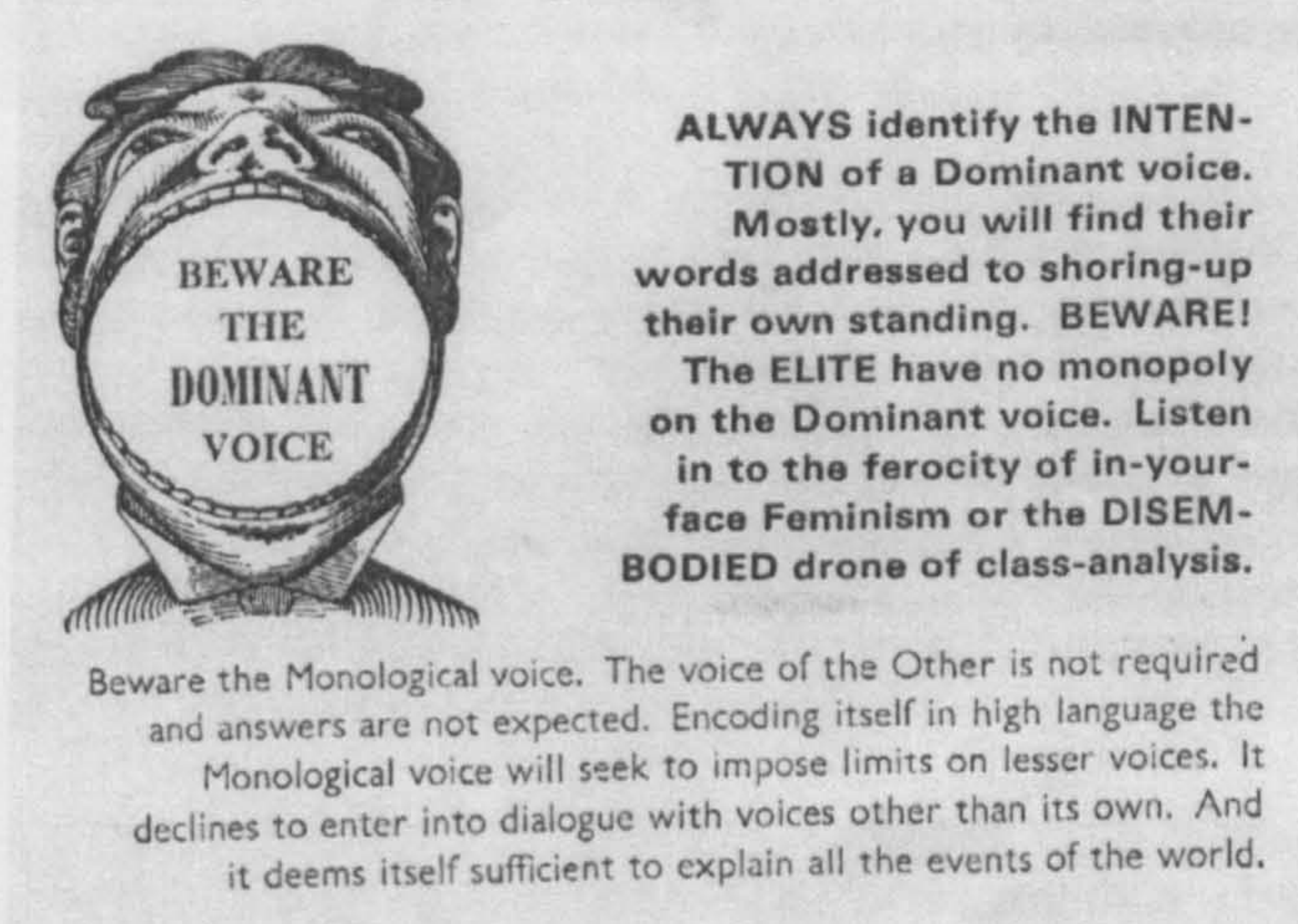
<sup>14</sup> “Give the people a free hand, and in ten days the food service will be conducted with admirable regularity. Only those who have never seen the people hard at work ... can doubt it. Speak of the organising genius of the ‘Great Misunderstood’, the people, to those who have seen it in Paris in the days of the barricades, or in London during the great dockers’ strike, when half a million of starving folk had to be fed, and they will tell you how superior it is to the official ineptness of Bumbledon” ( Kropotkin 1990: 77; cf Carter 1971: 108; *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 73 ).



arguments and values that are connected in diverse, overlapping and often contested ways: not as a scientific system that can be mapped out to any degree of accuracy. Abstraction does not help here, but the context of dialogue does. Ideology need not be expressed in dense theoretical works, furthermore, but in simple symbolism and through practice, as I shall consider in the next section.

First, we should recognise that 'Ideology' can be used as a swear-word amongst anarchists, and consider why this is so. Neal, for example, states that "the ideologue is a closeted authoritarian" ( 1997 ), and Vaneigem argues that "all ideologies are totalitarian. Cut off from the very life they are supposed to represent ... they invariably take over a repressive power" ( 1994: 7; cf IE 2005: 3 ). Ideology is condemned for its abstraction and its authoritarianism. *Organise!* contrast ideology to the process and needs of rational argument ( AF 1996a: 42: cf Watson 1997; Minogue 2000: 94 ), and Jarach makes a similar distinction: "Critical thinking leads to theory, where life is examined with a mixture of objective and subjective analysis. Ideology, on the other hand, leads to pat answers that have been previously formulated according to particular agendas" ( *Anarchy* 53 2002: 57; cf *Do or Die* 1996: 123; 'cw(3po)' 2002: 3; *TCA* 5(1) 2002: 6; POO 1998: 2 ). This commonly voiced rhetorical position leads to some interesting contradictions. Later in the thesis, for example, I will draw on *Green Anarchist's* opposition to ideological anarchists, but GA's own ideological output is considerable ( demonstrated for example by 25% of their total articles being editorial articles ) ( Atton 2002: 109 ).

I join those like Laclau who condemn 'ideology' as the desire for total closure by political projects and movements ( 1983: 24; Jasper 1999: 351-355 ). Anarchism is not about deciding what will and must happen, but about an open future in which we can all take part. Hence the Cunningham Amendment ( *TCA* ) state that they "are on guard against the blueprints of the Left and the Right. Context is always ongoing. New events unfold hour by hour" ( *TCA* 3(1) 2001: 19 ), and provide a warning against tendencies antithetical to the open dialogical spirit in F2.4:



**Figure F2.4 'Beware the Monological Voice' ( *TCA* 5(1) 2002: 7 ).**

The arrival of 'Primitivism' has supplied an interesting demonstration and clarification of the anarchist view on 'ideology'. The primitivists denied that they were promoting a new political ideology because they opposed "all systems, institutions, abstractions, the artificial, the synthetic, and the machine, because they embody power relations" ( Moore c1997: 4 ). This opposition to all 'ideologies' also led primitivists to deny being "anarchists per se, but pro-anarchy, which is for us a living, integral experience, incommensurate with power and refusing all ideology" ( *Fifth Estate* quoted in Moore c1997: 2 ).

In a similar manner to the posturing of Situationists and other anarchists as being the 'only' revolutionary position in opposition to a totality of repression, primitivists claimed that "From the perspective of anarcho-primitivism, all other forms of radicalism appear as reformist" ( Moore c1997: 2 ). This *included* anarchism.<sup>15</sup> Yet the discourse in which primitivism phrased its own claims to

<sup>15</sup> "Ideologies such as Marxism, classical anarchism and feminism all oppose aspects of civilisation", but "99% of life in civilisation remains unchanged in their future scenarios... The Western model of progress would merely be amended and would still act as an ideal. Mass society would essentially continue, with most people working, living in artificial, technologised environments, and subject to forms of coercion and control". Moore states that "only anarcho-primitivism opposes civilisation,



radicality bore a remarkable similarity to traditional anarchist arguments ( Moore c1997: 5 ), and others were able to define primitivism's opposition to the 'totality' of civilisation ( as opposed to just capitalism and state ), as an *extension* of anarchist principles ( BGN 2002 : 13 ).<sup>16</sup> The primitivist condemnation of anarchism actually demonstrated a continuity, in so far as it was grounded in anarchist values, and replayed anarchist arguments, albeit with new inflections, and some new vocabulary.

However, it has been claimed that such representations of primitivism reified it into an ideology that never actually existed ( Watson 1998: 60 ). Watson attacked those "tempted to establish a political tendency with its myth of origins, canon, genealogy and pantheon of luminaries" ( 1998: 58 ). He states that Moore's 'Primitivist primer' "borders on an attempt to codify a primitivist sensibility. Its catechism-like question-and-answer format and its indirect suggestion of primitivist taxonomy gives it an 'objective', descriptive authority. It even comes with a kind of five-point action program. Phrases like 'From the [ the? ]'<sup>17</sup> perspective of anarcho-primitivism' and 'according to anarcho-primitivists' abound" ( 1998: 59 ). Although denying ideologism, the discourse of primitivists led them to be condemned as "fully-fledged ideologues" themselves ( Roy Emery, letter, *Freedom* 24.1.2004: 6; 'cw(3po)' 2002: 3 ). As for my own view, I follow Black's point that, "Like standards and values, the anarchist 'isms', old and new, are best regarded as resources, not restraints. They exist for us, not us for them" ( 2004: 6 ).

The fact that anarchism has no dominant strand means that it is forced to remain in dialogue, at least within certain boundaries. It therefore leaves 'the answer' open, and encourages a constant questioning, particularly of those who claim they do have an answer. This may make anarchism a paradigmatic example of discourse: "dialogic, dynamic and riven with contradictions, an interactive process of producing meaning within specific historical situations" ( Doherty 2002: 89 ). The *TCA* employ Bakhtin's dialogism to underline this aspect of anarchism: meaning lies between people and not within separate voices ( 5(1) 2002: 10 ). This is illustrated in Figure F2.5.

All language is social. Even in our thoughts we are in dialogue with other voices. Every utterance I make is unique to its own time and space. And only I can occupy the same unique time and space. No one else can do this for me. Because of this I accept some responsibility for the context of every encounter. Life is to be lived and engaged with. It is to be won by interactive dialogue with real people in real encounters.

**Figure F2.5 'All Language Is Social'** ( *TCA* 5(1) 2002: 11 ).

There is no original source of authority within anarchism: the nearest that is commonly attempted is the authority of practice, and of what 'the people' ( sometimes 'the working class' ) believe or do. This is the opposite standpoint from the 'approved' ideology of a regime or revolutionary vanguard. Class War state that vanguardists "never want to admit that maybe they have got it all wrong" ( *CW* 1997: 16 ), and present their honest self-criticality as the anarchist contrast ( 1997: 2 ). In interview, TAPPers similarly condemned the SWP on these grounds, of pretending to have answers to every issue, and being dishonest to their followers: see Appendix.

Bakunin writes that "As soon as official truth is pronounced ... why discuss anything?" ( 1972: 302; cf Bakunin 1990a: 220 ).<sup>18</sup> In Neal's view, "the anarchist holds that Truth tends to end up in the back

the context within which the various forms of oppression proliferate and become pervasive –and, indeed, possible" ( Moore c1997: 2 ).

<sup>16</sup> As debates raged over whether the 'totality', a metaphor "for civilisation as a unitary, monolithic grid or railroad" ( Bookchin 1998b ) was an unhelpful worldview for activism ( *EFIJ* June-July 2002: 53; Ruins 2003: 16 ), primitivist writers were reminded of the anarchist notion of history including the counter-balancing 'legacy of freedom' ( Bookchin 1998b; cf Bookchin 1995b: 48; Bookchin 1989a; Bookchin 1991; Watson 1998: 59-60 ). This was termed "the perennial ( counter- ) tradition, ( Watson 1997 ), from which primitivists seek to learn and draw inspiration from ( *GAy* 15 2004: 1; Purkis 2001: 88; Ruins 2003: 2 ).

<sup>17</sup> Watson's brackets.

<sup>18</sup> Anarchist history provides supportive examples of this: "The Slavic Section recognises neither an official truth nor a uniform political program prescribed by the General Council or by a general congress. It recognises only the full solidarity of individuals, sections, and federations in the economic struggle of the workers of all countries against their exploiters" ( in Bakunin 1990: 220 ).



pocket of the most powerful” ( 1997; cf AF 1996a: 23 ). He advocates that anarchists should hold truth as fundamentally subjective, and states that “Freethinking is the only methodology you can safely rely on, in the absence of external Truth – that is, thinking and evaluating for yourself what is and isn’t” ( 1997 ). Neal goes on to argue that this leads not to a-political relativism, but to the matrix of anarchist ethics: “Does anarchist rejection of Truth mean that anarchism, in turn, means anything goes? Yes, and no – that which destroys illegitimate authority is anarchistic; that which doesn’t, isn’t” ( 1997 ).

We are here returned to what is simultaneously the source and the end-point of anarchism: freedom. As a contributor to *Total Liberty* puts it, all forms of anarchism “spring from a single seed, no matter the flowering of their ideas. The seed is liberty. And that is all it is ... Anarchism is not normative ... Liberty is a space in which people may live. It does not tell you how they will live, It says, eternally, only that they can” ( Bad Press 2002: 13; cf Malatesta 1074: 52 ). I will evaluate what this means in practice in sections 4.3.4 and 5.2.2.

One more point should be underlined here: that the diversity of opinions within anarchism should be lauded as a strength ( Roseneil 2000: 123; GA 1997a: 12 ). Consensus is retained by many activist anarchists as a valued demonstration of collective will. Yet it is rarely prioritised over individual dissent. Lyotard’s celebration of dissensus may be employed here, as he charges that “Consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension” ( 1984: 75; cf Best & Kellner 1991: 166 ). Many anarchists would agree with Lyotard’s point, and even those who would not ( perhaps tired by incessant argument and factionalism ), must still recognise the right of everyone to dissent, and to form a different view.

Anarchism’s reputation for factionalism and dissent is not wholly undeserved ( Walter 2002: 51; Mayday2000 2000d ). While this may have negative practical impacts for inter-anarchist organising, however, it is a demonstration of strength in the realm of ideology. In section 2.3.2 we noted how anarchism as critique is celebrated even when the manifest movement appears in a sorry state ( Ritter 1980: 155; Shatz in Bakunin 1990a: xxxvii3 ). Apter, for example, states that “At its best [ classical anarchism contains a ] social critique of capitalism as a system and socialism as a form of bureaucratic tyranny’ ( 1971: 10; cf Goodway 1989: 1 ). Apter hangs the strength and popularity of anarchism on its ability to articulate the reasons behind real faults in the system. He equates anarchism to an analysis that states present arrangements are responsible for these faults, and terms it “a language useful for identifying the more grotesque anomalies of these systems” ( 1971: 5-12 ). Apter’s argument is certainly supported in the environmental field, where anarchists lay the blame for environmental disasters on the logic of capitalism ( see section 4.3.1 ). We might note that anarchism’s obsession with power provides it with the chief critical tool here. Jordan states that “‘Power’ is the term that fills the gap, which in one word allows reference to all of the diverse exploitations and oppressions of this world without implying that they are the same exploitations and oppressions” ( 2002: 146; cf Heller [C] 1999: 73 ).

One further point should be made about the strength of anarchist critique, and that is that it is equally adept at turning inward, and pointing the finger at the anarchist agitators themselves ( Franks 2003: 19 ). Young demonstrates this when he states that “It is the insidious counter-revolutionary forces residing ‘inside’ the anarchist movement that has the greatest potential for diverting us from our primary goal of agitating for world social revolution” ( in AF 2001a: 3 ). Situationism has made the most useful contribution here, with the emphasis laid on the “constant danger of any idea being recuperated to the benefit of the present system” ( AF 1996a: 23 ). We will employ this perspective at several points within the thesis, but for now we have said enough about theory. Super-criticality alone does not provide the source of anarchist thought. Rather, anarchism is a discourse of practice, of experiment and real-world contestation. Anarchism seeks to be the expression of freedom, and it is with practical activity and relationships that anarchist thought is ultimately concerned.

### 2.3.6

## Practice



“Anarchism knows the need for sober thinking, but also for that action which clarifies otherwise academic and abstract thought” ( Zinn 1997: 655 ).

I have already laid out the significance of emotionality and rationality in supporting the anarchist movement. I would now like to emphasise how they are joined by a third, and perhaps most important element of *action*. In keeping with the general down-grading of theory within anarchism, Meltzer writes that “There were never theoreticians of Anarchism as such, though it produced a number of theoreticians who discussed aspects of the philosophy. Anarchism has remained a creed that has been worked out in practice rather than from a philosophy” ( 2000: 18 ). I concur that this is so.

*Organise!* are typical in arguing that “there is a reciprocal exchange between ideas and practice which grow from one another” ( AF 1997b: 20; cf Bonanno 1998: 2 ). In the ‘unofficial’ stream of anarchistic direct action, also, it is often the case, as at Greenham Common, that “theory and practice ... existed in a feedback loop” ( Roseneil 1995: 60 ). This is also taken to be the case with my own subject. Such an interaction between practice and theory is neither a smooth nor a painless process. What is, however, certain is that “The tightly assumed flow between given theory and advocated practice no longer obtains” ( Freeden 2000: 320 ). Anarchist ideas are constantly formulated and adapted to their context, which almost inevitably means that they must compete with other, more dominant or ‘common sense’ ideas. The writers in *Organise!* recognise this: “Ideas do not spring from the air. Our ideology ( and indeed all others ) came from a contestation with the very physical forces of our opponents” ( AF 1996a: 23 ). In observing this point, we should recognise that many of the ‘sources’ of anarchist discourse used in this thesis are made ‘on the hoof’, and in contest with others. They are rarely equivalent to distant and balanced academic observations, but rather make their appearance as moving, rhetorical positions made in the midst of debate ( Benton & Remie Short 1999: 2 ). They therefore owe much of their meaning to their *political* context, and also to the place they hold within a *dialogue* ( Godwin 1969: 310; cf Cox & Barker 2002: 12 ). This does not make them less ‘true’, but it does underline the difficulty of taking such ideas out of context. Where possible, I provide the bare bones of this context, and in the case studies I provide more than one expression from within each of the activist-anarchist dialogues.

As figure F2.4 indicates, anarchists do not bemoan the necessarily contingent and partial basis of their expressions: rather they celebrate it. Thus *Organise!* suggest to their readers, “If the contents of one of the articles in this issue provokes thought, makes you angry, compels a response then let us know. Revolutionary ideas develop from debate, they do not merely drop out of the air!” ( AF 2001a: 2; cf CW 1997: 2 ). Discussion is also held to improve thinking, perhaps an obvious point but one worth remembering with regard to my justification of this thesis to anarchists who are suspicious of academic writings. The EDA movement evaluated in the course of my research demonstrated this belief: “one of our strengths has always been that many heads are better than one...so, learn as a group, argue, criticise, pull it apart and develop your own theory” ( Notts ef! 1998 ). The pamphlets put together after Mayday 2000, June 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 and the G8 street party in May 1998 provide good textual demonstrations, the latter inviting people to

“help other people learn from our mistakes and set backs  
stop the need for people putting on street parties to keep re-inventing the wheel  
help street parties be a relevant and effective part of the political process  
stop street parties disappearing up their own fundamentals and instead move forward boldly  
and heroically towards glorious eco-anarcho utopia” ( GSP 1998: 1; cf GTB 2001 ).

I will conclude this chapter by defining what I term ‘anarchism through practice’ by contrasting it to its proposed opposite of ‘ideological anarchism’. This borrows from Neal’s distinction between ‘ideological’ anarchists and ‘methodological’ anarchists. Neal argues that ideological anarchists view their anarchism as ‘a set of rules and conventions to which you must abide’, while the methodologists see anarchism as a matter of practice, ‘a way of acting’. His characterisation of the ideological anarchist is worth recording for the accuracy with which it describes such groups as Britain’s *Anarchist Federation* ( AF ). This kind of anarchist

“stresses ideological conformity as the prerequisite for social revolution – in other words, you swallow A,B, and C doctrines and THEN you are an Anarchist. Their plan of action revolves around: 1) creating a central Anarchist organisation; 2) educating ( e.g. indoctrinating ) the

working class as to the tenets of Anarchism; 3 ) thereby building a mass movement; 4 ) creating a social revolution.

The [ ideological ] Anarchist is comfortable with the idea of a manifesto, platform, or other guiding doctrine as the means of ‘spreading the gospel’ – their emphasis is unity in thought and action, and ideological conformity as the basis for effective organisation” ( 1997; cf Bookchin 1995a: 60; *Do or Die* 1999: 123 ).

Adams divides the anarchist movement into two streams. One is the ‘specific and self-conscious’ movement ( 1993: 168 ), the other less well-defined ( ‘intuitive’ or ‘activist’ in my terms ( 1993: 169 ) ). The ‘intuitive’ or ‘spontaneous’ anarchist movement is generally considered to arise first, and in some situations never declares itself as ‘anarchist’ ( Heller [C] 1999: 85-7; Adams 2002; Goldman 1917; Newman 2003 ). In this thesis I am looking at EF! and the other ‘disorganisations’ and mobilisations that arose from the EDA movement as being rooted in this informal anarchism, and in this I am supported by other commentators ( Purkis 2001; Wall 2001: 154 ). This is not to imply that there can be *no* expression of anarchist ideology in these movements, however – far from it! It is the expressions of ideology, in text, in discussion, in repertoire, strategy and inter-personal practice, that constitute the subject of this thesis and I will be explicitly tying them to anarchist themes, ethics and principles. The crucial difference from an ideological anarchist organisation ( or an ideological anarchist thesis ), is that I am emphasising the *difference* and *incompleteness* contained within these expressions of anarchism ( *Schnews* 1999a: 3 ). The informality of these activist milieus, the commitment to deeds over words, and the embracing of difference at their heart ( *Do or Die* 1999: 108; Hetherington quoted in Seel 1999: 119 ), serves to keep them distinct from the explicit, official or rigid anarchist organisations. This remains true even once we recognise that a fruitful dialogue and interpenetration takes places between the two scenes: indeed the variations in anarchist backgrounds and interpretations greatly increases the vitality and expressiveness of the manifestations of anarchism.

Neal states that for the ‘methodological anarchists’ “the methodology of anarchism is more important and vital than the ideology of it” ( Neal 1997; cf *Black Flag* 221 2001: 17; Kornegger quoted in Epstein 1991: 168 ). He argues that methodological anarchists “hold that the *social struggle* itself – *propaganda by the deed* – politicises and radicalises the masses. When they get a sense of their own empowerment, attained through collective direct action, what you get are ‘anarchised’ people – folks who will understand the ideas of anarchism *in practice* rather than doctrinally, which is where it matters. You get empowered, active freethinkers, who are not afraid to engage in direct action – in other words, anarchists” ( 1997 ). In section 4.3.4 I will show how direct action constitutes a threat to capital and state ( Grassby 2002: 186 ). The idea that experience can radicalise the subject in an anarchist direction crops up repeatedly in anarchist discourse. Sometimes it is given a class tinge ( along the lines of ‘strikes develop class consciousness’ ), sometimes a democratic or non-violent one, but it is centrally placed in the worldview of anarchism. I will focus on this theme of ‘empowerment’ in section 5.2.2.

Another important aspect to the ‘methodology’ or practice of anarchism is that it is not, and cannot be, *purist* in the sense that anarchism’s opponents charge it with: see 2.3.1. Kropotkin stated “It is only those who do nothing who make no mistakes” ( 2001: 143; cf Bowen 2005: 122 ). Neal argues that “there is that which works, and that which doesn’t and degrees between those points. If one strategy doesn’t work, you adjust until you find one that *does* work” ( 1997 ). Anarchism as practised and performed is grounded by the realities of its lived context and environment. It simply could not exist, in the vibrant and diverse ways that I explore in this thesis, if it was immediately self-defeating or unreal. This is why I consider the practice of activism and direct action so crucial to an understanding of anarchism today.

Malatesta states that “its beacon is solidarity and freedom is its method. It is not perfection, it is not the absolute ideal which like the horizon recedes as fast as we approach it; but it is the way open to all progress and all improvements for the benefit of everybody” ( 1974: 47 ). This idea, of performative freedom and of means-ends convergence, provides a rich source for ethical critique. I shall build on this understanding in the later chapters.

## 2.4



## **Anarchist Theory: Conclusion**

In this chapter, I hope first of all to have established the key tenets of anarchism, defining distinctive anarchist perspectives on authority, freedom, rebellion, human nature and power, that will be used to inform our study of EDA. I also hope to have developed an understanding of the nature of anarchism's existence ( in text, history and sensibility ): to have conveyed a sense of what it actually means to talk of an entity termed 'anarchism'. Anarchism exists as both a pure ideal or standard, and as a rugged, hands-on practice; as both a site and expression of passion ( outrage, anger, desire ), and a rational critique constantly engaged in questioning, testing, and searching for better answers. I hope to have established that anarchism is both a body of coherent ideas, developed and refined through the ages, and also a practice of just 'getting on with it' in the here and now. It is deeply individual and fundamentally communal, cynical and generous, practical and idealist. I have therefore presented anarchism not as a static, textbook ideology, but as a matrix of reason, values and experience that is fluid, flexible and 'involved', which means it is both grounded and fractured at the same time. As such, I shall not in this thesis be deciding for the reader which forms of protest and sentiment are officially, correctly anarchist, and gathering them together under a new eco-anarchist catechism for our times. Rather, I shall be exploring some of the places of contestation, experimentation and discussion, that have been the 'hotbeds' of anarchism in recent years. As W.S. Landor is quoted with regard to a Street Party, "Call those bodies of men anarchical which are in a state of effervescence" ( *Guardian* 17.7.1996 ). Of course there are stronger and weaker expressions of anarchism, some more articulate and some less clear, but it is the interaction between all of these that constitutes the anarchism that I believe actually exists out there. Anarchism is found in the arguments around the campfire; in the moment when an individual places her body in the way of destruction; and in the relationships, sharing of skills and the mutual ( often tense ) development of ideas that EDA has provided so many vibrant sites of.

In this chapter, I hope to have presented an anarchism that can be entered into, and brought to bear against the different contexts that I shall assess in this thesis. In examining anarchist practice from within an anarchist framework, I sidestep any assumptions of non-subjective, once-and-for-all 'truth'. Indeed I suggest that anarchism, at least in a broad sense, must become our assumption ( our premise and our framework ) in order for us to examine its internal dialogues and manifestations. In other words, if we fail to move beyond the question 'is this anarchist?', then we will not be able to see the diverse richness of anarchism. Without claiming an exclusive right to name and define these practices, therefore, I am nonetheless examining eco-activist actions as expressions of anarchist ideology. The next chapter will define my approach and method for doing this. Carter laments that "to the extent that the political theory of many greens is anarchist, it is likely to be rejected out of hand by most academic political theorists, who, by and large, simply dismiss anarchism as lacking in any sophistication" ( 1999: 332 ). The theoretical and strategic sophistication of anarchism is one of the chief foci of my study. By *not* dismissing anarchism as idle dreaming or naivete, I believe ( like Carter and the anarchist researchers profiled in section 1.3 ) that we can gain a much better grasp of the true nature of today's environmental challenge, and our responses to it. It is just possible that the anarchists are right – that a thousand 'Earth Summits' and inter-governmental treaties can do nothing in the face of global capitalism, and that authoritarian solutions only give rise to further problems. For this reason, if nothing else, the anarchistic perspective of the grassroots eco-activists must be given a hearing.

Having established the theoretical framework for my thesis, I must now explain the methodology that I have used to obtain and analyse the data on which the thesis is based. This is the purpose of the next chapter. The next chapter will build on the theoretical foundations I have laid out in this chapter, and particularly: opposition to top-down authority; the underestimated capability of human actors; the perniciousness of unequal power relations; flexibility; non-dogmatism; the validity of emotion; criticality; and a keen attention to practice.



## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is grouped into three bands. In the first band, sections 3.2.1 – 3.2.4, I look at the salient theoretical and methodological issues involved in an anarchist project of research, as developed by previous researchers and theorists. I turn to my own experience in the later bands ( sections 3.3.1 - 3.4.5 ), and contextualise my thesis within the actual practice of my research. My overall aim is to develop a methodology that remains ‘true’ to anarchist values, and to the activists who are the subject of the research process. In this introductory section I will first run through the content and progression of the different sections, and then introduce my personal approach to an anarchist methodology of research.

In 3.2.1, *Anarchist Perspectives*, I begin by establishing some basic anarchist perspectives on thought, knowledge and ideas, and I maintain that these are also the perspectives of many of the activists in this study, therefore allowing us to explore EDA on ‘home terms’. In 3.2.2, *Critiques of Dominant Epistemology and Theory*, I extend these perspectives with critiques developed by feminist and other socially-engaged academics, concerning the dominant norms of ‘objectivity’, more accurately viewed from the anarchist perspective as a power-encoded ‘epistemology of rule’. I use the traditional anarchist example of law to clarify the anarchist opposition to such statist objectivity. I then use the situationists to condemn abstract theory, and feminist perspectives to find practical ways out of the revolutionary-purist trap.

With the critique of orthodox theory, objectivity and neutrality established, I move on to a consideration of the alternative approaches developed by feminists, anthropologists, and critical geographers, amongst others, and define these according to criteria of partisanship, participation, and an anarchist ethic of dialogue. In 3.2.3, *Political Approaches to Research*, I consider views of the role of the intellectual put forward by anarchists, critical realists and postmodernists, and explain my distance from the latter two positions. Having recognised the activists of my study to be themselves capable, enquiring, active agents, I define the role of the researcher in terms of a dialogue founded on anarchist ethics and an equal social relationship: not speaking ‘on’ or ‘for’ activists, but ‘with’ and ‘as’ one of them. In 3.2.4, *A Personal Approach to Research*, I explain my own personal subject position, and justify using qualitative and reflexive techniques of participant observation and insider ethnography, albeit referenced with textual records of the discussions and ideas shared in EDA.

In the sections of the second band, I bring the theoretical considerations of the previous chapters into context: specifically, the context of my own research, and my own subject position. In 3.3.1, *Anarchism and the Academy*, I consider the academy as a non-neutral field, engrained with the logics of state and capitalism, and I note its exclusion and misrepresentation of anarchist perspectives. In 3.3.2, *My Relationship to the Academy*, I consider how my own research was able to remain relatively resistant to these impacts, and was conducted as much in antagonistic, extra-institutional sites as it was in the institutional space of the academy ( although it needed both sites ). In 3.3.3, *My Relationship to Activism*, I consider the limitations of the term activism, but I also situate my own, positive experience of activism within the Newcastle-based group Tyneside Action for People & Planet ( TAPP ).

In the sections of the third band, I apply the theoretical and methodological evaluations explored in 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 to bear on my own practice of research, and the specific, local activist group that was most affected by it. In 3.4.1, *Researching TAPP*, I situate TAPP’s central, if understated, place within this thesis. I detail how my approaches to research shifted, according to my experiences of activism, and also according to TAPP’s experience of research. I then consider the salient aspects of this experience for our consideration of the interaction between research and activism. First, in 3.4.2, *Security Issues*, I consider whether my insider status brought greater risks to the group than outside researchers, and I record TAPPers’ own views on security issues. In 3.4.3, *Interviews*, I position my own use of interviews with TAPP, in relation to my own experience of being interviewed as part of TAPP. In 3.4.4, *Experiencing Insider Ethnography*, I consider the confusion involved in seeking to

both research and 'do' activism at the same time, and I explain my own approaches in terms of a pragmatic personal negotiation of this issue. In 3.4.5, Usefulness and Reciprocation, I conclude with an assessment of the practical impacts of research on a researched group, and I seek to justify my own research on the terms laid out in the first band ( sections 3.2.1 – 3.2.4 ).

I have been an active participant in many of the events and organisations covered in this thesis. I am an 'activist' as well as an 'academic', a participant and an insider with the potential benefits ( ground-level insight ) and dangers ( not seeing the wood for the trees ) which that involves. I have a sympathy for the movements I cover and my personal agenda is heavily informed by anarchist theory and attitudes. My methodology must take this on board.

If I were to research and write of environmental activism and anarchism as if it were a specimen, an 'out-there' object to be authoritatively described, and did not enter into dialogue with my study of it, then I feel I would be outside the spirit of anarchism and thus a fraud. I would also have to cut out all those aspects of my life that are intimately connected with activism, and with the people and ideas covered in this thesis. This would also distort the research, and create the pretence of a 'distance' that is both inaccurate and illegitimate.

In this chapter, I detail some of the arguments and perspectives that relate to and ground this position. These arise from the anarchist tradition, the radical feminist movement, and from politically engaged researchers working in various fields of social science. I also cite certain 'authorities' engaged in sophisticated theory, but it is not with these that I wish to stake my own claims to authority. Rather, it is with the activists on the ground who constitute my research subject.

Hostility to experts, ivory towers and intellectual theories is common amongst the DIY activist milieu ( Schnews 1997: 2; *Do or Die* 1997: 30; *Do or Die* 1998: 143; Halfacree 1999: 209; McKay 1998: 11-13; Bookchin 1995a: 2 ). Whitworth writes that "Academics seem to activists at times to be kin to politicians, having lost touch with the reality of grass-roots action, unaware of the frustrations and failures of real-world democracy, analysing to death the volatile and holistic nature of the issues, fragmenting them into specialist arenas and pet projects. The end result is the dilution of action and its co-optation into the very system it seeks to challenge" ( 1999: 7 ). This empirical distrust relates to the traditional anarchist hostility to the academy ( see section 3.3.1 ) which, I will argue, is not an unsophisticated case of anarchist anti-intellectualism ( *CW* 1997: 2; AF 2001d: 10; EWAW 1996; 'Jon' 2002; *Social Anarchism* 1987-1988; Widmer 1995 ), but a sensitive appreciation of the logic of capitalist, authoritarian and mass-bureaucratic modes upon knowledge and thought. In this chapter I will also assess the attempts to escape this dynamic.

## **3.2 Anarchist Perspectives on Research and Theory**

### **3.2.1**

#### **Anarchist Perspectives**

As an anarchist writing about anarchism according to anarchist principles, I should also apply these principles to my own activity. In relation to academic research, this anarchist perspective manifests itself most strongly as a critique. Before I look at this, however, I wish to sketch out six preliminary points about how ideas and academic knowledge are viewed from an anarchist perspective. The first five points are ( a ) that anarchist theory is fluid and flexible, ( b ) that ideas are social products, ( c ) that the common person can be as wise as any expert, ( d ) that every idea is developed out of practical experience, and ( e ) that 'objective' knowledge is contaminated with authoritarian values. A final perspective ( f ) comes from the individualist school and raises the radical doubt that anything can ever be known about anything beyond one's own experience.

( a ) The fluid and flexible nature of anarchist theory, elaborated in Chapter 2, means there is nothing that may prevent an anarchist approach being brought against a new subject, and no particular piece of intellectual baggage need necessarily be brought along ( Purkis 2001: 11 ). The whole point of being an anarchist, after all, is that you think for yourself and accept nothing on mere authority ( Bakunin quoted



in Ritter 1980: 11 ). It is in this light, also, that my presentations of ‘anarchist thought’ should be considered. My reading of anarchism is limited and I stake no claims to grand truth: in keeping with much activist reportage, the only truth I claim is the kind provided by an honest account ( Merrick 1997: backcover; Schneus 2004: 5; Purkis 2001: 11 ).

( b ) One of the most important aspects of the ( social ) anarchist evaluation of ideas is that “Ideas are social products” ( Brown 1994: 11; cf Kropotkin 2001: 125; Jasper 1999: 373 ). No man is an island and no innovation is possible without the existence and support of society. Thus Kropotkin argued that even the intellectual faculty is ‘eminently social’, since it is nurtured by communication and accumulated experience ( 1915: 220; cf Woodcock 1980: 19; Kropotkin c1890: 5 ). A practical demonstration of this sentiment has been the extension of the anarchist opposition to property into the information age, with activists and anarchists advocating positive notions of the ‘intellectual commons’, ‘copyleft’, and freely developed and distributed software ( Ortellado 2002; Moglen 2003; WSISWS 2003: 9; McCann 2005; Juris 2004 ).

( c ) Anarchists hold great faith in the resourcefulness and ability of the common man. Bakunin writes that “there is much more practical sense and spirit in the instinctive aspirations and in the real needs of the masses of the people than in the profound intellect of all these learned men and tutors of humanity who, after so many efforts have failed to make it happy, still presume to add their efforts” ( 1990a: 19; cf Bakunin 1990a: 134 ). There is nothing about the ‘expert’, therefore ( especially the ‘expert’ of ideas ) that makes him any wiser than the common man or woman ( Cattleprod & friend c2001: 1 ). A refinement in techniques, or ‘cleverness’, does not necessarily take one closer to the truth ( Martin 1991 ), and perhaps more significantly, it takes us no closer to a better world ( Bakunin 1986: 3; Fox 2005: 24 ).

( d ) A related point is that, for most anarchists, every idea has a contextual basis: “social techniques do not come from intellectual test tubes. Truly we learn in struggle” ( Brown 1994: 7 ). This means that the ideas of anarchism as a political theory cannot be separated from anarchism as a political struggle because, as Harding states for the feminist case, “political struggle is a precondition for knowledge” ( 1991: 109 ).

A classic anarchist statement of this position can be found in the ‘Organisational Platform’ of Makhno et al: “anarchism does not derive from the abstract reflections of an intellectual or a philosopher, but from the direct struggle of workers against capitalism, from the needs and necessities of the workers, from their aspirations to liberty and equality” ( 1989 ). Black, however, disputes the claim that the idea of anarchism arose from class struggle, and not individual reflection. He satirises the Platform’s claim that intellectuals ‘discovered the idea of anarchism in the masses’ as ‘an extraordinary feat of clairvoyance’ ( 2002: 15-16 ). Instead, Black highlights the influence of individual thinkers like Proudhon and Bakunin, and Goaman too highlights the “huge role” played by texts, both in transmitting anarchist ideas, and in binding the anarchist movement together ( Goaman 2002: 1-5 ). I do not feel I must reject their claims when I side with Kropotkin’s point that the philosopher too is a product of society ( Kropotkin c1890: 5 ).

The bookish work of intellectuals is indeed included and relied upon in this thesis, but it is outweighed by practical, movement-based expressions of anarchism. As I have expounded with my presentation of ‘anarchism through practice’ in the previous chapter, anarchists do place primary importance on practical experience ( though not necessarily the class struggle that Black satirises ), and it is this everyday, practical experience that anarchist intellectuals draw upon for their ideas.

( e ) The anarchist critique of the state is extended to a hostility to ‘objectivity’, because for the state to accept something as ‘objective’, it must conform to the statist paradigm ( Kropotkin 2001: 197 ). Thus the anarchist website *Anarchist Faq* states: “Like the old priesthoods, only those members who produce ‘objective research’ become famous and influential - ‘objective research’ being that which accepts the status quo as ‘natural’ and produces what the elite want to hear ( i.e. apologetics for capitalism and elite rule will always be praised as ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ regardless of its actual scientific and factual content...)” ( 1 2005 ).<sup>19</sup> I will consider this point more in section 3.2.2.

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<sup>19</sup> This line of critique is also extended into the realm of nature, for instance by eco-anarchist Peter Marshall who charges that “The ideal of science is the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. But science is not value-free. Science treats nature in a particular way. Research is usually oriented towards a specific goal which leads to the exploitation of nature” ( 1992b: 454; cf Plumwood 1993: 110-111; Merchant 1980: 290-292; Orton 2004 ).



( f ) A final point, coming not from within the social anarchist camp but from the individualist, challenges the ontological basis of 'objective knowledge'. Stirner ( 1995: 134-135; cf Nietzsche 1967: 268 ) maintained that the indefinable individual is the only really knowable and important part of reality. One's existence precedes all essences, and the individual is always contrary, always moving, impossible to pin down. Knowledge as we understand it ( and the logic integral to academic research ) can therefore never be comprehensive despite its pretensions because, at bottom, "the reality of the human condition is far too complex to be encompassed by propositions" ( Carroll 1974: 42 ). With the innovations of feminist and postmodern theory, we will see that such a case of radical doubt need not cripple our project of research, but rather serve a useful function in setting out the limits of what can be understood.

### 3.2.2

#### Critiques of Dominant Epistemology and Theory

Having sketched out these preliminary perspectives on ideas and academia from the anarchist tradition, I would now like to look at critiques of the dominant objective discourse that have emerged from the academic field. Bourdieu argues that "Symbolic systems are not simply instruments of knowledge, they are also instruments of *domination*" ( in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 13 ), and Bauman writes that the dominant epistemology has been "'naturalised' into something very close to a law of nature by the modern part of the globe" ( Bauman quoted in Plows 1998a: 4; Bauman 1987 ). Anti-establishment groups are constantly engaged in a struggle for validity against this dominant worldview and value-system ( Bourdieu 1991: 127; Doherty 2002: 16-17 ). Feminists and activists from many struggles are thus all involved in challenging the prevailing hegemony of 'scientific' objectivity, and each identify within it a certain 'logic of domination' ( Plows 1998a: 4; cf Plows 1998b: 47; Plumwood 1993: 4; Bookchin 1982; Glendinning 2002 ). This dominant epistemology is also instituted in research whose apparently neutral objectivity actually promotes a built-in bias. Thus Zinn writes that, "Ironically, the university has often served narrow governmental, military, or business interests, and yet withheld support from larger, transcendental values, on the ground that it needed to maintain neutrality" ( 1997: 504 ). Plows writes that "Activists and feminists both challenge the *raison d'être* of the dominant paradigm, and as a result are continually accused of political bias, whilst their accusers cover their tracks by retreating to the moral high ground of what Becker ... has termed the 'hierarchy of credibility'" ( 1998a: 5; cf Becker 1997: 181; Plows 1998b: 44 ).

Feminist theorists and researchers have mounted a sustained assault on what they perceive as the patriarchal bastion of objectivity. They have been supported by arguments from the sociology of knowledge, that "all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and that those circumstances shape it" ( Rose quoted in Valentine 1998: 306; cf Mac Laughlin 1986: 34; Gramsci 1971: 244; Bourdieu 1991 ). Thus Benston charges that "The claim that science is value-free, objective and purely rational is ideology and not reality": it is shaped by the "capitalist social relations" in which it is produced ( 1989: 62-74; cf Purkis 2005: 40; Jones 1987 ). Stanley and Wise have even suggested that "'objectivity' is the term that men have given to their own subjectivity" ( 1993: 59 ). We might crudely suggest that where anarchists see the state, feminists see patriarchy, yet both condemn objectivity in the same way.

Plows writes that "feminism offers an epistemological challenge in the following ways: ( 1 ) the notion that there is only one valid way of knowing the world is challenged; ( 2 ) the 'objectivity' of this dominant epistemology is exposed as a myth; and ( 3 ) that this world view is hierarchical, exploitative and oppressive" ( 1998a: 4 ). These terms of feminist critique accord with my own notion of anarchism. For the purposes of my argument and methodology, we can consider them as arguments and values common to both discourses. However, I must admit that it is feminist theorists, rather than anarchists, who have provided the sharpest tools for discussion here. It is primarily to the feminist tradition, therefore, that I have looked for theoretical support for my methodology.

Feminist theorists have particularly focussed their attacks on the notion of objectivity, the creation of dichotomies ( Plumwood 1993: 41-68; Miles & Finn 1989; Cixous 1981: 102; Moulton 1983: 149-163;

Dubois 1983: 110-111 ), and the identification of cause-effect explanations ( Harding and Hintikka 1983; Stanley and Wise 1993; Nielsen 1990; Hartman and Davidow 1991 ). On the latter issue, Roberts asks “What if the most fundamental error is the search for mono-causation? What if the world is really a field of interconnecting events, arranged in patterns of multiple meanings?” ( in Stanley and Wise 1991: 47; cf Purkis 2005: 52 ). Here I wish to look at the attack on objectivity.

Parlee argues that “Concepts, environments, social interactions are all simplified by methods which lift them out of their context, stripping them of the very complexity that characterises them in the real world” ( 1979: 131; cf Bleiker 2000: 229; Scheman 1991: 193; Mishler 1979; Khayati 1998; *TCA* 5(1) 2002: 9 ). Such attempts at objectivity – the “myth of disembodied vision” ( Heller 2000: 143; Jasper 1999: 377 ) - are thus criticised for their reductionism, and their inability to comprehend truths in their full, complex reality ( Benston 1989: 64 ). There is also a strong connection between systems of classification and formulation, and the exercise of top-down, exploitative control ( Holloway 2002: 72; Smith 1997: 352; Smith 1998; Horkheimer quoted in Holloway 2002: 66 ). Greens condemn objectivism on similar terms ( Begg 1991: 2; Goldsmith 1988: 162-3; Plumwood 1993: 144-145; Des Jardins 1997: 204-210 ), and anarchists have always argued against “‘grand theory’ and ‘specious theorising’” ( Mac Laughlin 1986: 27; cf Kropotkin 2001: 173; Bakunin 1990a: 133; Pepto-Dismal 2004: 64; Thompson 1978: 216 ). Stanley and Wise argue that “The whole fabric of objectivity is flawed, and its continued use is bolstered by frequently obvious and simple techniques which transform ‘the subjective’ into ‘the objective’ by the use of particular forms of speech. For example, ‘it is thought’ for ‘I think’, and so on” ( 1993: 42; cf Holloway 2002: 2; Bell 2002 [D.S.]: 222 ). Here we are brought down to the nitty gritty of academic language, in which the patriarchal attempts at ‘objectivity’ are embedded ( Miles and Finn 1989: 163-4; Daly 1978; Watson 1998 ). I will look further at the critique of ‘objectivism’ and methods designed to counter it in section 3.2.4.

As we have noted, such a critique of academia and its objective language can also be found in the anarchist tradition. Kropotkin argued that “We have been brought up from our childhood to regard the State as a sort of Providence; all our education ... accustom[s] us to believe in Government and in the virtues of the State providential... Open any book on sociology or jurisprudence, and you will find there the Government, its organisation, its acts, filling so large a place that we come to believe that there is nothing outside the Government and the world of statesmen” ( 1972: 67; cf Mac Laughlin 1986: 28; Bakunin 1990a: 33; McCalla 1989: 48; ‘Council for the Spreading/Advancement of Occupations’ quoted in *GAY* 14 2004: 4 ). This theme is elaborated by eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin, who proffers the twin theorisation of an ‘epistemology of rule’, and ‘ontological structures of domination’. An ‘epistemology of rule’ is defined as “the various ways of mentalising the entire realm of experience along lines of command and obedience ... Just as aggression flexes our bodies for fight or flight, so class societies organise our psychic structures for command and obedience” ( 1982: 89; cf Holloway 2002: 38 ). The notion of ‘ontological structures of domination’ suggests that the very theory and comprehension of being in general ( ontology ), is ‘structured’ by categories and formulations which integrate domination into our most basic conceptual understanding of the world ( Bookchin 1982; Ely in Clark 1990: 50; Smith 1987; Chistiansen-Ruffman 1989: 130 ). Anarchists have thus identified a ‘political’ dimension to academic authority through an extension of their central analysis of domination. Cattleprod can consequently charge that “most intellectuals and academics are little more than stenographers to power” ( c2001a: 25; cf Holloway 2002: 22 ).

For anarchists, the paradigmatic example of state-supporting ‘objectivity’ comes with the case of law. Zinn notes that, in contrast to the ‘rule of men’ that preceded it, “the rule of law ... claimed to be impersonal, neutral, apply equally to all, and, therefore, democratic.” Yet “What was done before – exploiting the poor, sending the young to war, and putting troublesome people in dungeons – is still done, except that this no longer seems to be the arbitrary action of the feudal lord or the king; it now has the authority of neutral, impersonal law.” The law’s apparent objectivity thus serves to mystify: “because it has the look of neutrality, its injustices are made legitimate” ( 1997: 372-3; cf Winstanley 1973: 170; Bakunin 1986: 8 ).

Anarchists condemn the law on two grounds. First, for its tyrannical and rigid generality ( Ritter 1980: 13 ) which, in its attempt to reduce the multiple actions of people to one universal standard, ignores the fact that “Every case is a rule to itself” ( Godwin 1796 (2): 393; cf Kropotkin 2000: 157; Kropotkin 2001: 200 ). Second, law is attacked for supporting our ongoing exploitation and oppression – as another device of authority. They frame their own approach as the contrast to this – the negation of



authority ( Berkman 1964: 62 ). Carter links this anarchist perspective to that of the oppressed, and particularly those at the receiving end of such state-centric justice:

“There is an almost inescapable sense in which accepted theories of politics and law act as ideological justifications for the existing social hierarchy. They are largely accepted by those at the top who make and administer the laws, and provide them with the principles they need in the process; and these theories are often mutely or openly rejected by those at the bottom, who see the ‘law’ from the perspective of the police cell and the jail” ( 1971: 44; cf Mac Laughlin 1986: 11; Winstanley 1973: 101 )

Kropotkin argued that the alternative approach of the anarchists looks “at society and its political organisation from a different standpoint than that of all the authoritarian schools - for we start from a free individual and reach a free society, instead of beginning by the state to come down to the individual” ( 2001: 180; cf Ward 1988: 22; Holloway 2002: 8 ).<sup>20</sup>

The situationists added to this critique, stating that the academy plays its part in the transformation of everything into objects, and the stripping away of all human values, by framing phenomena within theories that, ultimately, support the capitalist system: “an ideology in power turns any partial truth into an absolute lie” ( in Knabb 1981: 178; cf Holloway 2002: 62-72 ). Even when the intentions of researchers are good, therefore, the situationists warn that the language and practice of academia expresses a pathogenic intellectualism: “No doubt he would like to be regarded as an enemy of its rhetoric; but he will use its syntax” ( Debord 1990: 31; cf MacIntyre 1981: 3; Smith 1995: 52; Heller [C] 1999: 36 ). This relates to the attempts of activists like Plows to use academia as part of activism: “academia as a protest strategy” ( 1998b: 47 ). Plows quickly discovered that “to enable the views of protesters to be heard and understood by academia, it is necessary for oneself to become part of the academic establishment and to a large extent, play by those rules” ( 1998a: 12 ). This is a dilemma which I too have had to negotiate.

If I accept wholesale the terms of the situationist critique, then I must view the act of researching radical challenges such as the environmental direct action movement with hostility. The situationists would argue that this research strips the subject of its revolutionary quality, which is grounded in the context, organisation and experience of the people involved, and renders it harmless, as an object amongst objects ( Purkis 2005: 41 ). It then places the object, rendered abstract and therefore toothless, within a framework or discourse which judges it and characterises it according to what are ultimately capitalist and authoritarian terms. My research thus stands condemned as an act of commodification, or spectacularisation ( Duckett 2001c; Social Movements List 1998b; Plows 1998b: 74-5 ).

If I remain within the framework of situationist thought, then I have no answer to this charge. I must therefore dismiss certain elements of the situationist perspective in order to avoid becoming crippled. This situation of mine marks out a more general danger that comes with working within radical theories. A contradiction point is reached, at which I must choose against the radical theory in order to carry on my research: Academy 1: Anarchism 0. Here, then, I must soften the glare of the situationist critique and try to somehow ‘bring it on board’ in a manner which the original situationists would find contemptible. One way I will seek to do this is by utilising the critique of the situationists and others to condemn theory as abstract and therefore alienating, but then following non-situationist lines of escape from the theory-trap. My rejection of purist, super-revolutionary situationist perspectives is rooted in the “tension ... between the perfect formula and the problem of living it” ( Goaman 2002: 119 ), a tension which contributed to the implosion of the Situationist International.

The situationists argued that a ‘unified theoretical critique’ must join with ‘a unified social practice’ ( Debord 1994: 147; Knabb, ed, 1989: 334 )<sup>21</sup>. This rhetorical position – the unification of theory and practice - is common to much of the left, but I find it unacceptable: both unreal and unethical. Against

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<sup>20</sup> Colin Ward’s oeuvre provides many good examples of a practical application of this bottom-up perspective, looking at how the issue at hand ( be it housing, education, or DIY culture ) might allow ordinary people to live in a more cooperative, self-controlled society. In a different style, Jeff Ferrell situates himself amongst those marginal autonomous subcultures ( 2001: 87 ) who experience and view the view the mechanisms of state control and ‘aesthetic exclusion’ by the middle class ( 2001: 14 ) in a very different light ( 2001: 67 ).

<sup>21</sup> In January 2002, one disaffected participant in TAPP criticised the group for being all action and no theory. He argued that nothing could be done without a theoretical understanding of that action but, in my opinion, offered nothing by way of practical suggestions, merely repeating certain stock rhetorical positions. I have always been suspicious of people who offer their ‘theory’ as a clue to the mystery of the universe, when they are unable to ground it in real-life experience.

the over-abstraction that this perspective can lead us into, feminist researchers ground theory much more firmly in the realities of their experience. Chester, for example, argues that “Radical feminist theory is that theory follows from practice and is impossible to develop in the absence of practice, because our theory is that practising our practice is our theory” ( cited in Stanley and Wise 1993: 56 ). Stanley and Wise warn against the tendency within politically engaged leftist discourse to become overly theoretical. This is a warning that I have done my best to heed, particularly with my attention to anarchism as practice. It is also in keeping with the feminist valorisation of experience, whose possible re-involvement with theory is stated by the Redstockings: “We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all products of male supremacist culture” ( quoted in Roseneil 1995: 138; cf Seel 1999: 101; Holloway 2002: 5 ). Unlike theories, experience is never limited or simplified ( Henry James quoted in Jasper 1999: 379 ), and in my research, I have drawn upon my own practical experience to augment and ground the theoretical analysis. I shall consider the re-evaluation of experience more in section 3.2.4.

In this thesis I have used largely empirical evidence to make a case about anarchist theory, and this represents a deliberate choice on my part. At the same time, however, I utilise the theoretical literature to illuminate and critique the empirical practice. In this way I am endeavouring to use theory to say something about the practice ( eco-activism ), and the practice to say something to the theory ( anarchist ideology ). I wish to emphasise, however, that I have not plucked the anarchist theory from a world far distant from the eco-activists. Rather I would argue that this is the theory which *they* read, which can be found in *their* libraries ( literally, in the library tent at EF! Summer Gatherings ), and which is therefore the most relevant background against which to paint them.

An anarchist approach partakes of a language common to at least a substantial proportion of the eco-activist community, and it may thus provide the most fitting terms on which to study their activities ( Purkis 2001: 11; Epstein 1991: 20; Welsh 2000: 205; Doherty 2002: 8 ). Where Halfacree writes that “academics can learn from what takes place on the ground in order to invigorate their own theoretical endeavours and overcome some of the distance between theory and practice” ( 1999: 209 ), I do not think this goes far enough. I believe that this distance need not exist when a common language and a common perspective and experience exists. I shall mark the difference between this and the abstract and over-optimistic position of ‘unifying theory and practice’ in the following two sections.

### 3.2.3

#### Political Approaches to Research

In this section I consider how anarchists ( should ) apply the intellectual and political implications considered above into a project of researching activists: namely by entering into a critical dialogue with the subjects which both acknowledges a “rigorous partiality” ( Clifford 1986: 25 ), and accepts responsibility for one’s role in the relationship. The ingredients of this approach have been chiefly drawn from theorisations developed by feminist researchers such as Mies, who elaborated an alternative epistemology for research grounded in ( 1 ) an avowed partiality ( not disinterested objectivity ); ( 2 ) a commitment to the voices of the studied ( not the experts ); and ( 3 ) participation in the movement being studied ( 1983: 122-126 ). I will distinguish my approach from Marxist assumptions of critical theory and feminist standpoint epistemology as both simplistic and outside the spirit of anarchism laid out in Chapter 2. I will also ground my research in anarchist, not postmodern positions, though I note a broad compatibility of Routledge’s third space approach in allowing research to be both useful and non-dominating of activism, while retaining a critical bite. Finally, I will consider the essential and unavoidable power relation that exists between researcher and researched, in order to avoid over-domineering assumptions of movement ‘approval’ or ‘representation’ in this thesis.

Chomsky has spoken of the “responsibility of intellectuals” in terms of the privileged position that comes with political liberty, access to information, and freedom of expression. “For a privileged minority, Western democracy provides the leisure, the facilities and the training to seek the truth behind the veil of misrepresentation, ideology and class interest through which the events of current history are presented to us” ( 1969: 324; cf 1996: 56 ). To neglect that responsibility is to acquiesce in



oppression. Zinn also emphasises the importance of knowledge in relation to an unjust world: “What we call the rise of democracy in the world means that force is replaced by deception ... as the chief method for keeping society as it is. This makes knowledge important, because although it cannot confront force directly, it can counteract the deception that makes the government’s force legitimate” ( 1997: 501; cf Adorno 1990: 41 ).

Although Chomsky is perhaps the most famous anarchist ‘public intellectual’, there are many others in the academy who, like Zinn ( 1997: 613 ), have ruminated upon their political responsibility. Touraine ( 1985 ) has described the importance of ‘committed research’; Katz ( 1992 ) has spoken of a ‘politics of engagement’; while hooks ( 1994: 54 ) has advocated an ‘ethics of struggle’ that exists both within the academy and beyond ( Kitchin and Hubbard 1999 ). As we have noted, in an earlier age Kropotkin “insisted that the duty of socially-concerned sciences lay in articulating the interests of subordinate social classes and combating poverty, underdevelopment and social injustice wherever they existed” ( Mac Laughlin 1986: 11 ). At a time when nationalism and jingoism were peaking, Kropotkin promoted a subversively anti-nationalist and anti-colonialist message ( quoted in Mac Laughlin 1986: 32 ). Thus he embodied Chomsky’s ‘responsibility of the intellectual’, in opposing racist misunderstandings, colonial domination and international rivalry ( Kropotkin 1972: 262 ).

Foucault has posited a distinction between ‘specific intellectuals’ and the ‘universal intellectuals’ who theorise beyond their own experience and thus become the representatives of others ( 1980: 126-8 ). He suggests we should aspire to the former, and view the latter with suspicion. On a related theme, Bauman ( 1992a: 21 ) has advocated that the intellectual today should take on the role of ‘interpreter’ ( 1988: 229-30 ). This stands in contrast to the model of the intellectual in the era of modernism, as distanced ‘men of knowledge’, working hand-in-hand with the state to enshrine their ‘legislative authority’ ( 1988: 219; Orton c2001 ). Foucault and Bauman’s re-definitions accord with a standard view held by the anarchist tradition, for whom “The social scientist had no claim to direct the revolutionary movement, but could only serve as its handmaiden” ( Miller 1984: 80 ). My own view of the anarchist intellectual’s proper role may be referenced to these points made by Chomsky, Zinn, Foucault and Bauman.

It is with the innovations of feminist research that I am most interested in this section. Partly, this is because feminists have produced some of the most interesting and practically engaged forms of research. It is also, however, ( and this might explain the reason for the former ) because I view the feminist experience with the academy as providing an emblematic example for both the anarchist argument against institutions ( Hartman & Messer-Davidow 1991: 204; cf McDermott 1994; Crossley quoted in Cox & Barker 2002: 2 ), and for the importance of micro-political ethics between people. McCalla explains that feminist researchers were not primarily “preoccupied with abstract methodological issues”. Instead, their critiques of method developed largely through hindsight, “as *reflections* on research *necessarily* done in a manner which violates many of the methodological canons of the researcher’s discipline” ( 1989: 41 ). Similarly, the qualitative approach I shall consider in the following section represents a pragmatic not an ideological choice ( Plows 1998b: 38 ).

Specific methods by which feminists addressed the research problematic included ( 1 ) *Action research*, where action and evaluation proceed simultaneously; ( 2 ) *Demystification research*, which assumes that the creation of alternative knowledge will partially set the conditions for change; and ( 3 ) *Participatory/ collaborative research*, where the research participants are part of the decision-making process and direct the course of research ( Reinharz cited in Farrow, Moss & Shaw 1995: 72 ). I do not follow any of these models specifically, but we may note that, just as they stand radically apart from the traditional ideal of disinterested research, they accord with the traditional anarchist positions ( 1 ) that we learn through struggle and that ideas are social; ( 2 ) that a critique of domination can undermine its power; and ( 3 ) that everyone should participate in decisions that affect them.

Feminists like Mies, Roseneil and Harding have argued the case for research which is ethically and politically partisan, on the basis that ‘The question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on’. Research which claims to be non-partisan often serves the interests of the dominant class. By denying that claim of neutrality, furthermore, partisan techniques of research also deny the validity of ‘objective’ analysis. As Mies argues, “The postulate of value-free research...has to be replaced by conscious partiality, which is achieved through partial identification with the research objects” ( 1983: 122; cf Epstein 1991: 20 ).



One advantage claimed for this method of research is that it takes place on “the same critical plane” as the subjects being studied. Harding stakes this claim:

“The best feminist analysis... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of research. That is, the class, race, culture, and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the researcher her/himself must be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint” ( 1987: 9; cf Plows 1998b: 52-57; Clifford 1986: 32 ).

Harding goes on to consider the value of doing this: “the researcher appears to us not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests.” The significance of this, she argues, is that “the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for ( or against ) the claims advanced in the results of research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence. Introducing this ‘subjective’ element into the analysis in fact increases the overall objectivity of the research and decreases the ‘objectivism’ which hides this kind of evidence from the public” ( 1987: 9; cf Benston 1989: 68; Becker in Emerson, ed, 2001: 322 ). It is this claim for transparency leading to greater objectivity which, I feel, is the great strength of feminist approaches to research.

Plows, evaluating the merits and dangers of researching as such a ‘partisan insider’ within the environmental direct action movement, highlights for us the key difference between feminist and activist approaches to research: “Protesters are not the marginalised underdogs of classic feminist/critical theorist literature. The roads protest movement was initiated as a political force for change through Non Violent Direct Action ( NVDA ), with an intrinsic belief in the power of both individual ( DIY - ‘Do It Yourself’ - culture ) and collective action” ( 1998a: 1; cf Purkis 2001: 11 ). Plows thus decided that, rather than copy the research practices of other feminists, she would adapt her own methods according to the needs of her research:

“not to ‘empower my subjects’ in this traditional sense, but to contribute to the academic understanding of the views/values of a dynamic movement. Protesters are demonstrating about the domination and exploitation of nature/social groups -they are not demonstrating because they see themselves as oppressed” ( 1998a: 1 ).

My experience has also supported Cox’s observation that activists participating in research “are fully capable of locating the activity of intellectuals and using it for their own purposes” ( 1998: 9; cf Purkis 2001: 11; Harrington 2003: 598 )<sup>22</sup>. In evaluating the potential ‘usefulness’ and ‘aptness’ of my research to its subjects of study, therefore, I am dealing with complex and dynamic actors, not a static pool of ‘oppressed subjects’ waiting for a critical spark.

It is worthwhile distinguishing my approach from that of critical theory, a perspective that dominates much left-research, and which is characterised by a criticality that is both epistemological and ethical ( Eagleton 1994: 17; Wall 1997: 9-10 ). Hammersley notes that “its most distinctive feature [ is a ] commitment to political goals as part of an attempt to unify theory and practice” ( 1995: 41 ). In the case of Marxist critical theorists, partisanship with working class organisations was given priority ( sometimes to the exclusion of all other groupings ). Cox justifies supporting certain positions within a social movement on the basis that, as knowledge involves a practical intervention, this intervention should be consciously recognised, in a manner that reflects the Marxist approach to political movements ( 1998: 5; cf Touraine 1981; Scott 1990: 63-4 ). Yet I find such a strong interventionist approach ethically uncomfortable and I refute the idea of the intellectual ( or party ) as ‘interpreter of the world’, seeking to expose to the researched their ‘false consciousness’. I share Routledge’s distrust of intellectuals who arrogate to themselves the authority to judge what resistance is right and what is wrong ( Routledge & Simons 1995: 473 ), and I share Seel’s dislike for situations within which “research participants become targets of research rather than active subjects with the power to interpret and change their own situations” ( Seel 1999: 131 ).

If, as Cox argues, there is “an implicit parallel between organising modes and strategies of research” ( 1998: 7 ), then I would adopt the anarchist DIY approach to revolutionary organising, rather than that of Marxist ‘guidance’ and articulation of the ‘real’ class interests, which so easily developed into

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<sup>22</sup> In my case, an example of this was a TAPP meeting’s request for me to collate a folder of TAPP’s writings.



'official' communist parties, and the myriad of Trotskyite splinter groups, each assured that it alone possessed the 'correct' view of history. Notions of the 'know-it-all party' ( Holloway 2002: 86 ) or of 'vanguard intellectuals' are opposed by Greens ( Begg 1991: 9 ), NVDA practitioners ( Martin 2001: 75 ) and anarchists ( Bakunin 1990a: 198-199; *CW* 1997: 4 ) alike. Cox, a neo-Gramscian with anarchist sympathies, does not advocate the Leninist 'vanguard' approach, but it serves as a useful 'straw man' here, against which to present my own approach. Considering the role of the intellectual, Kropotkin states that "All we can do is to give advice. And while giving it we add: 'This advice will be valueless if your own experience and observation do not lead you to recognise that it is worth following'" ( 2001: 103 ). It will be clear in this thesis which are the modes of activism that most accord with my own sensibilities, but I have not adopted a 'champion' that best expresses the anarchist spirit. Rather, I celebrate the diverse expressions and modes of activism, on the basis that the more going on, the better, and the more voices in the debate, the better that debate will be ( Ritter 1980: 106; IE 2005: 13; Reinsborough 2003: 4 ). I also do not view my own voice as more objective ( a higher synthesis ) than the various expressions cited in the thesis, although it is, of course, more centrally placed.

Common ground exists between critical theory and anarchist approaches, however, in the emphasis placed upon dialogue. Cox argues that "research should develop in dialogue with movements, even perhaps to the extent of directing research into areas that the movements themselves are interested in rather than areas decided by the 'traditional intellectuals' of the academy" ( 1998: 7 ). At the EF!SG in 2001, participants urged that academics should 'study the powerful' ( Corporate Watch are an EF!-affiliated group who do just that, tracing connections and weakspots in the large corporations ), but this is not a direction that I have followed. I have, however, endeavoured to keep my research activity in two-way communication, particularly with an activist-academic conference on 'Radical British Environmentalism' which I staged with Jenny Pickerill in 1999. One of the participating local activists stated at the end of the conference, that the day had "Helped demystify the academic process". Several participants also expressed the sentiment, central to Cox's Gramscian approach, that theorising and political activism are not binary opposites. One stated: "I've always had a problem with academic theorising. [ But I ] Realised today that we're always theorising. In our direct action group we're always doing it" ( Pickerill & Duckett 1999: 85; cf Seel 1999: 128 ).

Some feminist researchers adapted critical theorists' ( Marxist ) notion of a privileged working class consciousness into 'standpoint' theories, which assume women to possess a superior perspective due to their subject position ( Harding 1987: 184-185, Hartsock 1983: 285, Nielsen 1990: 10-11 ). The question is raised whether one can claim a privileged 'activist standpoint' that can see more into the world than can the detached, non-activist standpoint. There are certainly insights and experiences that can only be encountered once one becomes politically and socially engaged, but I doubt whether this amounts to a qualitative epistemological difference from the rest of society. Anarchists typically think that every individual has the capacity to turn around and oppose the powers-that-be, and view the world in an anarchist light, no matter what place in society they hold ( *CW* 1997: 14 ). In a general sense, I disagree with the core positions of standpoint epistemology. Those of us who are white, western, middle-class and male, are not fore-ordained to adopt a certain role in relationship to class and gender politics ( Bowen 2005: 119; Collins in Hartman and Davidow 1991: 104 ). My lack of attention to gender and class perspectives in this thesis, however, may provide a possible line of critique, particularly from feminist theorists whose insights I have sought to apply in a de-gendered way.

I admire the intentions of the critical theorists, but I do not share their confidence in the attainability of their project. I do not think that theoretical inquiry, of the kind that critical theorists are involved in, is the place where emancipation can happen. I assign myself a more limited role with this thesis, broadly in keeping with a hermeneutic framework, but with a consciously partisan ( and 'critical' ) ethic.<sup>23</sup>

The radical framework that has challenged Marxist 'critical theory' in the halls of academe is that which tends to be called postmodernism. As a reaction to the universalising efforts of Marxist critical theory, this strand has emphasised the constructed character of narratives and their diversity.

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<sup>23</sup> Hermeneutic researchers argue that to explain and understand any human social behaviour, we need to understand the meaning attached to it by the participants themselves ( it cannot be done by solely looking at observable human action ). A full understanding of social action must therefore involve empathetic understanding, and it is this empathetic understanding which provides the underlying tone of this thesis, and constitutes my primary aim. My secondary aim, arising from this position, is that this thesis will attain a useful political and practical function by aiding the self-reflection and reflexivity of the movements that it considers.



Hammersley notes that “From the point of view of poststructuralism and postmodernism, critical theory is not critical enough. It is regarded as relying on the Enlightenment assumption that the exercise of reason can produce demonstrable moral truths about how society should be organised and how change can be brought about” ( 1995: 34 ). Postmodernism is defined by its opposition to the modernist attempt at producing an authoritative corpus of universally valid knowledge, based on the self-reflection of a subject ( individual or collective ). This is rejected on the grounds that ( a ) it is not achievable, and ( b ) because the attempt to realise it involves the enforcement of a single point of view, and the persecution of those who refuse to accept it. The critical attention of postmodern thinkers thus tends to focus on “attempts at epistemological grounding, which are seen as the source of modern political repression” ( Hammersley 1995: 33 ). This emphasis within postmodern endeavours has a clear resonance with anarchist themes.

I must emphasise that I have not in this thesis attempted a thorough or consistent examination of postmodernism. While there is much in postmodernism which I recognise as valuable, I also do not identify with ‘postmodern’ positions wholeheartedly. This is demonstrated by my conventional style of prose: I have not sought either a poetically evocative style, nor used postmodern jargon in a painfully sensitive self-policing of my language, avoiding ‘suspect’ terms. In sections 2.2.5 and 2.3.6 I thus positioned my approach according to the anarchist emphasis on dynamic, lived interactions, rather than on such techniques as Derrida’s deconstruction or Foucault’s genealogy. I will briefly now discuss the salient political and practical issues of the ‘postmodern’ approach, as perceived by certain activist-researchers.

Schman argues that “Deconstruction can be a powerful tool to expose the logic of domination, as it lurks in the egalitarian rhetoric of the Enlightenment; it has a place in a revolutionary’s toolbox. But deconstruction is as indiscriminating a tool as were the shock tactics of the artistic avant garde. Its appeal is that it *can* dismantle the master’s house. But it dismantles *our* houses just as effectively” ( 1991: 195; cf Pratt 1995: 56; Benhabib 1992: 230; Hammersley 1995: 35; Holmwood 1999: 288 ). As Heller puts it, there is a “danger that the destabilising process results in too forceful a challenge and destroys any form of agency” ( 2000: 144 ). I have argued in the previous chapter that the ethical and political matrix at the centre of anarchism can provide us with a ‘way out’ of this self-destructive avenue. The feminist experience, furthermore, provides us with an example of why political and social values should not be divorced from our modes of theorising.

McDowell contrasts the bases for critique provided by academic postmodern theorists, and on-the-ground, practically engaged feminists. She charges that “by turning to postmodernism rather than feminism, the new anthropologists... have managed, whilst appearing to challenge it, to leave in place the legitimacy of their own claims to privileged knowledge” ( 1992b: 65; cf McCalla 1989: 53; Bakunin & Warren 1981: backpage ). As the old kings of theory topple, so new ones arise to take their place. Anarchists argue that it is what takes place on the ground, in our interactions and our social world, that is important. I have therefore chosen to draw on feminist rather than postmodern writers for the bulk of my epistemological discussion. Where it is at its best, postmodern theory can provide us with tools for demystification and a dazzlingly sharp analysis of professedly ‘progressive’ discourses. But when theory is only speaking to theory, it is of no concern to us. The experience of feminism, and of feminist researchers, has been eminently political at its base, and it is my belief that, even if it were just for this reason alone, feminism would share a deep affinity with anarchism. Having said this, it is with anarchism rather than feminism that my proclivities really lie. As Plows sketched out above, this brings my perspective more closely in line with that of my ‘research subjects’.

Routledge has theorised a research strategy that attempts to close the gap between research and activism ( although he does so in a painfully jargonistic pseudo-poetic language ( 1996b: 412; Routledge & Simons 1995: 484 ) ). He posits the idea of a ‘third space’ that moves between the worlds of academia and activism, and from which a position of ( non-dominating ) critical engagement with both is possible ( 1996b: 400–407; cf Brewer 2000 ). Routledge’s ‘third space’ ties in well with both postmodern approaches to theory, and anarchist approaches to politics. It is not equivalent to a dialectic synthesising of positions. Rather, difference is at once validated and included in the strategy ( Routledge 1996b: 414 ). Such practices can articulate “a refusal to know one’s place” ( 1996b: 403 ): a radical, potentially liberating quality. Academics can aid the subject, or the political cause, at the same time as they conduct their critical research, acting “as a catalyst for the movement’s strategic and tactical trajectory” ( 1996b: 411; cf Touraine quoted in Purkis 2005: 49; Cox 1998: 10 ). Denzin makes the additional valuable point that an interpretive ethnography, by making its values and criticisms



public, is also characterised by vulnerability ( 1999: 510-513 ). This vulnerability is perhaps essential to keep a more equal power-relationship with the subjects of research, themselves rendered prone by heavy inspection.

I will return to this theme of usefulness, reciprocation and identification in 3.4.5. For now I would like to mark the point at which this combination of 'the political' and 'the academic' becomes impossible, and should therefore stop. I have noted already that I do not think that the leftist imperative to 'combine theory and action' can always translate into meaningful action. It can also obscure important points of contradiction that are better learnt from than dismissed. I would like to add to this understanding, Hammersley's observation that "If political goals are pursued consistently, the line of action engaged in is unlikely to be recognisable as a form of research" ( 1995: 42; cf Routledge & Simons 1995: 472 ). If my thinking was entirely informed by anarchist theory, and if the impulse behind this thesis was indivisible from my desire to make it useful to the movement, then I would never have produced a thesis in this way. Rather, I would have produced a piece of propaganda ( for the 'external' world ), or of strategic and ideological analysis ( for 'internal' use by the movement ). My individual intellectual interests, and my location as a person whose future employability, and family relations, would be negatively affected by the non-completion of a thesis, are therefore additional ingredients.

Choosing a base within the academic world, feminist researchers have positioned their work as 'for' women rather than merely 'on' women ( Klein in Bowles and Klein 1983: 90; cf Stanley and Wise 1993: 37 ). The intention is "to provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need, rather than providing for welfare departments, manufacturers, advertisers, psychiatrists" ( Harding 1987: 8 ). Routledge, however, warns that "It is all too easy for academics to claim solidarity with the oppressed and act as relays for their voices within social scientific discourse" ( 1996b: 413; cf Routledge & Simons 1995: 483 ). The danger of personal bias is such that "it would be easy for politically, passionately engaged researchers ... to conduct research in such a way that our pre-existing beliefs, views about our research material is corroborated" ( Plows 1998b: 46; cf Marcus 1986: 182 ). This would entail the loss of critical 'distance', which I discussed above. Other problems arise from the issue of 'representation', opposition to which has long been expressed by anarchists in the political world, and more recently by feminists and postmodernists in the domain of theoretical analysis. Haraway argues that "representation depends upon possession of an active resource, namely, the silent object, the stripped actant" ( 1992: 313 ). Clifford ( 1986 ) and Gitlin, ed, ( 1994 ) are amongst those who have condemned ( as a form of domination ) attempts to use partisan research as a form of political representation for the subjects of study. In contrast, they advocate that people be allowed to speak for themselves in research texts, even to collaborate in the research process ( Hammersley 1995: 38 ). Such arguments agree with the basic values of anarchism, although in practice such an approach may prove problematic. I detail the degree and manner in which I have involved my own research subjects within the research process in the third band of this chapter, sections 3.4.1 to 3.4.5.

Even for researchers who adopt a partisan outlook with their research, or share common experiences, the relationship of the researcher to the 'researched' remains defined by a "social-political distance" ( Moss 1995: 82; cf Roseneil 1995: 12; Goaman 2002: 32 ). Purkis notes that the anarchist concern "with analysing the construction of authority in a variety of different contexts" means that "from a methodological point of view, the relationship between the researcher and the researched must be central" ( Purkis 2005: 47 ). Stanley and Wise state that this is an 'inevitable' power relationship ( 1993: 168 ) that cannot be brushed aside. Moss argues that "It is imperative that we struggle toward some equitable distribution of power within each research situation: so that change is effected from within rather than being imposed from the outside; so that the status quo is challenged; so that we as researchers can be less exploitative, less oppressive" ( 1995: 89; cf Mies 1983: 123 ). The tools we might use to try and reduce the 'gap', and to subvert the traditional top-down relationship, are the subject of the following section.

In sections 6.2.1 and 6.5.3 we will note how the anarchist notion of direct action critiques those activists who seek to be "the voice for the voiceless", particularly in animal and earth liberation when "the revolutionary subject ... cannot ... participate in its own liberation" ( Ruins 2003: 16; cf Heller 2000: 133 ). The anarchist mode of revolution emphasises that no-one can 'do' the revolution for anyone else ( *GA* 1999: 3 ) and that we should all, selfishly and honestly, place ourselves at the centre of the process. Activists are highly sensitive to the domination involved in "Speaking for Others" ( *EF!J* 23(8) 2003: 9; cf Goaman 2002: 26-27; Heller 2000: 139 ) and critique those who seek to represent others on anarchist grounds ( Jarach in *GAY* 15 2004: 35 ). For this reason, I am suspicious



when the *Notes from Nowhere* collective, for example, recognise that they cannot speak for others, yet state that “these pieces have been read and commented on by the social movements themselves” ( 2003: 15 ). I cannot imagine how a ‘movement’ can comment in that way, indeed I doubt whether such a reified ‘movement’ really exists. It is only *individuals* who have read and commented on my thesis, and though they cover a spectrum of issues and approaches they can never be ‘adequately’ representative. In the article featured in Figure F3.2, I thus wrote “remember, no-one speaks for you – even the Action Update can’t really be representative” ( *EF!AU* No.64 2000: 5 ).

### 3.2.4

#### A Personal Approach to Research

Now that we have explored the political side of the epistemological challenge, we can look at the other side of the coin, that of the personal. This focus on the personal is the more epistemologically radical aspect of the feminist/ postmodern/ anarchist challenge. As Stanley and Wise note, “alongside ethical issues and dilemmas concerning the use and abuse of ‘subjects’ are epistemological issues: these concern whose knowledge, seen in what terms, around whose definitions and standards, and judged by whose as well as what criteria, should count as knowledge itself” ( 1993: 202 ).

Stanley and Wise propose certain “epistemological precepts” for a feminist ethic of research ( 1993: 8-9 ). These include a “recognition of the reflexivity of the feminist researcher in her research as an active and busily constructing agent; insistence that the ‘objects’ of research are also subjects in their own right as much as researchers are subjects of theirs ( and objects of other people’s ); acceptance that the researcher is on the same critical plane as those she researches and not somehow intellectually superior; and, most fundamental of all, no opinion, belief or other construction of events and persons, no matter from whom this derives, should be taken as a representation of ‘reality’ but rather treated as a motivated construction or versions to be subject to critical feminist analytical inquiry” ( 1993: 200 ).

A repeated strand of feminist argument is that we must avoid narrow, reductive analyses in order to allow more complex interrelationships and contexts to become visible. Thus DuBois writes that “To be open to... complexity and to see things in context means to move out of the realms of discourse and logic that rely on linear and hierarchical conceptions of reality ... [ and ] on dichotomous modes of thought, discourse and analysis” ( 1983: 110 ). Reinharz, for example, argues for an experiential research in which “The feminine mode draws on the interplay of figure and ground rather than on the dominance of either; on the contextualised, not dissociated. As interpretations are made and recorded, the remaining data are examined to see if and how they corroborate or refute the ongoing analysis” ( 1983: 183 ).

Bowles and Klein write that “One of the first claims of feminist scholarship was that male theories about women were biased. So we declared that since everything is biased we at least would *state* our biases” ( 1983: 15 ). This is viewed as a key ingredient for creating ‘unalienated knowledge’ ( Rose 1983 ): “‘good research’ ... should account for the conditions of its own production” ( Stanley 1990: 13 ). Stanley argues that “the most pertinent dimensions of an ‘unalienated knowledge’ in feminist terms are where:

- “the researcher/theorist is grounded as an actual person in a concrete setting;
- understanding and theorising are located and treated as material activities and not as unanalysable metaphysical ‘transcendent’ ones different in kind from those of ‘mere people’;
- and the act of knowing’ is examined as the crucial determiner of ‘what is known’” ( 1990: 12 ).

We may observe that there are common themes in all these points, in that the context, the material position and the actual on-the-ground activities are prioritised over abstract reflection. This priority is supported by the anarchist perspective ( Amster 2002; Glendinning in *GAY* 14 2004: 6; Bakunin 1990a: 135; Heller 1999 [C]: 46; Holloway 2002: 5 ). It may be used to support, and be supported by, both postmodern and empirical approaches. When Hall argues that “there is now no metatheory” ( quoted in Jordan & Lent 1999: 205 ), I would suggest that the importance of empirical action, of activity,



increases in significance. Each of the anarchistically-minded researchers closest to my own project have foregrounded their own experience in the research process ( Goaman 2002: 34; Heller 2000: 3; Seel 1999: 31 ).

The combined precepts translate positively into tools that draw from the authority of personal experience ( Valentine 1998: 305; *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 14 ), such as autobiographical forms of writing ( Stanley 1991; Okely 1992: 5 ). Although theorists like Bourdieu are critical of such personalised approaches, Stanley and Wise argue that “to omit ‘the personal’ is to omit the central intellectual and practical experience of research” ( 1983: 201 ). Such an omission has negative implications for the validity of the research data:

“One’s self can’t be left behind, it can only be omitted from discussions and written accounts of the research process. But it is an omission, a failure to discuss something which has been present within the research itself. The researcher may be unwilling to admit this, or unable to see its importance, but it nevertheless remains so... in doing research we cannot leave behind what it is to be a person alive in the world” ( Stanley & Wise 1993: 161 ).

The inclusion of personal experience, and evidence of the researcher’s own self, on the other hand, helps avoid presenting faux-objective descriptions “as non-problematic and indisputably ‘true’” ( 1993: 175; cf McCalla 1989: 46-50 ). The personal experience that Stanley and Wise urge us to include, furthermore, is not only our political perspective or narrative history. In contrast to the norm ( Widdowfield 2000: 200 ), feminist researchers have insisted upon the importance of the *emotional* experience of research ( Johnston in Miles and Finn 1989: 377; cf McCalla 1989: 46; Thompson 1978: 210; Zinn 1997: 120-121 ).

The above discussion indicates why methods of qualitative research might be highly regarded. Ward-Schofield provides us with a fuller advocacy:

“At the heart of the qualitative approach is the assumption that... [ the ] research is very much influenced by the researcher’s individual attributes and perspectives. The goal is not to produce a standardised set of results that any other careful researcher in the same situation or studying the same issues would have produced. Rather it is to produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of the situation” ( Ward-Schofield 1993: 202 ).

There are risks in adopting solely qualitative research methods, however. The most common criticism is that valid generalisations cannot be made on the basis of small numbers ( at worst, just a ‘sample of one’ ), and thus that representativeness is an insurmountable evaluative problem.

My own approach is to combine my analysis of anarchist and eco-activist literature, with the insights that came through my participation in events and otherwise largely undocumented activist practice. I attempt to ally an explicitly *anarchist* theoretical insight to the practical experience of activism. It will become clear by reading the thesis that my arguments are mostly substantiated by the textual manifestations of EDA. By choosing this strategy ( as opposed to a systematic series of interviews, for example, as practised by Plows and Wall ) I might be in danger of presenting a distorted picture. Those who write texts ( pamphlets, articles in *Do or Die*, or discussion documents on specific movement-wide issues ), and also those who speak frequently and articulately at national gatherings, do not represent the whole of the movement ( SPCA 1998; Cox 1999: 63 ). Indeed, I have found that written texts in particular display more *explicitly anarchist* thinking than I believe to be the norm in EDA. Bookstalls underline the point: a highly visible demonstration of allegiance to the anarchist tradition, in place at each major *EF!* gathering. However, my argument is that anarchism is *also* displayed in the workings of EDA events, and the process of EDA activism. Textual expressions are only a *part* of the anarchist dialogue, often constituting an application of self-conscious anarchism to the practices and matters at hand.<sup>24</sup> They thus reveal a highly significant point of anarchist analysis - a public application of anarchist principles to practice - and much of this thesis is dedicated to following the arguments expressed therein, of value for their own sake. In this thesis, therefore, texts are neither excluded nor relied upon. Rather they are given a specific place in dialogue with other sources such as campfire discussion and the actual practice of activism.

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<sup>24</sup> They are more deliberately and self-consciously engaging with(in) anarchist discourse than those who stay textually silent.



The format of this thesis, heavy with quotes and multiple references, might nonetheless mislead the reader into thinking they are the primary focus of the thesis. I have not, however, relied upon nor specifically followed the textual manifestations of activist anarchism: often they represent an 'add-on' to my argument, used solely to provide a public reference to the event, argument or theme. Life is dynamic and interrelational: it is more than a text. Ideas, words and actions, furthermore, are themselves "part of dialogical processes occurring in concrete historical settings" ( Barker 2001: 176 ). Used in isolation, the public texts of a movement present a distorted story ( Roseneil 1995: 33 ). They are designed for public consumption - often for persuasion or propaganda - and even the 'internal' movement texts are a product of specific intentions and perspectives *within* a debate: they are never in themselves a reliable portrait of all the issues at hand ( Duckett 2001b ). It is therefore essential to participate in the activities that ground - and provide the subject for - these movement texts, in order to appreciate their full meaning ( Seel 1999: 42 ).<sup>25</sup> An additional problem with using movement texts alone lies in 'fixing' them into stasis: everything is written in a particular moment, and authors do not wish to be tied to that momentary expression for all time. When I cite, for example, *Green Anarchist* ( 1999 ), there is no way of indicating how the author may have moderated or rejected that opinion. I cannot entirely avoid the tendency in my thesis to 'fix' expressions ( cf Ong 1982: 91; Radley quoted in Thrift 1997: 126 ), but I must express here that life, and movements, are fluid and ever-changing, and every individual has a multiplicity of opinions, responses and possibilities not well expressed by 'referencing' them ( Wall 1997: 26; cf Heller 2000: 144 ).

In this thesis, I also cite many academic and journalistic commentaries but the latter in particular have proved an extremely partial, inaccurate and ideologically-loaded source. Academic articles certainly tend to more accuracy and depth of analysis but, in a manner comparable to the latter, often serve more as an outlet for academic concerns than as testaments to the actual beliefs, interactions and life-world of the activists themselves. The exceptions to this tendency are the most highly cited in this thesis, however, so this effect has largely been 'edited out'. Here I will introduce the journalistic case as the more straightforward, but both the journalistic and academic cases partake of the same dangerous dynamic, antithetical to the anarchist ethos ( and both the media and the "servile intellectual class" are likewise condemned together in activist anarchist circles ( Rob Newman in *Schnews & Squall* 2000; cf London Greenpeace c2000; *Do or Die* 1998: 7 ) ).

George Monbiot is the clearest example of the dangerous dynamics of journalistic spokespeople. An articulate and well-known commentator on EDA, Monbiot was heavily involved in 'The Land is Ours', produced a helpful 'Activist's Guide to the Media', and was accorded respect in provincial activist circles such as Newcastle's ( this was demonstrated by our choosing to advertise his events ( *TGAL* No.37 2000: 12; cf *Freedom* 27<sup>th</sup> January 1996 57(2): np ). Yet Monbiot's celebrations of EDA turned to a harsh and somewhat unbalanced criticism after the Guerrilla Gardening action on Mayday 2000 ( Monbiot 2000b; Monbiot 2001b ), and this prompted many activists - without the same privileged access to mass media outlets, to articulate anarchist critiques of media, power and representation ( *Squall* 2000: 1; RTS 2000d; RTS 2000e; Flood 2001 ). Academics can also use their own privileged status as 'authoritative' commentators on movements, to anger, alienate and misrepresent activists in a similar way. In the current world, it is the 'weakness' in anarchist organisation ( its openness, its fluidity and its inability to 'authorise' statements ), that allows such 'outside' spokespeople to speak 'on behalf' of the movement, often in direct opposition to its anarchist aims.<sup>26</sup>

Epstein argues that "In order to understand in any depth the worldview of the movement, the meaning of its actions needs to be seen from the inside" ( 1991: 20; cf Welsh 2000: 205; Doherty 2002: 8; Ferrell 2001<sup>27</sup> ). Goaman laments that NSM theorists "neglect the texts and arguments produced by the movements, with the result that the perspectives, self-definitions, language and vocabulary of the latter do not enter the framework of sociological discourse" ( 2002: 11; cf Hiller 2000: 62 ), and Welsh urges the combination of participatory research methods with an anarchist theoretical approach, on the basis

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<sup>25</sup> The inaccuracies of textual manifestations, such as newspaper reports and even internal activist reports, is made manifest to those involved in peripheral groups such as ours, each time actions are inadvertently misreported, particularly when our word is taken as fact when we *know* we are exaggerating ( *Schnews* 2002: 14 ).

<sup>26</sup> *Schnews* articulate one of many occasions for this lament: "our refusal to talk to the press this time meant that academics and wannabe politicians whining 'We voted for Labour and they let us down' got airtime and are seen to represent us" ( *Schnews* 2002: 17 ).

<sup>27</sup> Amster summarises the difference between an anarchist, and an academic perspective on validation in a revealing comment on anarchist academic Jeff Ferrell: "Ferrell himself dabbles in many if not all of these anarchistic pursuits - a quality that lends integrity and credence to his work even as it undermines his stature in traditional academic circles" ( 2002: n.p. ).



that “Immersion in the movement life world ... frequently presents direct challenges to categories developed within the academy to analyse movements” and may thus lead to findings that stand against, or in a different world from, more straightforward academic analysis ( 1997: 80 ). I consider this perspective with regard to ‘direct action’ in section 6.2.1

It was on such an understanding of the limitations of texts that I undertook much of my research as an ‘insider ethnographer’ ( Jones 1970: 251 ). Positive aspects of this approach include the greater likelihood that subjects of study provide the researcher with honest information ( partly this is to do with trust, but it is also because the insider ethnographer would often know if they were lying ). Negative aspects, however, include knowing perhaps too much about the group. Editing my research data was the most problematic aspect of my research, as I was interested in many different issues, campaigns and activities at the same time. With some of these, furthermore, I was interested in both an academic sense, and an activist sense, and would forget which one. I will return to these dilemmas in 3.3.3 and consider the experience of insider ethnography in 3.4.4.

Practical tools that I used in this approach include participant and non-participant observation, semi-structured interviewing of groups and of individuals, and discussion of salient themes with other participants. I also used what Roseneil terms “‘opportunistic research strategies’ ... using one’s own ‘at hand’ knowledge, unique biographies, and situational familiarities” ( 1995: 8 ). Most of my research ( interviews, participant observation, leaflet surveys ) has taken place in ‘natural settings’. Reinharz argues that “Data gathering in natural settings can alert the researcher to the presence of information that is already available in the setting such as archives, reports, newspapers, posters, letters, diaries, photo albums, etc” ( 1983: 179 ). Such was undoubtedly true in my case, and it is made only more so when those photo albums belong to yourself, when you have put up the posters and when the ‘natural setting’ is your living room. None of those things were solely personal to me, however. Rather, they were transformed into public, activist spaces through their use by the group ( my photo albums were trawled to find shots for the ‘TAPP calendars’; I had a hand in many campaign posters; and TAPP meetings frequently took place in my living room ). Goaman argues on anarchist grounds for an “inversion of traditional method of ‘participant observation’, in favour of what has been rather ‘observant participation’” ( 2002: 5 ), and a similar reversal of priority was true in my own case.

I combined the above approach to data gathering and discussion with a reading of the ‘technical literature’ ( academic books and papers ) and the ‘non-technical literature’ ( propaganda, news reports etc.. )<sup>28</sup>. I also undertook some quantitative research, with surveys of activist literature: leaflets available at activist gatherings, the *EF!AU*, and the local newsletter ‘*Think Globally Act Locally*’ ( *TGAL* ) ( Grassby 2001: 109-111 ). I do not, however, premise much of my argument on this survey data because I did not find it illuminated much of interest. My central argument is not, for example, that eco-activists say anarchist things: that is too self-evident to require so much proof. Instead I took that as my initial premise and framework ( my quantitative sources allowed me that assumption ), while not of course assuming this to be universal. From this background position I then focussed on what, with my insider knowledge, I considered the most interesting tangents of anarchist expression, and focussed on the diversity *within* that anarchist framework. I thus adopted a method comparable to my use of interviews, in which I decided against blanket interviewing as an unjustified use of the activists’ time ( see 3.4.3 ). Instead, building from a bedrock of insider knowledge, I used interviews sparingly and precisely to discuss items of particular interest.

The above techniques produced tentative explanations and propositions which I then tested and revised as I continued my research ( and participation ). Although I entered this research with certain strong notions and beliefs, it was only in the sixth year that I crystallised my arguments. At no time did my hypotheses become fixed and rigid, and while this at times made it hard to edit my data for ‘relevance’, it allowed me to stay open to new ideas, and to avoid distorting my data according to pre-set expectations. Only a fraction of the movements and sites of direct action which I have studied appear in the final thesis. On a personal note, I have been continually surprised ( alternately delighted and dismayed ) by the developments of the movements which I have studied: for this reason I assert no ‘predictions’ in the concluding chapter’.

In arriving at this thesis, I have travelled a long journey of ‘reflexive’ research ( Okely 1992: 24; Brewer 2000: 128-130; Gouldner 1973 ). I will now consider the relevance of reflexivity for such an

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<sup>28</sup> I might add that I often found the ‘non-technical’ literature much more technically sophisticated, and I concur with Heller in finding activist handbooks, for example, of much more utility and insight than academic accounts of direct action ( 2000: 62 ).



anarchist project of experiential research. Bourdieu argues that “to leave one’s thought in a state of unthought is to condemn oneself to be nothing more than the instrument of that which one claims to think” ( Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 238 ). Maxey goes further to suggest “a link between the processes of critical reflexivity as a researcher and the processes of engagement, challenge and personal development that are part of ‘activism’” ( 1998: 4; cf Pouget 2003: 5 ). This is a link which I consider to be central to my own activity. Both my activism and my study have been driven by the same need. I would also suggest that, perhaps more than any other theory except feminism, anarchist theory and anarchist practice speak to each other on every plane. Experience feeds back on theoretical assumptions, and theory judges and frames our experience, creating an ongoing dialogue ( Bonanno 1998: 25 ). Maxey noted that “The process of engaging in activism has led me to renegotiate and develop the way I perceive the world and my place within it ... this process of personal development is one of the great strengths of non-violent direct action” ( 1998: 10; cf Cox 1999: 52 ). I concur in this finding, although I would emphasise that the ‘personal development’ involved is not always an unproblematically good and positive one.

Reflexive research is rarely a smooth process ( Maxey 1999: 203 ), and does not eliminate the danger of ‘going native’, when a sense of ‘over-rapport’ develops between the researcher and those under study ( Fuller 1999: 221 ). Yet Fuller argues that “going academic” ( 1999: 226 ) represents only one alternative. There is a space in which constant reassessment, renegotiation and repositioning of a researcher’s various identities allows the development of a collaborative position from which “the construction of flexible, practical relations of solidarity” ( Pfeil 1994: 225 ) can be “constructed through various forms of dialogue and struggle” ( Routledge 1996a: 225; cf Fuller 2000: 226 ). The bottom line here, is that we must use our research techniques impartially enough to ensure that they are allowed to disprove our most cherished notions. In my case, for example, I had to allow the possibility that the movements I was studying were demonstrated, by my research, to be distinctly ‘not anarchist’, or that anarchist methods of campaigning, organisation and lifestyle were shown to be wrong-headed and ultimately counter-productive. Certain preconceptions of mine have indeed been called into question: for example, that the ‘cliques’ in *Earth First!* are more apparent than real, and that conflicts between different forms of direct action are theoretically soluble, but my underlying values have only been strengthened.

In this section we moved from our consideration of recommended research methods and related issues, to the actual practice of my own research. In the following sections I will contextualise this, with regard to ‘the academy’ ( 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 ), with ‘activism’ ( 3.3.3 ), and then with the experience of TAPP as a researched group ( 3.4.1 ). In doing so, I will outline the strategies and dilemmas that I developed in the course of my research process.

### **3.3 Situating My Own Research**

#### **3.3.1**

##### **Anarchism and the Academy**

As we have seen, feminist researchers have problematised the power relationship involved in the research process. In doing this they, along with critical geographers and sociologists, have identified that the academic institutions themselves have a marked impact on research ( Cox 1998; Hartman and Davidow 1991; Sidaway 2000 ). Stanley and Wise, for example, bewail the “general flight of academic feminists into ‘theoretical’ and eminently traditional forms of analysis” ( 1983: 201; McDermott 1994 ). Scheman, furthermore, warns that what might at first appear as sharp, political tools, can become denuded of their subversive weight once their ‘ownership’ passes to the academic institutions ( 1991: 193; cf *Do or Die* 2000: 213; Purkis 2005: 41; Routledge 1995: 475 ). This process of co-option and de-radicalisation is looked at again in section 5.2.1 as the institutionalisation thesis.

It is illuminating that the same process of institutional adoption, and co-option, has not taken place with the anarchist tools of critique ( despite McKay’s hopes ( 1996: 27; cf Ehrlich 1990 ) ). Mac Laughlin thus writes that “The ‘state-centered’ tradition constitutes the mainstream of modern social science”,



and “dissident minorities like anarchists, who provided anti-statist and anti-capitalist struggles with ideological and indeed ‘scientific’ support, were excluded from socially-strategic positions in the academic world” ( 1986: 14-23 ). This situation of exclusion, rather than co-option, underlies Sylvan’s perception that “Most of the seminal and interesting work on anarchism has come from outside universities”, and academics “have contributed little original anarchist thought” ( 1993: 215 ). Zinn characterises the academy’s exclusion of anarchism, “one of the most important political philosophies of modern times”, as an indictment of narrowness in education ( 1997: 644; cf Mac Laughlin 1986: 11; Purkis 2005: 40 ), and Javad cites Marxist partisanship as the major factor in anarchism’s exclusion from social theory ( 2002; cf Millet 1995; Mac Laughlin 1986: 12 ).

This “Determinism and sectarianism” ( Welsh & Purkis 2003: 9 ) is linked to the process of a) sociological institutionalisation, b) professionalisation of sociologists, and c) the reliance of both processes on the state ( Javed 2002: 2; cf Welsh & Purkis 2003: 10 ). The sociological academy’s unquestioned Marxist assumptions lead it to ignore anarchism because of Marxists’ focus on ‘state domination’ instead of ‘critique of capital’ ( Ojeili 1999: 157 ). Javed writes that “when Marxism established its sociologicality within the academy ... its body of judgement over its rivals was accepted as a matter of fact rather than matters open to argument.” For this reason, “what has gone under the name of critique of anarchism is confined to Marx’s critique of classical anarchism” ( 2002: 3; cf Cox & Barker 2002: 11 ). Absent from the sociological establishment, therefore, are both the classical anarchist critique “of Marx ( Marxism ) and statist theoreticians”, and also “more importantly .. the continuing critique by anarchists which is a vital part in contemporary social thought and social activism outside the university” ( 2002: 2 ).<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this thesis will work in some way to remedy this fact, but the danger is raised that it might equally serve to aid the institutionalisation and de-radicalisation of anarchism.

We have already noted the mistrust of academia that anarchists have historically expressed ( Walter 2002: 35; Goldman 1969: 35 ). Thus Bakunin, in one address “To the Students of the University, the Academy & the Technical Institute”, warns us to “Take notice of learning, in whose name men try to shackle you and strip you of your power. Learning of this kind must die together with the world of which it is an expression” ( in Avrich 1987: 10; cf Illich 1971: 124; Situationist International 1989: 74 ). It is my view that the experience of feminist researchers with the academy provides a ‘proof’ or test-case of the anarchist critique.

I do not wish to imply the simplistic position that academics are mere ‘lackeys of capitalism’, “socially and objectively related to the dominant sectors of capitalist society and consequently lacking in any intellectual autonomy or ‘manoeuvrability’” ( Mac Laughlin 1986: 11 ). Rather, I follow Mac Laughlin’s position that we should recognise the “capacity of dissidents in academia to produce antithetical knowledge less to the benefit of dominant social groups and more in the interests of ‘their own’ disadvantaged constituents” ( 1986: 13; cf Gramsci 1971: 3-43; Gouldner 1979; Doherty 2002: 60; Bakunin 1990a: 216 ). Without resorting to simplistic, instrumental characterisations, however, Bourdieu reminds us that the academic field is a field of power, not of crystal-clear, unsullied objectivity ( 1988; cf Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 236; Bell [D.S.]: 222 ): this is something we should take on board.

Bourdieu identifies three levels of bias that may blur the sociological gaze: 1 ) the social origins and coordinates of the individual researcher; 2 ) the position the analyst occupies within the academic field; and most importantly 3 ) “The *intellectualist bias* which entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically” ( Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 39 ). I hope to at least limit the degree to which these three layers of bias affect this thesis, by reflexively examining my own social and academic position, and by exposing my personal voice amidst the intellectual analysis ( although Bourdieu himself does not advocate using the first-person voice ). While I view anarchist ethics and intent as the essential antidote to disengaged reflection, it is debatable whether it can break through the format of a thesis sufficient to remedy the third bias.

Sidaway argues that the making of connections between action and research is discouraged by a wider culture of academic production ( 2000: 265 ), and Kitchin and Hubbard follow Bourdieu ( 1988 ) in noting that “the distinction between the pristine ‘ivory tower’ and the messy world of the ‘streets’ has

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<sup>29</sup> It is perhaps an indication of this that I found sources from the geographical and anthropological wings of academia more fruitful for anarchist analysis than those from sociology or politics.



been important in maintaining the pedagogical authority of education, an authority that is seen to be compromised when academics attempt to bridge these two worlds” ( 1999: 196; cf Sibley 1995 ). Thus Zinn charges that “We are accustomed to keeping our social commitment extracurricular and our scholarly work safely neutral. We were the first to learn that awe and honour greet those who have flown off into space while people suffer on earth” ( 1997: 500; cf Holloway 2002: 9; Goaman 2002: 31 ). Zinn argues that five unwritten rules mark out the a-politicism of the academy:

“Rule 1: Carry on ‘disinterested scholarship’

Rule 2: Be objective

Rule 3: Stick to your discipline.

Rule 4: To be ‘scientific’ requires neutrality

Rule 5: A scholar must, in order to be ‘rational’, avoid ‘emotionalism’” ( 1997: 504-6 ).

We would do well to recall Kropotkin’s castigation of academics for their inattention to the plight of their fellow men. He compared them to drunkards for the way that they cared only for their personal gratification ( 2001: 264 ).

Sidaway links these aspects of academic practice to the capitalist logic underlying its economy and knowledge-production ( 2000: 263 ). This process has been analysed historically by Mac Laughlin, who argues that the “Professionalisation and ‘nationalisation’ of the social sciences in the West throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century created divisions of labour in the academic world that mirrored those in the world of industrial capitalism and colonial expansion” ( 1986: 20; cf Knabb, ed, 1989: 319 ). In the present-day, Sparke highlights the “capitalist and bureaucratic imperatives of publication in contemporary academia” ( 1994; cf Mohan 1994 ). Thus the status of professors is judged according to the stacks of papers which they churn out: as Zinn comments, “the scholarly monographs and the social evils keep rising higher and higher in separate piles” ( 1997: 613 ). He states that “interests are internalised in the motivations of the scholar: promotion, tenure, higher salaries, prestige” ( 1997: 503 ), and Stea charges that “The academic community... has taken on the values of the society which spawned it, substituting stacks of paper for stacks of money” ( 1969: 1; cf Luke 1993: 98 ).<sup>30</sup> It is certainly unlikely that academics looking to their careers will find anarchist avenues of thought and research practice to be a promising direction ( Goaman 2002: 48 ).

Zinn frames this process in a form that restates the standard anarchist critique of ‘the system’: “these interests operate, not through any conspiratorial decision, but through the mechanism of a well-oiled system, just as the irrationality of the economic system operates not through any devilish plot but through the mechanism of the profit motive and the market, and as the same kinds of political decisions reproduce themselves ... year after year” ( 1997: 503; cf Smith 1995: 51; Routledge 1995: 475; Gitlin 1980: 4 ). Thus the logic of the state is sufficient to itself, without the need of any especially evil people at the top. Zinn makes the case that “There is no question ... of a ‘disinterested’ university, only a question about what kinds of interests the university will serve” ( 1997: 504 ). Here at Newcastle University, the army is allowed to actively recruit, British Aerospace run stalls at careers fairs, and ethically suspect multinational companies like Procter & Gamble, Nestle and Esso all provide sponsorship ( SAPP 1998; cf Platform 2003; Monbiot 2000a: 284-289; *EF!J* 24(5) 2004: 22-24; Soley 1995; Ehrlich 1985 ). During my study at this university I have therefore been involved in demonstrations, leafleting and subvertising in ( somewhat tokenistic ) opposition to such aspects of the institution ( *TGAL* No.52 2002: 9 ).<sup>31</sup> This was made most clear with Gene-no!’s opposition to the International Centre for Life, a combined university, business and infotainment project which we opposed on a range of grounds including “big business = bad science”, and the waste of money and corruption involved ( Gene-No! 2000; *Do or Die* 1999: 106; *TGAL* No.69 2006: 6 ).

The final point we should recognise about the academic field is that it is a domain of privilege, as well as prestige. Thus Routledge notes that “As academics we inhabit a place within society that enables us to enjoy many of the traditional benefits that such a profession provides, while also critiquing that society and profession... a privileged location that affords intellectuals the *possibility* of various kinds

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<sup>30</sup> The anarchist solution to this specialised a-politicism and obedience to capitalist logic might be found in Kropotkin’s call for a re-unification of manual and intellectual work, in such a way that intellectual work would inform manual work, not add to its exploitation” ( Mac Laughlin 1986: 28; cf Kropotkin 1972: 105; Bakunin 1986: 1-5 ). This resembles Okely’s valorisation of ‘embodied knowledge’ ( 1992: 16-17; cf Barker & Cox 2002: 24; Mehta & Bondi 1999: 69 ).

<sup>31</sup> It is perhaps significant that of all the actions, updates and events reported in *TGAL*, the only ‘academic’ paper advertised was one which critiqued the government’s white paper on education ( *TGAL* No.61 2003: 6 ).



of political action” ( 1996b: 402; cf Adorno 1990: 41; Holloway 2002: 63 ). It is my privileged position to have been able to look in depth at anarchism, and involve myself in various forms of activism, without being condemned as subversive and contemptible in the eyes of society. As Cox has put it, “Academia is a wonderful day job for an activist” ( Social Movements List 2002; cf Heller 2000: 6 ). I myself have not been employed by the academy, so I do not share the same relationship as Cox and others I have cited: I shall detail my own relations in the next section.

### 3.3.2

#### **My Relationship to the Academy**

I would now like to briefly discuss how my own research activities have stood in relation to the academic fields of power. Amongst the salient forms of interference and control exerted by the academic field are ( a ) validation and the acceptable ‘norms’ of research, and ( b ) funding.

Regarding the issue of validation, McDowell notes that “It is difficult to simultaneously be seeking validation from and critiquing the academy” ( 1992b: 59 ). I have not felt compelled to impose limitations on my own inquiries, however, in part because as they have not focussed on academic institutions themselves. The fact that I have not been seeking a career within the universities might also have helped to keep the ‘policeman in my head’ at bay. I *have* felt frustrated at the need to shoehorn analysis into a thesis format - I feel it has imposed a false rigidity on my consideration of arguments, forced me to overemphasise one aspect over another, and rephrase discussions into a more jargonistic language – but I cannot honestly pin a ‘political’ explanation on this. Zinn warns that the specialisation inherent to academic study “divorces fact from theory” and “Ensures the functioning in the academy of the system’s dictum: divide and rule” ( 1997: 505; cf Jonathan X 2000: 162; sasha k 2000 ). Yet committed scholarship should transcend these boundaries ( Miles and Finn 1989: 18-28 ). Throughout this thesis, I justify my subject matter and discursive diversions according to the values and logic of anarchist ideology: I am therefore fortunate in that anarchism is a loose and boundary-crossing canon, so that I have been able to select my sources of academic authority from a variety of fields ( political philosophy, NSM theory, feminist epistemology ), and I have sought to demonstrate the links throughout.

The core issue lays with funding, and I would like to discuss this now, leading into more general points about my relationship to the academy. I did not apply for funding, and so I was neither led to design my research topic, nor to conform to the requirements of a funding body. I came to choose research as an activity for more personal motives, including what could broadly be read as anarchistic values: I did not wish to sacrifice the freedoms of a ‘student lifestyle’ for the material remuneration of a nine-to-five job, and I wished to have a project with which to engage more deeply in environmental thinking and political activism. I have greatly valued the freedom that I have had in directing my own research according to my own motives and spontaneous desires. I had been warned at the beginning of the enterprise that my topics of interest were unlikely to gain funding, and I would certainly have felt less adventurous and full-of-choices had I been overshadowed by a funding body wishing me to keep to an initial funding proposal. There would also have been the danger that I would have adapted my study to fit the needs and criteria of institutions ultimately antithetical to the subjects of my study: for protest ‘management’, neutralisation, or refutation. The funding body can serve to bring in a ‘third party’ to the research process, with its own criteria and objectives, and I have gratefully been free of any hint of this.

I have obtained my funding from alternative, non-academic sources: parental support, temporary and part-time jobs, and state benefits. Implications of this include my privileged position of having parents whose economic position allowed them to support me when requested, and whose tolerant, liberal social views did not condemn the subject matter. Certain of my survival techniques have also involved a degree of dissembling to state, banking and other bodies This is one of the many informal ways in which my situation has shared common ground with the subjects of my study ( Jonathan X 2000: 168-169 ). Many of the activists featured in this thesis tend to view such bodies with contempt ( certainly with no loyalty ), and are also often compelled to present an ‘official’ persona that leaves out much of what gives their lives meaning. I have also been enabled to pursue this thesis by a low-consumerist



lifestyle, and by being part of a mutually supportive community of friends amongst the green and counter-cultural milieus of Tyneside.

My position vis-à-vis the academy has thus been one of some ( critical ) distance. I quickly came to view my project as antithetical to some tendencies within the academy-as-institution: of expert knowledge and elitism, of providing a service to state and corporate funders, of the implicit logic expressed by all institutions governed by economic or bureaucratic logics. After the first term of my first year of research I cut as many links as I possibly could with this side of the academy, so that most of my research activity has ended up taking place outside its walls. At the same time, however, I have benefited greatly by the academy-as-intellectual-community. Ingredients of this include the space for discussion provided by email lists and conferences and the imprint of this intellectual community left in journal articles and library shelves. This relates to the anarchist position that no idea is created in isolation by an individual, to be claimed as 'his alone' by right: see 3.2.1 ( b ).

My critical distance to the academy-as-institution has also enabled me to develop concerns with the norms of academic language and tone. Thus it is that I have felt affinity for both the critiques and the alternative epistemologies expressed by feminist and other researchers, which I outlined above. In questioning the political and institutional discourse of the academy I have been left more open to epistemological and ontological challenges to its discourse. This relates to the anarchistic values and ideals that I brought with me into the process at the start, of course, and which this chapter aims to explore.

Having thus discussed the academy as a powerful, very real body, we should note the simple dictum that "no simple opposition exists between academia and activism" ( Routledge 1996b: 411 ). Thompson emphasises that "outside the university precincts another kind of knowledge production is going on all the time" ( 1978: 200; cf Cahill 2003: 93 ). Most of my active thinking and discussion of ideas has taken place amongst other activists and sympathetic individuals, from the hurly-burly world of 'the streets'. I have walked through the streets carrying flags for peace, and I have dodged through lines of riot police as, the press report, 'anarchist mobs storm the streets': see Figure F3.1.

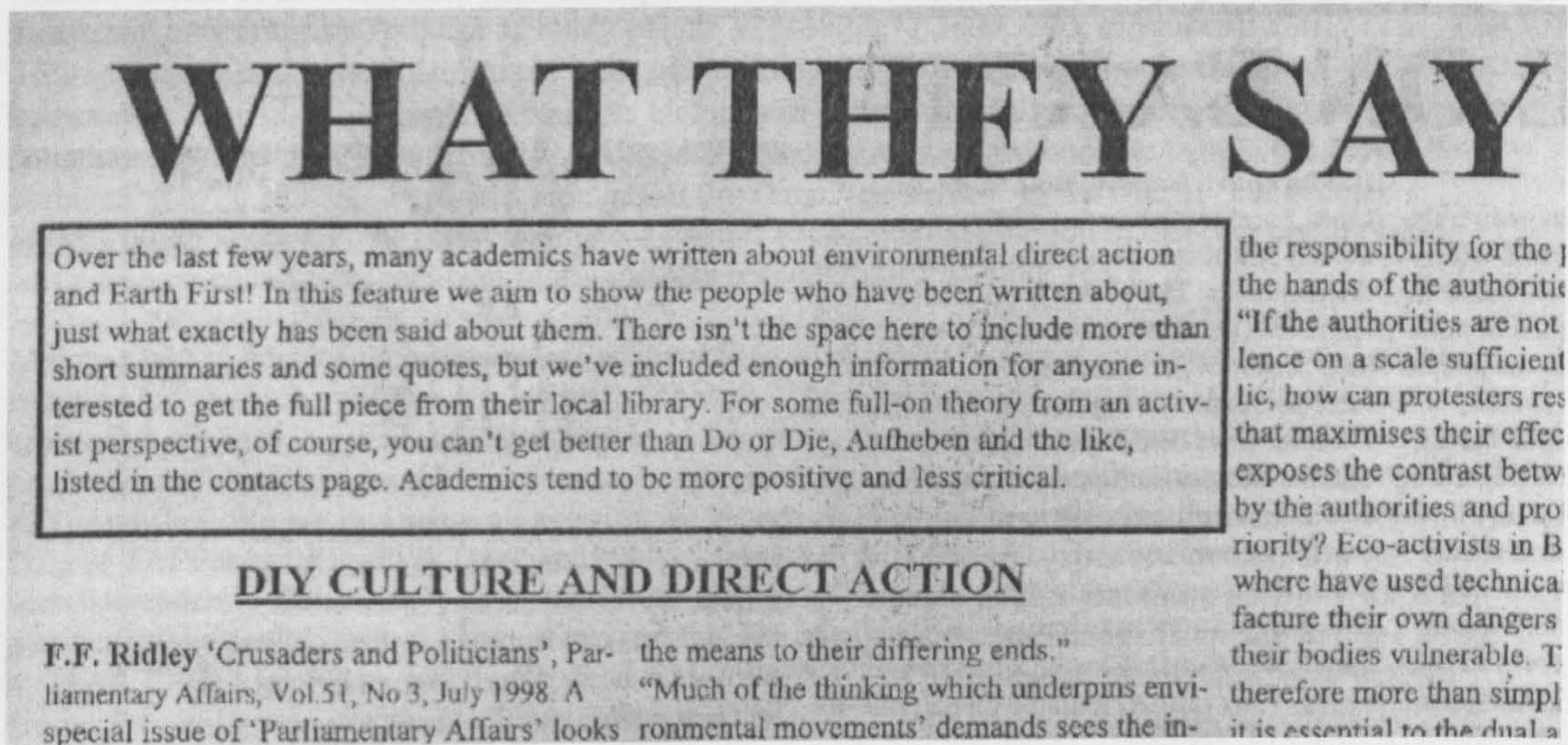




**Figure F3.1 Images of author ‘in the streets’.**

The moment of dramatic action is not the only place where anarchists get together, however. Rather, there are the summer gatherings and festivals, there are debriefings and strategy meetings, and I concur with Blomley when he writes that “the life of the mind is often a lot healthier in many of the community settings” than in the academy ( 1994: 5 ). Although Thompson notes this is not universally true ( 1978: 200 ), it certainly was with my local group TAPP, considered in section 3.4.1. My ‘intellectual’ contributions outside the academy and within activism included working with an older, Newcastle born-and-bred activist to produce a radical history of Tyneside ( TAPP 1998 ) - this was used for propaganda, our group education and as a fundraiser; collating folders of news clippings and information for the TAPP office. I also edited copies of *TGAL* including a ‘special election supplement’ for the 2001 election which explored anarchist and other activist approaches to elections and democracy. I also wrote reflections on big events such the ‘Carnival Against Capitalism ( 18.6.1999 ) the ‘Reclaim Life’ day of action ( 27.5.2000 ) and the DSEI arms fair action ( 9.11.2001 ), and passed copies to interested people within TAPP. I contributed discussion documents to *EF!* Moots and *Dissent!* gatherings. After TAPP decided to dissolve itself, I produced a report on what TAPP members had discussed and expressed during the group’s existence, using material from my research archives and soliciting additions, disagreements and comments from other ex-TAPPers. This is provided in an Appendix, and gives a fuller impression of what the group was about.

Some of these reflections were purely personal, but others were intended to break down barriers between activism and academia, as Figure F3.2 illustrates:



**Figure F3.2 Fragment of article by author ( *EF!AU* No.64 2000: 4-5 ).**

My contributions were by no means unusual: others in TAPP also wrote and distributed reflections ( TAPP 1999; TWNP 2000; Gene-no! 2000 ), wrote articles ( Rabley 1999: 69-79; Thornton 1999/2000; Read 2000; AF 1999-2000; Chatterton 2002 ), debated in meetings and pubs, made flyers, changed plans, criticised each other and ruminated on the purpose and impact of our activism ( Duckett 1999a; TAPP 2003 ). A list such as this cannot show the ongoing, mutually produced debate that takes place within activist networks, furthermore. My own thoughts were formatively influenced by this world of ideas.

### 3.3.3

#### My Relationship to Activism



We have now been brought to the nature of my relationship with activism, and so it is time to cast some doubt upon this term that I have been using so firmly in this chapter. Blomley writes that “As we all occupy multiple subject positions, so activism is a field of contradiction and diversity” ( 1994: 3; cf McLeish 1996: 39 ). Maxey similarly states that “activism is not a fixed term, but is actively constructed in a range of ways” ( 1999: 199 ). I have found it fruitful to compare Maxey’s experience with my own.

I, like Maxey, came to term myself an activist after being empowered by the experiences of activism. This moment of change, after which one feels the urge to talk ‘as an activist’, is worth some consideration. In my own case, there is a sense in which I felt a form of emotional release after doing my first ‘actions’. This came from bonding with a small group of allies, risking arrest and working together to ‘do something’ against the status quo. Up until this point, despite my extensive reading, talking and thinking about radical politics and ‘changing the world’, I had not done anything that I considered sufficiently ‘active’ about it. Now, at long last, I had found a group of people with whom I could convert my theory into practice. It was only after this moment that I realised how much I had been ‘kept in’ by not feeling able to ally my thoughts with my actions. Now I felt a new sense of oneness with myself, and this relates to the ‘empowerment’ that many activists associate with their experiences. I consider this more in section 5.2.2.

Together with the sense of empowerment that activists can feel having ‘done an action’, however, Maxey warns that less positive outcomes can also result. He writes that his group was “actually producing a rather narrow, exclusionary... view of activism that emphasised dramatic, physical, ‘macho’ forms of activism with short-term public impacts ... instead of opening up notions of activism to inspire, encourage and engage as many people as possible” ( 1999: 200; cf Pickerill 2001: 77 ). There were times this was also true in our case, although TAPP was always more fluid and interconnected with other circles, and other methods of activism, than the stereotypical ‘activist group’. Jonathan X warns that “The activist role is a self-imposed isolation from all the people we should be connecting to” ( 2000: 164 ), that it partakes of the same ‘specialism’ as the role of ‘intellectual’ ( 2000: 160; cf sasha k 2000 ), and that it acts counter to the anarchist notion of direct action by taking “on a role on behalf of others who relinquish this responsibility” ( 2000: 161 ).

Maxey came to adopt a more inclusive understanding of the term ‘activism’, one which could equally relate to his research activities. In Maxey’s scheme, “The social world is produced through the acts each of us engages in every day. Everything we do, every thought we have, contributes to the production of the social world. I understand activism to be the process of reflecting and acting upon this condition. We are in a sense all activists, as we are all engaged in producing the world” ( 1999: 201; cf TAPPER in Pickerill & Duckett 1999: 85; Jonathan X 2000: 161 ). In considering “the activist/academic dichotomy”, Heller, furthermore, raises “serious doubts that these positions exist as distinct categories” ( 2000: 6 ), and points out that his own position can change from day to day ( 2000: 4; Thrift 1992: 136; Plows 1998b: 21; TCA 5(1) 2002: 8 ). The identities of ‘researcher’ and ‘activist’ are performative, and not distinct in an ontological way.<sup>32</sup>

So far in this chapter, I have been using a narrower understanding of ‘activism’, and I shall continue to do so as a convenient short-hand for the particular form of activity that ‘activists’ see themselves as engaged in. The activities of ‘research’ and ‘activism’ may not be as distinct as their conventional separation might imply, but nor should we imagine that they can be blithely combined without significant tensions arising: I consider this in section 3.4.4. I wish to conclude my methodology with an account of the relationship that TAPP, the activist group, has held with the various projects of research that have drawn on it. In doing this, I will also contextualise my own methodological approach, and provide some of the reasoning ( and feelings ) that lie behind it.

### 3.4 Tyneside Action for People and Planet

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<sup>32</sup> Heller argues, against the optimism stated by Plows who viewed her academic work as a continuation of her activism ( 1998b: 5 ), that “When I started my research I had more illusions about the potential impact of academic work in general” ( Heller 2000: 5; cf Schnurrer 1998: 1 ), but by the end of his research he felt “it is as an activist that I think I have the greatest potential effect in terms of bringing about potential social change” ( 2000: 5 ). Since the demise of TAPP and my own reduced involvement in protest and confrontational activism, I have listened to other self-defined radicals critique ‘activism’ as limited and ineffective ( in comparison to cultural events, for example ). My experience of these articulate radicals’ actual practice, however, has only increased my respect and faith for the power and the rounded ethical holism of the forms of ‘traditional’ activism covered in this thesis.



### 3.4.1

#### Researching TAPP

Tyneside Action for People and Planet ( TAPP ) formed in 1998, after a small group came together to stage an action on Mayday in support of sacked workers at Magnet Kitchens. I attended the very first meeting, and kept in constant involvement until shortly before the group's demise in Spring 2002. TAPP was not a fixed, structured group, and my participation waxed and waned from month to month, yet it was usually quite intense. It was with TAPP that I came to term myself an 'activist', because it was primarily with TAPP that I took part in demonstrations, blockades, meetings and the organisation of events. My identity during this research was strongly hooked into the TAPP group and our common experiences. The other participants were and are my friends, and my companions in the political world. Although we never agreed on every point, we managed to create a community of shared values in which to support each others' activism. I cannot state strongly enough how important this has been to me: at the very least it is TAPP that provides the chief source of my political experience.

TAPP also became the subject of several pieces of research during its brief history. Various discourses such as anthropology and new social movement theory thus interacted with a group that I knew in the 'real world'. This gave me an interesting insight into the resources by which academic discourses can describe the world. In my view, they were only able to present very simple stories, and their findings suffered from not being able to take into account the complexities and contextualities of real life. On the positive side, however, by analysing and comparing their methodologies, I ( the academic ) became better able to understand and adapt my own. Aspects of TAPP that I ( the activist ) had overlooked were also brought under scrutiny by these accounts, and the conclusions drawn from previous years could be compared to the then-current situation.

In the following discussion, I will focus on the methodological issues of security ( 3.4.2 ), interviews ( 3.4.3 ), the experience of insider ethnography ( 3.4.4 ), and the use-value of research to the studied group ( 3.4.5 ). I would first, however, like to note the strong reservations that I had about researching TAPP: indeed at its beginning I decided that I would not use it in my research at all. Faced with such a good source of data on my own doorstep, however, over time I was led to modify this and include 'insights' from TAPP as an unnamed local group. Other TAPP participants then suggested to me that it would make much more sense for me to use TAPP as a focus of research, rather than search elsewhere in the *Earth First!* network. I therefore extended my self-imposed limits again. This time, I told myself that I would only use data from the 'past history' of TAPP. This meant that I could tell my friends that I was not actively researching them, but was just sifting through what we'd already done. The date at which this post-dated research stopped was then brought forward again and again as more years ticked by. This approach represents a less systematic approach than Roseneil's strategy of 'retrospective auto-ethnography' ( 1995: 8 ) but in its favour I can argue that it was more collectively grounded, in that other TAPP participants recurrently influenced my research strategy ( not always consciously ).

The greatest reason for me choosing to only research TAPP's past in this way, was that I felt it would just be too hard to simultaneously 'do' and 'research' things. Every time I wrote a leaflet, would I have to record the factors leading me to do so? How could I discriminate between useful information on the email lists if I was trying to record everything 'potentially significant' for academic reasons as well as just keep up with events? How could I 'turn off' my research head to think about what was useful to a meeting, rather than what I should be memorising for my research?

The strategy I adopted, of backward-looking research, worked for me in the sense that I was able to get through the week without clogging up my life with data-gathering. I wished very much to free myself up to just act, spontaneously and with the flow of the group, rather than impose the 'control' and 'ordering' that thorough research implies: for one period I gave away every photo I took, for example ( although more recently I re-gathered many of them from the defunct TAPP office ). It was only in the fifth year of research that I finally collated my scattered TAPP materials into a folder for research, and I only very rarely wrote research notes after TAPP events. This deliberate restraint in ongoing note-taking was balanced by the collection of leaflets and newsletters we produced. It is possible that, by



relying more on these more public and collective documents I reduced my own authorial interpretations.<sup>33</sup>

In the end, I decided to limit the use of TAPP in this thesis to a supporting role - as local examples and local 'grounding' for the themes discussed in each section. I also chose not to use participant observation 'up-front' in the thesis, but as a largely undisclosed background to the textual references which I have introduced in section 3.2.4. This paralleled my turn from a more 'sociological' analysis to a greater focus on 'ideological' expression. These shifts in emphasis have made the security issues discussed in the following section less contentious, and they made the overall thesis less invasive and exploitative, at least on my terms. I cannot claim my primary motivation in this shift was ethical, however, but merely what suited the ongoing development of my thesis. It means that the urgency given the questions below may sound somewhat unbalanced, but I have kept them in, because during most of the time I spent researching this thesis they dominated my reflection on methodological practice: I also think the themes have an enduring value.

### 3.4.2

#### Security Issues

Ed Hunt was the first researcher of TAPP<sup>34</sup> ( which he gave the pseudonym of WAG, 'World Action Group' ), arriving before the group had grown accustomed to being the object of research. He announced himself, at the outset, as a researcher wanting to do an anthropological study of the group. He wished to add some 'field work' to his own experience, and his reading of activist and academic literature. As he explains his approach: "Fieldwork with WAG was conducted from late October 1998 to January 1999 and consisted primarily of participant observation. I was present at weekly meetings and at a significant number of the actions that WAG was involved in during the three months of fieldwork" ( 1999:3 ). There are no interviews in his work, and little concrete detail. Hunt asked remarkably few questions of the group, but was content to rely on group observation and discussion between ourselves, instead of direct interrogation. His method was to extrapolate certain aspects of the group's practice and then relate them to more abstract theories. In many ways, therefore, 'WAG' has an air-cushion that separates it from reality.

Hunt had decided that, due to his sympathies with our form of activism, he would pursue an explicitly overt research agenda ( as opposed to a covert one ). Due to the way in which he was open, even formal, in the way that he approached us for research, we were more wary with Hunt than with any of TAPP's later researchers. This was the only time that I remember the group discussing together the issue of being researched, and it was the only time that we asked for conditions to be put on the research: "The group was keen that I should not mention names in my paper so as not to incriminate any individuals. I accepted this from the outset and in this essay I mention no names of individual informants and have also changed the name of the group that I studied" ( 1999: 5 ). By announcing himself as a more-or-less detached observer, before we knew him as a fellow activist, Hunt made himself an object of some distrust. As he sat with us in the meetings, watching and listening, we were quite aware that he had another agenda, and we were therefore led to impose quite heavy restrictions on his research.<sup>35</sup> I was at least as insistent as anyone else that he take these measures, and it is ironic in this light that he made the group quite anonymous, and 'protected' us far more than other researchers, particularly myself.

One is immediately struck by the difference between Hunt's presentation of TAPP ( WAG ) and my own. A few months after his research, which he had made anonymous at our request ( and also because it did not interfere with the essence of his study ), I produced two detailed accounts of how TAPP

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<sup>33</sup> Routledge makes the important point that activists' "voices are not necessarily an authentic articulation of a resister's ( individual or collective ) inner subjectivity since each individual resister speaks with many voices, the articulation of resistance being only one of many" ( 1996b: 413 ). This is certainly true in the case of leaflets produced by TAPP for public consumption, as I reflected upon in Duckett ( 2001b ).

<sup>34</sup> TAPP had already merited a small mention in an undergraduate essay on 'DIY Culture', but this was done by an 'insider' without the need for sustained research.

<sup>35</sup> Although in general we remained candid, and always 'honest' in our discussions, the informal ways in which some information was excluded or filtered before it reached him should not be underestimated.



works, one 'academic' for the RBE conference ( Duckett 1999a ), and one for publication in the activist journal *Do or Die* ( 1999b ).<sup>36</sup> In some ways, therefore, Hunt's confidentiality and protectiveness puts my own approach to shame, and it is me ( the insider ) who put TAPP much more at risk than him ( the outsider ). There is a sense in which all of Hunt's security measures are undermined by my 'revelation' of the truth behind his disguise<sup>37</sup>. I have wrestled with this dilemma many times, as I shall discuss. An aspect worth noting now is that due to my intimate relationship ( friendship ) with the group, they were both less likely to censure me, and also less guarded in what they said. Conversely, they were also more likely to give me honest feedback ( especially when drunk ), and to provide useful criticism and comment throughout the research process.

At the RBE conference, a sympathetic academic and occasional TAPPER organised a discussion at which participants ( who were both activists and academics ) were asked to consider what an 'activist' would want from an academic. The following questions resulted:

We'd want to know of the people researching us:

- Where are they coming from? ( sympathetic, hostile )
- Who's funding them? public/private, eg. dodgy companies
- What will they do with the information?
- Where will it be published? - obscure journals might be fine, but a trade journal might be different
- How accessible will the information be to non-academics? - to comment on etc. eg. can you get it from the university library?
- Security - what mechanisms will be used? - eg. names, confidentiality The researcher should sign a contractual agreement, ~~so~~ if either side breaches it, they're both covered ( eg. if the researcher's information is followed up in court, they need to be protected. )
- Is it mutually beneficial? - put across group's message
- What biases will the academic bring in? - would we accept it if it was negative?  
eg. if BNFL wanted to research you, how would you respond to it? maybe with an exchange system - they visit you and then you visit them!
- How could we respond to the paper / comment - we'd like to be able to read it, edit it?

*The point was also made that:*

- Knowledge that research is happening affects the researched's actions or responses, but don't believe in objectivity anyway

**Figure F3.3 Questions to ask a Researcher** ( Pickerill & Duckett 1999: 27-28 [amended copy] ).

This discussion represented the high-point of TAPP's questioning and critical engagement with researchers. After this event, concern and curiosity waned, and ennui began to set in, as myself again ( 1999b ), then Kate Gridley ( 1999 ), Susannah Waters once ( 2000 ), and twice ( 2001 ), and Gonzales ( 2002 ), all produced pieces of research on the group ( see Figure F3.4 ). Others did articles on aspects of TAPP activity, such as the eclectic city squats ( Read 2000; Chatterton 2002 ) and Reclaim the Streets ( Hughes-Dennis 2001 ). Although Harrington notes that "many groups find it identity-enhancing to be studied by a sympathetic outsider" ( 2003: 610 ), with TAPP this proved true only for the first couple of cases.

Access to the group came more easily to Gridley and Waters than it did to Hunt because Gridley was on the same university course as a member of TAPP and Waters was an occasional participant. They were thus introduced to the group by friends<sup>38</sup>. Waters, researching TAPP a year after Hunt and Gridley had concluded their research, noted that "Secrecy is an important issue within the group. Consent for this research was granted because, as a member of TAPP I could be trusted to take security into

<sup>36</sup> We may assume that the piece in *Do or Die* was more likely to be read by the intelligence agencies, due to its medium of publication.

<sup>37</sup> One participant in TAPP did raise this contradiction to me, when I presented my *Do or Die* piece to the group to be okayed: what was the point in Hunt making us anonymous if I then go and tell the world all about us? This unease was not, however, carried forward into an objection to my paper.

<sup>38</sup> The importance of this in gaining acceptance for new members of TAPP should not be underestimated: it is only individuals who were *not* introduced in such a way who TAPP viewed as objects of suspicion.



consideration” ( Waters 2001: 10 ). I am in the same position of trust as Waters, and so the same imperative applies to my own work. Video-activists have noted with worry how “our work can so easily turn into surveillance footage ... useful to the enemy” ( ‘Surveillance Watch’ in *Schnews* 1999 ), and Waters notes the equivalent dilemma for investigative research: “One cannot judge what exactly the police would find useful” ( 2001:10 ). It is very hard to judge at what point one is becoming too paranoid, or being too lax: “the anthropologist cannot avoid the political consequences of his or her research” ( Okely quoted in Waters 2001: 10 ; cf Scarce 1994: 133). Waters was led to the doubt ( pertaining to her own research topic ) that “No one needs to know about TAPP recruitment except for TAPP members” ( 2001: 10-11 ). I hold the conceit that the themes in this thesis are worth spreading far and wide, but it is not within my power to decide what the eventual impacts of my research are. There is no firm reply to the point that Okely raises, just a series of security measures and issues to take into consideration. I would suggest that, in situations of sympathy and trust, the researcher should hand the decisions over to the group that is at risk. This will at least allow them the chance to highlight a revealing gaffe that the researcher has missed.<sup>39</sup>

Waters includes, in her consideration of security, a quote that she ascribes to a different interviewee from myself, yet which I am sure is something that I also said, in interview. As the recorded interviewee was a close friend of mine, it is probable that, having discussed it together in the period immediately before the interview, we both expressed near-identical opinions to Waters. Whatever the case, this quote also represents my general approach to living with the risk and paranoia of activism, and is worth re-quoting:

“If ‘they’ wanted to know they could find out easily enough. I don’t think there’s been any sign of them bugging houses, certainly not to the extent that its stopped us doing anything about it too far in advance... I don’t personally think we do anything that dodgy. I know I’ve probably got a small file somewhere but I’ve kind of got certain limits on what I do and I don’t step over them” ( TAPPer quoted in Waters 2001: 10 ).<sup>40</sup>

Heller, in considering the security issues of his ethnographic research with the Faslane Peace Camp, was faced with the situation that “legal problems might arise if I even admitted knowledge of certain actions” ( 2000: 4 ), and he did not mention certain actions because he was asked not to.<sup>41</sup> I do not feel I am in this situation ( although earlier in my research I did expect to find myself in this situation ), and the only interest the police might have for my data would be from a more general, evidence-gathering point of view. If I begin to worry about possessing ‘dodgy’ literature or evidence, then I remind myself that the only time TAPP ever got into trouble was when we blatantly asked for it ( like refusing to move until we’re arrested ). The secrecy involved in direct action ( certainly where TAPP was concerned ), is practically motivated by the risk of ‘them’ finding out before the action has happened and making it more difficult. Finding out, after the event, that we have our own records of these things happening is not going to be of much additional use to a security force that already has photos, videotape, convictions and addresses of us doing those exact same things.

If I was an outside researcher unaware of the real nature of TAPP then it would be irresponsible to take the above position and a more rigid guide would be more appropriate. As it is, I know TAPP well enough to know I have not risked much. If I had possessed evidence of something that individuals I know could get in trouble for, then I would not have kept it. Fortunately I am confident that no TAPP members are wanted for serious offences. As regards the more borderline and arrestable acts that, hypothetically, TAPP members could have been involved in ( like criminal damage or ‘conspiracy to cause’ some form of protest ) then photos or records would not have been made in the first place. We discussed in TAPP whether a more general knowledge of our internal dynamics might in some way be useful to security forces, but did not reach a firm conclusion. We rarely saw ourselves as very important on the political scene.

I would now like to move from these general considerations on security ( which, we may note, cannot be separated according to ‘researcher’ and ‘activist’ roles ) to detail the actual security measures which

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<sup>39</sup> But see the final points of this section to see how my views on this situation were prompted to change.

<sup>40</sup> This situation, in which I face the possibility of quoting myself as quoted by another researcher, raises some interesting issues of multi-layering ( including yourself as one of the research subjects ), and accuracy. I could easily have engineered quotations for inclusion in the thesis, and indeed I produced a pamphlet for distribution in EFl in 2002 which would have supported many of my arguments: however I thought it better to exclude it from consideration!

<sup>41</sup> He also comments that “Their absence perhaps speaks more about the ethical implications of my research than any formal, angst ridden, reflexive methodology chapter ever could” ( Heller 2000: 4 ).



I have employed as a researcher. Interview tapes have been wiped, individuals have been renamed, and personal details have not been included: I have avoided including specific details, and personal characteristics that might identify individuals. My chief strategy was to hand over 'the evidence' to the now-defunct but still identifiable group, so that we could collectively decide whether anything should be excluded,<sup>42</sup> but the group's demise made these issues less pressing. Indeed one TAPPER joked that I created TAPP for my thesis and therefore folded it when I had enough information. The biggest omission from this thesis is an examination of the direct action group which formed after TAPP's dissolution: I decided not to research, record or analyse this group for security reasons, and to eliminate all the quandaries I had had to negotiate during TAPP's existence. It is not because I view this subsequent group ( or network, or forum ) as any less important than TAPP, but rather because I respect the people involved in it, and because it was not necessary for my arguments.

Maxey has noted that 'informed consent' is not a possibility when you live amongst the people you are 'researching'. He notes that, even after informing his 'subjects' of his research project, they would often forget about this once he took on the more long term roles of neighbour, fellow-campaigner and friend ( 1999: 205; cf Plows 1998b: 16 ). Most TAPPers and EF!ers did not see me primarily as a researcher: I was more often representing a certain campaign, or introduced as a regional contact point: in go-rounds at Earth First! gatherings I've been 'Mike from Newcastle' since 1997. It is not realistic to say 'Is it alright to use that joke in the Phd' every time you chat over a cup of tea. I therefore found it impossible to acquire a reliable case of 'informed consent' from those with whom I had an ongoing and multi-layered relationship.

I did, however, repeatedly mention my research, making it known not only to TAPPers but also to Earth First!ers and other activists. After putting up a poster at the 2002 EF! Moot, announcing my thesis and inviting people to read a draft, a typical comment came from one EF!er: "It's good you're doing that, but I doubt anybody will bother" reading it ( EF! Moot 2002 ). Asking for consent would not work for every kind of research, and was possible for me only because of my intimate and long-term relationship with the local group studied. It was because I recognised my thesis to share the underlying values and political direction of its subject-matter, therefore, that I felt able to expose it to the attention of the researched. We can imagine a different situation in which the piece of research was subjected to a brutal process of criticism,<sup>43</sup> and distorted into a piece of propaganda or butchered into badly-fitting contradictory fragments.

As it is, however, TAPP interest in this piece of research did not extend to such criticism: the response was, as Heller noted in his own case, "amusement or indifference" ( 2000: 6 ). Maxey warns that, in trying to involve the researched in the research process, we must consider "the extent to which this is actually an inappropriate imposition on people who really do not have the time or interest in such things" ( 1999: 206 ). He records that in his case, "In trying to pursue a more participatory approach, I was in danger of imposing my project on others" ( 1999: 205 ). With TAPP, similarly, the chief result of being researched was an ennui with being researched. Thus Waters records that four of her eight interviewees replied "Not another one!" when they heard she was doing research on TAPP ( 2001: 15 ). She states that "I was aware that TAPP had been 'studied to death' over the past few years, by various academics. Most of them seemed to come to meetings, come on actions and then, vanish back into the world of academia never to be seen again" ( 2001: 9 ). The group expressed no explicit *hostility* to being researched again, yet a feeling for this mood in the group deterred me from undertaking a series of interviews at that time and with that format.

Waters records that contentious issues did later arise concerning the value of research: "Many people involved in TAPP raised the contentious issue that if someone was doing research they were spending more time on that than on actions" ( 2001: 3 ). In my experience, also, doing research is one of the many ways that a person ( myself ) can feel they are keeping up their involvement in 'politics', while at

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<sup>42</sup> In a previous draft I declared that "The subjects of study will thus be invited to comment and their requests on security will be adopted. They will also get a chance to veto or edit out any parts of the thesis that disturb them. This is not to say that I will accept anything they say: I consider my own views to be just as valid as theirs, and I hold an author's prerogative. It is therefore only on grounds of security ( not representation ), that I would accept their desire for omission. On questions of analysis or representation, then I will include their opinions in a footnote but not cancel out my own. I don't imagine many will feel compelled to write these, but the opportunity will explicitly be made ... comments would be relegated to footnotes and appendices" ( 2000 thesis draft ). In the final event, ex-TAPPER comments were minimal, as most individuals had moved on to the next pressing issue.

<sup>43</sup> Two anarchist academics in the North East recently withdrew a proposed paper, prompted ( but not decided ), by my point that the subjects, whose opinions were stated on anarchist internet chatrooms, would probably condemn it and them.



the same time not achieving or contributing anything to that 'politics' ( Bakunin 1990a: xiv ). Certain participants in TAPP did, on occasion, express irritation at me for turning up on actions, but not contributing to the organisation of them. They also compared the time that I spent on research with the time I devoted to the TAPP group. The culmination of this was expressed in a satirical email sent around the TAPP network, reproduced in Figure F3.4:

#### PH.D. PROPOSAL: THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF A DIRECT ACTION GROUP

Tyneside Action for People and Planet (TAPP) is a direct action group that has existed in the north east of England since 1998 (?). In this time it has become the subject of what must be an unprecedented amount of academic study. A huge variety of different aspects of TAPP have been researched by both undergrads and postgrads alike. In fact, so much research has been done on TAPP that it has now become possible, nay imperative, to research the researchers. This thesis will examine those who have researched TAPP in respect to their:

- sex
- age
- social class
- ethnicity
- length of dreds
- number of dogs owned
- consumption of lentils
- length of time dreds have been sported

This data will then be used in relation to the following questions:

1. Why is it that academics themselves not only allow this kind of research but actually seem to encourage it?
2. How do those who research TAPP and involve themselves in it simultaneously see their own position?
3. What comes first, the political involvement or the research?
4. What's more important, the political involvement or the research?
5. Does anyone (apart from people in TAPP and people who desperately need a topic for their final year humanities degree dissertation) actually give a flying fuck about TAPP?

These responses will be used in an attempt to answer the fundamental question, an answer which will radically alter the very way occidental society perceives knowledge, ideology and the world.

Why is it that so many people think that a very small group of people organising a few things over a small length of time warrant so much fucking attention?

There will also be a slightly more metaphysical bit where I attempt to study myself doing this study of people who have studied TAPP. After gazing at people gazing at their navels, I will then vanish in a puff of paradox up my own derriere.

**Figure F3.4 Mock 'Phd proposal' 2001**

These considerations of the ethics and implications of participant research record the salient issues as I viewed them until September 2005, at which point I was compiling my bibliography in readiness for submission. Unbeknownst to me ( which demonstrates the degree to which the process of writing up a thesis had separated me from activism ), a symbolic protest involving a giant 'id card' was planned to take place outside a meeting of EU ministers in Newcastle. Ironically, this protest against the removal of civil liberties and the right to protest was prevented by the arrest of all participants as they stepped out of their vehicles, followed by 20 hours in police cells, and the simultaneous and thorough search of each individual's home. While most of the individuals involved found this more comical than frightening, it caused me severe worries precisely because of my research. At the time my room was scattered with carefully ordered and half-catalogued piles of pamphlets, notes, newspaper clippings and leaflets. If my house had been raided I would have lost several weeks of work by the mess created; my compilation of activist and anarchist literature ( including some 'extreme' items such as Green Anarchist ) might have been confiscated; and my diaries, photographs and notes would have intimately revealed the friendship groups, names and associations of TAPP and other Newcastle activists. This was brought especially home to me for two reasons. First, my girlfriend was lodging with one of the



arrested individuals and all of her academic and personal possessions were searched, and several removed, including a video TAPP had made which included me speaking to camera of how we stopped nuclear convoys, and shots of such an obstruction in action: if this was of interest to the police, then so would my photo albums, diaries, and collected artefacts including activist videos collected over the last ten years ( see Figure F6.7 ). Second, this wave of raids was not done because of any wrong-doing or intended wrong-doing on the part of the individuals arrested, but rather bore the hallmarks of a more general intelligence-gathering operation: indeed the circumstances of the arrests, made before the individuals even began their protest, was suggestive of some prior knowledge.<sup>44</sup> All the ethical principle discussed in the preceding pages would be insufficient to remedy the 'gift' my research would have provided for the police and other governmental intelligence agencies.

I was prompted to re-read the salient literature on security and participant research, of which Rik Scarce's account of his imprisonment for refusing to divulge information gained by ethnographic research is perhaps the most salient (1994 ). I found his account insufficient for my concerns, however, in that the punishment was centred solely upon his person, and the information at stake was entirely within his command ( I do not know how he would have managed to hide or protect his records and written data from police raids: it is possible that he was much more careful than myself in solely exploring matters of public knowledge, principle and belief, in a manner that was abstracted from local context ). The consequences of my compiled research going into the files and computer systems of the police and other governmental agencies would be much more diffuse, and I would not be able to gather all the penalties back into my own body. Other considerations are that Scarce sought to use the authority of academically-defined sociological principle and his position within the academy to fight his corner ( 1994: 145 ), whereas I have sought to occupy a territory mostly outside the academy and would have to bend some principles of anarchism to use that privileged, protected position as the basis for protecting my data. Scarce's focus upon the scenarios in which the possibility of going to jail might be confronted ( 1994: 134 ), furthermore, cannot answer the power and propensity of the police to raid houses and collect information without formal recourse to the court process or public scrutiny. The waves of additional state legislation and counter-terrorist intelligence activity of the last few years has made notions of academic neutrality even more naïve than when I started this research. I am therefore left in the position ( which has a disturbing echo of familiarity ) where I consider that the anarchist principles ( laid out above ) are sound and ethical in themselves, but would not stand up to the interventions ( attention/assault ) of the state. This will have a bearing on my intended future ( extra-institutional ) projects of research.

In the next section I will discuss how the group was involved in research interviews: the primary and most clear 'experience' of research. I will follow this with a consideration of the tension and confusion that can arise from conducting insider ethnography within a group like TAPP, and I will consider the potential 'usefulness' of such research for the group involved.

### 3.4.3

#### Interviews

Gridley, like Hunt, openly announced her status as researcher during a TAPP weekly meeting, and invited people to step forward for interview. Those who *were not* interested in being researched, therefore, could largely avoid it, while those who *were* interested in articulating their ideas and motivations were given that chance. This worked well, and I sought to follow her example of giving this choice concerning participation over to the research subjects. Gridley's interviews were the first experience that TAPP had of being interviewed. Waters also conducted several interviews, and I took part in these latter sessions as an interviewee.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The alternative possibility for these raids is that the EU ministers' visit had provided the police with so much manpower, money and resources that they were just looking for something to do with it, and the small demo was the closest trigger they could find for their activity.

<sup>45</sup> Participants at the first Eclectic City squat ( largely the same people as TAPP ) also took part in a group interview with students from the Newcastle University Politics Department in 2000. Not having taken part in this group interview, I found that I was desperately eager to hear exactly what was said and how the group presented itself. It appears that the group presented their beliefs and justified their practice in a more abstract and grand way than I was used to – they were described as 'utopian' by one of the interviewers.



For my own research, however, I did not rely upon such individual interviews. This was partly because my knowledge of the group and their views was deep enough already, and partly because the group had become tired of them. Instead, I conducted infrequent and occasional interviews, once with a group of six TAPPers ( which incidentally included two other academics ), but usually with specifically chosen individuals. These interviews were designed to pursue particularly interesting perspectives that I'd heard from those TAPPers in more casual conversation. I used these interviews both to gain consent for using those points of view, and also to encourage those individuals to articulate their view more precisely. The most in-depth of these was with a Green Party ex-TAPPer who lamented the conflict between Green Party and anti-electionists in the group. Others covered the motivation behind direct action; the role of Earth First!; activism in Newcastle before TAPP; the state of the UK's anarchist movement; the value of squatting and the reasons for the demise of TAPP. In addition to these pre-planned and 'announced' interviews ( only 8 ), there were over a hundred informal conversations in which consent was *not always* specifically requested or granted, but which I afterwards used to inform my notes. Also there were innumerable dialogues and group experiences which were not recorded, but which echo around the group's texts, explicit conversations and background assumptions. Many group dialogues ( planning meetings, fundraising socials, debriefings ) in which I was a participant but not the orchestrator were also recorded: these merge with participant observation / observant participation, but were more explicit, formal and reflexive than ethnographic methodology assumes, often organised systematically, for example with a SWOT analysis ( Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats ).

Even though I did not personally participate in Gridley's original interviews, as a member of the group I could recognise the voices of those who were then quoted. This relates to an issue raised in the methodological literature: "It is not uncommon for a whole town or community to be able to identify participants in a research project even when fictitious names are used" ( Frankfort-Nachmia and Nahmias 1992: 85 ). It is tempting to reveal the background behind those who were interviewed, in order to give an otherwise inaccessible depth and context for their statements ( for example, how experience in particular groups and movements informed attitudes to issues like the media and violence ), but ethically I felt I could not justify taking this study of TAPP onto this individual level. Early on, I decided this as a general policy for my 'insider' research: it would never go below the level of the 'group' processes and details, and I would leave out specific individuals' identities. I sought instead to use my own individual experience and understanding, combined with the analysis of public texts and events, to create an interaction between insider experience ( behind-the-scenes knowledge ), and the recorded or public layers of activism.

Gridley recognised that her sample of interviewees was not representative, and I concur with this. An interesting split revealed itself between those in TAPP who were more keen to be interviewed and those who were less keen. It is a simplification to say this is a split between 'doers' and 'thinkers'<sup>46</sup>, yet it is true that some members of TAPP were more interested in discussing things, and some preferred just to 'do' them. I also found it interesting that some of those who were not interviewed then felt left out, and were thus prompted to take part in later interviews to see what they were missing. I can quote my own experience in this regard, as I declined to be interviewed by Gridley, but then asked to be interviewed by Waters 'for the experience'. It was both gratifying and strange to find my words recorded in somebody's work: a comparable experience to reading a newspaper report of one of our protest actions. In addition to her interviews, Waters ( like Hunt but unlike Gridley ) also took part in several TAPP events ( both political and social ). Her research was thus performed as a form of insider ethnography, and this brings her experience, to a degree, into the same realm as my own.

#### 3.4.4

### Experiencing Insider Ethnography

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<sup>46</sup> One participant in TAPP ( a 'doer' ) suggested there was a general split in the left between groups who actually try and do something ( such as the *Socialist Alliance* ) and those who only engage in navel-gazing ( such as the *Socialist Party of Great Britain* SPGB ). As this comment was made in the context of TAPP, I took it to imply a criticism of us ( myself ) doing too much navel-gazing, and also to encourage us as a group to work with other groups like the *Socialist Alliance*. I should, however, also note that myself and another participant were identified on another occasion as being the ones who most often cut short debate in meetings ( in order to arrange the practical side ). There was not, therefore, a neat equivalence between 'doers' and 'non-intellectuals'.



Waters notes that insider ethnography puts one in an unusual position: “Ethnographers studying another culture have to learn and negotiate how to become a participant, and then how to step in and out of that position. When you are a participant to begin with you have to do the reverse of normal ethnography, trying to learn how to be an observer without alienating yourself from the group entirely” ( 2001: 13 ). Waters found this process to be a confusing one. She cites the discomfort, experienced by many researchers, of having to go back into academia and discuss, as ‘scientific objects’, these people that have become friends ( or, in my case, who were friends first of all ). Waters raises the ethical question: “do these friendships mask our exploitation and ulterior, personal and academic motives of these people?” ( 2001: 9 ). Roseneil’s experience at Greenham Common is instructive here: her insider status gave her “more opportunity to exploit the interviewees than an outsider could ever have achieved” ( 1995: 12; cf Mascia-Lees 1989; Harrington 2003: 597; Plows 1998b: 21 ). She admits that, despite her best wishes, “I have not conducted a truly *collective* piece of research. I have *exploited* and *used*” and retained “the power of authorship” ( 1995: 13 ). The process of research impels one to this.

I also found researching my own social circle and actions strange. As Waters comments: “studying an aspect of your life will inevitably include an assessment and increased awareness of your position within the social group or situation” ( 2001: 11; cf Clifford 1986: 2 ). One way in which Waters did this was, like other ethnographers, to keep a diary of research. While I myself did not keep a specific diary for the ‘research’ part of my life, I integrated occasional reflections and analysis of my dilemmas into the diary/scrapbook that I already kept ( indeed which I had kept since my early teens ).

A diary by its very nature is personal, private and therefore, in a sense, covert. It is not the same thing as a covert investigation, however. Episodes and judgements about friends and activists that I know might appear in my diaries, but it is only if such accounts are then used in a research project that they become a political and ethical issue. This is something, therefore, that I have not done, and such accounts were written to satisfy my impulsive *need* to write, not a coldly calculated research project. When I was consciously engaged in taking notes about an issue relevant to my thesis, or writing up an account of an EF! gathering or protest event, then I deliberately did this in a separate place. By thus marking such records as separate I endeavoured to keep my diaries as a largely personal and self-reflective space untroubled by worries of ‘invasive’ research. This was chiefly done ( as with most of the measures here discussed ), for my own psychological wellbeing and clarity of thought.

Waters expresses the existential dilemma of trying to be a researcher and a participant at the same time: “I found it very hard to find a balance between observing and mentally taking notes but also being a ‘normal’ member of the group. I often forgot I was doing research, which I think is necessary, as you cannot remain in your social group continually observing. You have to be a participant, and ... to do that you have to switch off and step back in from time to time” ( 2001: 9 ). Hunt also noted the effect that doing research had on his experience of protest actions. He contrasts the activist with the academic state of being: “the fact that I was now looking at these protests from a new perspective, from that of an academic, shifted my perceptions on how I viewed protests. Outside of fieldwork I would become fully caught up in the emotional drive of the protests, but during my fieldwork I became more detached” ( 1999: 3; cf Seel 1999: 128 ). I too encountered both these feelings, alternately of emotional involvement, and of academic detachment. The latter was perhaps more in keeping with traditional methodological requirements, but it ‘felt wrong’, and was not a good basis from which to engage in continuing research / life. The former is out of keeping with the expected ‘objectivity’ of traditional researchers, but it represents a human response.

I found researching what I was simultaneously just trying to ‘do’, a confusing and sometimes debilitating position to be in ( Social Movements List 1998a ). To negotiate this situation, I adopted a temporal strategy: I would ‘turn off’ my research into TAPP for significant periods as I just got on with ‘doing’ it, while in other periods I ‘turned off’ my involvement in activism in order to get research done. It was never as neat as this, but there would be definite periods when I would actively be pursuing one activity, to the occlusion of the other. It may be possible for others to both research and be ‘active’, but for me it was just too tiring to effectively combine the two for long stretches of time.

### 3.4.5



## Usefulness & Reciprocation

I would like to conclude this discussion with a consideration of the potential usefulness ( or not ) of these pieces of research to the local group, TAPP. This reflects what Mac Laughlin terms “The Anarchist Quest for Relevance” ( 1986: 25 ). We can begin with Gridley’s piece, which can be read in two different ways ( this is true for all the analyses ). One is from the perspective of ( in her case ) social movement theory, to see how her findings support theoretical hypotheses and illuminate that discourse. The other is from the perspective of the activist group. The key questions Gridley phrased at the end of her piece were designed to be directly relevant for TAPP. TAPP here was the audience.<sup>47</sup> A TAPP participant at the RBE conference thus stated the hope, with regard to my own research, that “It’ll be a mutually beneficial thing – if critical of the group, then that’s good for us. Looking at things like that is an important part of activist groups” ( in Pickerill & Duckett 1999: 31 ).

Waters justified her own research in part by endeavouring to feed back her conclusions to the group. In 2001 she stated that “Lengthy late night kitchen-table discussions will follow at various points between myself and members of the group, past and present, individuals in the wider network, or those completely unassociated with TAPP”.<sup>48</sup> If these did indeed happen, they did not have a noticeable impact on the activities or thinking of the group. Instead of assuming such dialogue would successfully happen in my own case, I produced documents such as the post-TAPP pamphlet ( in the Appendix ), and distributed it around the old group members. Not only was I thus assured of its being read, but I could also use it to prompt other ex-TAPPers to write on TAPP. An additional benefit of this for the research process is that, as Cox notes, “there is no better way to improve your thinking than to have it criticised by people who know the situation you are talking about” (1998: 10 ).

The issue of whose voice is expressed in my research project is here raised: with Waters I could note that my perspective “is only my interpretation from my viewpoint” ( 2001: 19; cf Merrick 1996: 4 ). I was at an advantage over Waters, however, in that I was more confident of my active role in the group, so that I had fewer qualms about expressing my own perspective of it<sup>49</sup>. My voice may only be my voice, and I do not seek to speak for the others in TAPP, but my voice *does* have as much a right to be heard as anyone else’s. I had always felt confident disagreeing with others in TAPP, and it was never a group that expected obedience to one common view.

My opinions and approach are well known to ex-TAPPers and drawing the distinction between these and my more academic analysis has only a formal meaning. It was with this attitude in mind that I wrote the following for my 1999 account of TAPP analysis and communication:

“Most importantly, for me, this paper stands at the beginning of a process, in which other activists in the group will comment on what I have written about them. Already the criticisms I have made have generated significant discussion within the group, and I’d like to emphasise that this piece is a part of activist self-reflection as much as it is of academic appraisal. I hope, therefore, that this lies at the beginning of a mutually beneficial collaborative effort, ( between researcher and researched ) and is a part of the very process of debate and analysis which is the subject-matter” ( Duckett 1999a: 21; cf Heller [C] 1999: 8; Smith 2002 ).

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<sup>47</sup> Gridley sought to highlight factors which inhibited mobilisation ( both in the sense of political action, and in involvement with TAPP ). She notes, for example, that “limited time; limited energy; poor health; the desire to avoid possible risks; and the geographic isolation of TAPP, all contribute to the failure of ‘weak’ ties to facilitate mobilisation” ( 1999: 1 ). As potential solutions to these limitations, she proposed “Providing childcare, scheduling actions for more convenient times, making special arrangements for those with health problems and finding funding for transport to and from actions” ( 1999: 10 ). These suggestions were not put into practice by the group, although the themes did crop up again after she raised them ( she was not, however, the first to raise them ). One TAPP member did undergo a course for crèche workers and after TAPP finished, awareness of the problems faced by parents was heightened as several parents sought to become involved in activism. Of this post-TAPP period, this thesis remains silent.

<sup>48</sup> We might also note that Hunt, despite his sympathies for the group, did not feed back his own research except to provide the group with a paper copy. His language was highly technical and therefore not read by most of the group. Waters wrote that “I do not believe this reciprocation would occur if the researcher was not a member of TAPP as these ideas will not be put forward in a formal feedback meeting of some sort” ( 2001: 15 ). I agree with her in this, and what I consider to be my *greater* involvement in TAPP will, hopefully, lead to a *greater* feedback.

<sup>49</sup> Compare this with Waters: “I questioned if I was a full enough member to legitimately use the group as a research base” ( 2001: 9 ).



Now, standing at the end of this process of research, I can only re-emphasise the sentiment of this passage, and lament only that I did not make *more* concrete efforts toward our conscious, collective self-reflection.

Waters made the following plea for the practical relevance of her research paper for the group: "It may have revealed some insights into different members' opinions on mobilisation [ her research topic ] that may not have come out in a group discussion assessing the problem, due to dominating speakers, members being absent, or there not being sufficient time for everyone to put all their views forward" ( 2000 ). I believe this is where the ultimate relevance of such research is to be found: in providing a space for reflection which lies outside the hurly burly of collective debate. Interviews in particular provided an arena in which individual voices could be heard at length: we rarely got that chance in a meeting, on an action or even socially. It is also for this reason that I see my various pamphlets as vital attempts at feeding back ideas, in a format in which they can be understood outside of the here-and-now urgency of activism. I intend to edit elements of this thesis into pamphlets to distribute at activist gatherings, and I am involved in additional projects of converting my research data into accessible formats.<sup>50</sup>

To conclude, I would like to re-emphasise that analysis in the form of academic and formal papers is only one strand of a much more active and engaged analysis ( Wombles 2004b: 3; cf Cox & Barker 2002: 12 ). TAPP as individuals, and as the group in its heyday, were constantly communicating, expressing, re-thinking and arguing about what we were doing, in many different ways. This is the gist of my 1999 paper and has been confirmed with time: I view it as empirical support for the strength of anarchist criticality, argued for in section 2.3.5. I wish to frame this thesis, furthermore, on these terms of ongoing activist debate within activist circles: this contradicts the lazy accusation of 'anti-intellectualism' levelled at DIY activism.

### 3.5

#### Methodology: Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I defined the anarchist discourse that I am looking at in this thesis as the product of 'activists-in-struggle talking to each other'. It is on this basis that I have focussed on the debates that have taken place amongst activists for the primary material of my study. With this definition in mind, it is particularly relevant that my thesis is understood in the way that I have elaborated above. My thesis is a commentary upon, and a contribution to, the reflexive discussion of individuals and networks engaged in environmental direct action. It is written on the same critical plane as that of anarchist values, the experience of activism, and the logic of anarchist/activist argument. While I do not claim to have established a formula for 'anarchist research' that is valid in all cases, for all time, I do feel that my efforts have remained within the 'spirit' of anarchism.

In this chapter, I have situated my research both in the theoretical terms of anarchist, feminist and other politically-engaged researchers cognisant of the state-centric bias of the academy, and also in terms of ( my own ) activism, particularly with the Newcastle-based TAPP group, in which I played a full part from 1998 to 2002. Theoretically, I have drawn upon a foundation of traditional anarchist perspectives on ideas, in 3.2.1, and a more sophisticated critique of accepted 'objectivity' as statist and pernicious from an anarchist point of view, in 3.2.2. In 3.2.3 and 3.2.4 I then assessed the counter methodologies and epistemologies advanced by feminists, anarchists and others, highlighting those elements most fitting to anarchist ethics, and also most applicable to my research needs. Amongst the validated themes are: the inclusion of subjective experience; a commitment to reflexivity and dialogue instead of on-high pronouncements; and an attitude to the research subjects that is both partisan and critical, respectful and honest, and which will accept the need for people to sometimes just be left alone.

In the sections of 3.3 I used this theoretical grounding to assess the two fields in which my research has been conducted - the academy and activism. In the sections of 3.4, I paid particular attention to the

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<sup>50</sup> One of these projects is to make a 2007 diary featuring dates and episodes from Newcastle's radical past, largely utilising old issues of *TGAL* and acting as a kind of *TGAL* review. This will involve ex-TAPPers. Another intended project is to edit activist videos into short clips of 'peoples history' that can be downloaded from the internet.



latter in its local form as the TAPP group, because it was here that my research responsibilities were primarily felt to lie. I do not claim to have revolutionised or empowered this group of individuals, however, despite my efforts to effect the most careful, ethical and communicative practices of research. I can, however, claim to have enacted my research in an anarchist frame, independent, politically-engaged, participatory and founded upon dialogue, and adapting to shifting contexts and experiences. As such, on my personal terms, I can view the research process as a positive, not a disempowering experience.



## **Chapter 4 Green Radicalism**

### **4.1**

#### **Introduction**

In chapter 2 I laid out the framework of an anarchist theory that is plural, flexible, dynamic and dialogical. In this chapter I shall bring a similar approach to bear on radical green thought. I shall also be exploring the interactions and conversations that go on between anarchism and green radicalism, demonstrating that eco-anarchism is a product of dialogue between radical ecology and anarchism, and the environment is a field in which anarchism has made its influence felt.

I begin in 4.2.1, Radical Environmentalisms, by establishing various ways in which 'green' thinking has been claimed as radical ( and non-radical environmentalism dismissed as illegitimate ), and I situate the anarchist perspective within the range of green positions. In 4.2.2, Environmentalism through Practice, I connect this understanding of a plural, fluid ecologism with the sense of 'anarchism as practice' which I established in Chapter 2. I wish to avoid misconceptions of green thought either as a static, self-contained, or 'natural' ideology. The next two sections are concerned with the relationship between, on the one hand, the inherent radicality of ecology, and on the other, the agency of political radicals in influencing its development with ideas from other political traditions. In 4.2.3, the Environmental Problematic, I introduce the key elements that environmentalism introduced into political discourse, namely the 'environmental problematic' and the notion of 'limits to growth', and I assess how such tenets encouraged a radicalism to take hold in green thought ( although they did not determine its particular manifestations ). In 4.2.4, Green Ideas and Political Traditions, I assess the relationship between the 'new' radicalism of green thought and traditional political discourses, and I emphasise the especial connection that exists between ecologism and the anarchist tradition. In 4.2.5, Deep Ecology, I assess the strongest claim for a green radicalism that is solely derived from ecological thinking ( as opposed to other political influences ). I note two streams of deep ecological politics, liberal and militant, both of which have proved subject to critique from anarchists. In 4.3.1, Eco-Anarchist Critique of Capitalism, and 4.3.2, Eco-Anarchist Critique of the State, I establish the basis for green opposition to all capitalist or state-centric processes, and in 4.3.3, Inadequate Green Strategies, I identify the anarchist critique of most green strategies for change. This prepares us for a fuller understanding of what anarchists consider legitimate or revolutionary practice in 4.3.4, Anarchist Action.

## **4.2 The Nature of Green Radicalism**

### **4.2.1**

#### **Radical Environmentalisms**

In this section, I introduce dualistic definitions of environmentalism, a common method used by green theorists to define 'true' environmentalism in contrast to pseudo-varieties. However, rather than viewing these as a definitive naming and pigeonholing – as a system of categorisation - I use these dualisms as a starting point to sketch the identity of a fundamentally fluid and pluralistic environmentalism. Identifying some of the different ways in which environmentalism has been defined as radical, will provide us with the initial points of connection with anarchist theory.

To begin with Dobson's definition, ecologism is presented as a fully-fledged ideology in contradistinction to environmentalism, which he regards as "not an ideology at all" ( 1995: 2 ). In Dobson's view there is nothing either new or challenging about the 'environmentalism' that has been adopted by the existing political elites, which consists of an entirely reformist, managerial agenda that



reinforces, instead of calling into question, the key issues of technology and affluence in society. Ecologism, on the other hand, represents a much more fundamental challenge, which cannot be isolated into manageable components, but requires an 'all-or-nothing' shift in direction: "radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life" ( 1995: 1 ). It is this ideology that was articulated by such thinkers as Porritt & Winner in revolutionary terms: "the most radical [ green aim ] seeks nothing less than a non-violent revolution to overthrow our whole polluting, plundering and materialistic industrial society and, in its place, to create a new economic and social order which will allow human beings to live in harmony with the planet. In those terms, the Green Movement lays claim to being the most radical and important political and cultural force since the birth of socialism" ( 1988: 9 ). Dobson suggests that green politics actually represents a *more* profound challenge than socialism, as the early socialists already had much of their ideas laid out for them by the liberal tradition. In contrast, Dobson argues, "the radical wing of the green movement ... is self-consciously seeking to call into question an entire worldview" ( 1995: 9-10; cf Porritt 1986 ). I have used the term 'ecological' in my thesis title in reference to this definition, and I view the cases of EDA I deal with as a radical challenge in this sense. However, in the text I tend to refer to 'radical environmentalism' not 'ecologism', in order to avoid the danger of misidentifying social radicals with pure ecocentrism ( see below ), or indeed with the science of ecology.

Dobson is not the only writer to divide the green movement into radical and non-radical strands, and to use these distinctions to define what is legitimate ( radical ), and what is to be dismissed from the fold. Naess's 1972 essay, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-range Ecology Movement' did the same, opposing the shallow ecology of a strategy that relied on legal and institutional fixes, with the deep ecology project of fundamental changes in human relations with non-human nature ( Naess 1995a; 1991; 1988; 1993 ). O'Riordan provides a variation on this dualism by contrasting 'ecocentrism' ( pursuing diversity, stability and the small scale ) with an 'arrogant technocentrism' ( 1981: 1; cf Pepper 1996: 37 ). Cotgrove, on the other hand, opposes 'new' or 'radical environmentalism', to the re-emergence of older forms of conservationism ( Cotgrove & Duff 1980: 338; Cotgrove 1982; cf Dalton 1994: 46-7 ), and Atkinson outlines a similar contrast between conservationism and radical Utopianism ( 1991: 20 ). Bookchin, similarly, contrasts mechanistic or instrumental environmentalism with his own project of social ecology, which "seeks to eliminate the concept of the domination of nature by humanity by eliminating the domination of human by human" ( 1988b: 130 ). The radical activists of my study tend to fall on the radical side of each of these equations, but to be a 'radical' green one does not need to radical in all the ways here identified. How the radical camp is defined, furthermore, varies in significant ways, but I shall not go into the differences at length. The most important contrast for me to mark is between those who seek to derive all content from a logical 'working out' from ecological, purely green principles, and those who more consciously draw on political arguments and ideas from existing political traditions. Section 4.2.4 addresses the latter issue, and section 4.2.5 addresses the former.

I would like to conclude by considering the place of anarchism within the field of environmental ideologies. Pepper's Marxist analysis of environmentalist ideas ( 1996 ) sorts them into the camps of 'ecosocialist' ( including the anarchistic forms ) and 'ecofascist'. Anarchists assign themselves the role of countering any and all tendencies toward authoritarianism, and any potentially fascist elements. In the green field these characteristics have been identified both as allegiance to authoritarian 'solutions', and as tendencies toward determinism, mysticism, racism or misanthropy ( Biehl & Staudenmeier 1996; Martell 1994; Bookchin 1988c )<sup>51</sup>. The writings of Hardin ( 1968 ), Ophuls ( 1977 ) and Heilbroner ( 1975 ) have been labelled as eco-fascist in this way ( Martell 1994: 142-4; cf Pepper 1996; AF 1996c ), as has the "explicit misanthropy of James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis'" ( Bookchin 1998c; cf Martell 1994: 146 ).

O'Riordan suggests a four-fold typology for the political postures associated with environmentalism. First, the vision of a 'new global order' with powerful global institutions. Second, 'centralised authoritarianism', in which governments would enforce the necessary projects for sustainability ( perhaps by rationing and population control ). The third position is the 'authoritarian commune' ( to which Goldsmith leans ), and finally there is the 'anarchist solution', which is fundamentally egalitarian and participatory ( 1981: 303-307 ). O'Riordan's schema is more useful to my project than

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<sup>51</sup> This anti-fascism can be given a rather uncompromising form by some anarchists who require an *explicit* commitment. The Anarchist Federation thus state that "ecological themes require an explicit social context to have political relevance; the failure to provide this is the hallmark of reactionary ecology, under banners such as 'beyond politics' or 'apolitical'" ( AF 1996c: 15; cf Biehl & Staudenmeier 1996 ). I consider the difference between left and right wing environmentalism further in section 4.2.4.



Pepper's more simplistic left-right division because it demonstrates that from the anarchist frame of analysis it is not just 'eco-fascist' variants of green thought that are to be opposed, but all analyses and proposed solutions that do not commit themselves to a future of complete social freedom. As we shall see in section 4.3.3, these include all projects of reforming the capitalist system ( such as green consumerism ); all strategies that rely upon state-like infrastructures ( such as electoral campaigns ); and all strategies that do not define themselves as a fundamental political challenge ( such as 'consciousness-raising' divorced from a struggle for material changes ).

## 4.2.2

### Environmentalism through Practice

By introducing the various poles or tensions that have been identified within green discourse, I hope to avoid any monolithic assessment of 'this is Green Thought'. Instead, green thought is "not a singular voice but a chorus" ( Benton & Short 1999: 132; cf Goodin 1992: 11). The full range and diversity of these varied voices will not be covered in this thesis: not even those on the radical edge. I am only able to consider a selective tangent, and these only for the points of relevance to anarchism. Yet I will argue for the same fluidity, flexibility and dynamism that I established for our understanding of anarchism.

In this section I wish to add to the above summary mapping of green ideas by returning our focus to action. The subject of my study is not only *radical* environmentalism, but also *grassroots* environmentalism: thus our focus remains pinned to action. In keeping with my assessment of 'anarchism through practice' in section 2.3.6, I argue that political ecology ( or 'ecologism': the precise term is unimportant here ) is also performed through action. Thus Rodman argues that "ecological sensibility ... is a mode of experience expressed by the practice of 'ecological resistance'" ( quoted in Torgerson 1999: 35 ). By embracing this notion we must accept ( again, as with our theorisation of anarchism ) that ecologism is a dynamic and contested discourse that *cannot* be set in stone ( Naess 1991: 160-1; Merchant 1992: 238; Benton & Short 1999: 136 ). I share Pepper's argument here that ecologism "shares with anarchism the tendency to resist neat categorisation, having shifting beliefs and, as a 'new social movement', embracing many groups" ( 1993: 210; cf Doherty 2002: 1 ). The implication of this is that ecologism, like anarchism, is indefinable in the strict sense of the word, and the reason for this is that it is *live*, the emanation of collective involvement and interaction ( Wall 1997: 26 ). This sense of a discourse grounded in the activity of its movement should inform how we identify green thought: 'thought' here is not abstracted and opposed to 'practice', but exists in a feedback loop. This informs the framework of my thesis, which is not a static conceptual mapping but an assessment in keeping with positions grounded in practice and context.

Hajer explains that "The reconstruction of paradigms or belief systems excludes the intersubjective element in the creation of discourse. It overlooks that in concrete political situations actors often make certain utterances to position themselves *vis-à-vis* other actors in that specific situation, emphasise certain elements and play down others, or avoid certain topics and agree on others" ( 1995: 79 ). In agreement with this view, I limit the mapping or reconstruction of green ideology in this thesis to a minimum. I assess the 'texts' of ecological direct action in relation to their context – particularly those other ( and competing ) arguments, analyses and visions against which and influenced by which, the first text gains its meaning. One implication of this stance is to demonstrate that those who argue that "Green theory is poorly developed" ( Knill 1991: 238; cf Wall 1994b: 1 ), speak from a position whose claim to 'truth' and superior perspective is open to question. Who is to say what needs 'developing'? How do they know what direction to develop it in? They are informed either by a theoretical basis, of which there are many in conflict, or from a reading of experience, which is equally diverse and contestable.

Several theorists of ecologism have embraced the idea of a dialogic and contested discourse ( Hajer 1995: 72; Merchant 1992: 238 ), and emphasise the defining importance of struggle and disagreement in producing ideas. Laclau and Mouffe argue that "The forms of articulation of an antagonism ... far from being pre-determined, are the result of a hegemonic struggle" ( 1985: 168 ). Green political thought should therefore be viewed, not as spontaneously or necessarily radical, but as *made so* through discursive struggle. This highlights the importance of anarchist arguments and anarchist practice ( in



competition with the other political camps ), for their constitutive influence on green thought. Thus Carter notes that “one reason for the existence of tensions within the green movement is that these contributory traditions have often been highly antagonistic towards one another” ( 1999: 199 ). We gain a greater understanding of green thought by assessing the positions of one of its component parts, or fields of influence. For me, the fact that environmental thought is not automatically linked to radical or revolutionary ideas makes it even more interesting that such a widespread convergence has been achieved. I will develop our understanding of the relationship between anarchism and ecology in section 4.2.4, but first I will lay out two definitive ( and ‘new’ ) elements of green ideology, and chart how this encouraged a radical base of values into which anarchism could easily gel.

### 4.2.3

#### The Environmental Problematic

A defining factor of green thought, and what has made the environmental movement historically unique, was the growing evidence of ecological crisis ( Doherty 2002: 27 ). Atkinson writes that “In spite of general differences in approach... in general an analysis, in the form of a scenario and a prescription, with certain well-defined contours, emerged from the environmentalist literature of the early 1970s” ( 1991: 17 ). These included a recognition of the implications of world population increase, of economic growth, and the resulting increase in pressure on natural resources, which were forecast to run out. Atkinson refers to this as the ‘environmental problematic’ and states that “Political ecology starts from an acknowledgement of the environmentalist warning that our cultural trajectory is potentially catastrophic” ( 1991: 4; cf Carter 1999: 19; Dobson 1995: 22 ). Ecologism can be viewed as the political expression of this realisation. Where opposition to authority may be viewed as the central territory of anarchism, perception of environmental crisis is constitutive of environmentalism.

Everndon argues that the ‘environmental crisis’ is as much a *social* phenomenon as it is a *physical* one ( 1992; cf Beck 1995: 47 ). The role of environmental activists and radicals in ‘creating’ the environmental crisis is crucial: “Environmental problems do not become such by virtue simply of their objective existence; they do not become environmental problems until they are defined as such” ( Martell 1994: 120; De Shalit 2000: 90 ). This is not to dismiss the role of environmental disasters, and an increase in environmental awareness, in provoking critical responses to dominant society. Yet I believe Torgerson, for example, is broadly correct when he argues that “Ecology’s subversive character comes not from the shifting ground of particular findings, but from orienting metaphors that challenge the presumptions of the administrative mind” ( 1999: 100 ). This understanding of ecology’s power and potential has implications for its political strategy, as we shall consider in section 5.2.1.

Cotgrove argues that green activists “want a different kind of society. And they use the environment as a lever to try to bring about the kind of changes they want” ( quoted in Carter 1999: 328 ). With Duff, he outlined the hypothesis that

“What differentiates the environmentalists ... from the general public is not primarily their awareness of environmental dangers. Rather, it is the use to which they have put environmental beliefs ... They are opposed to the dominant values and institutions of industrial society, and want to change them. Now such a challenge faces enormous odds. But the environment has provided ammunition for their case” ( Cotgrove & Duff 1980: 338 ).

This is a hypothesis that I accept, at least for EDA. The environment provides a symbol and justification through which radicals can attack the existing system: an umbrella and a shared vocabulary for reflecting a range of problems, anxieties and tensions that lie deep within modern industrial society ( Grove-White 1992: 10 ).<sup>52</sup> Cotgrove and Duff emphasise the political aspect of this, and O’Riordan notes that radical environmentalists have challenged “certain features of almost every aspect of the so-called western democratic ( capitalist ) culture – its motives, its aspirations, its institutions, its performance, and some of its achievements” ( 1983: 300 ). The specific sights of environmental struggle covered in this thesis therefore partake of the character of battles in a wider

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<sup>52</sup> This, however, is only half of the story of ecological radicalisation – the abstract half. The other motivation comes from the actual experience of beloved local places destroyed by ‘progress’, as I shall emphasise in sections 5.2.2 and 7.6.



struggle. Yet I am not therefore accusing radical greens of not being real environmentalists: rather they are *both*. In section 5.2.2 I shall present an anarchist framework for understanding how the two modes combine.

The key question arises of whether ‘greenness’ ( or ecocentrism ) is inherently and essentially radical in and of itself ( because of nature ), or whether that radicality is only contingent, and derived from outside influences ( such as the movement politics amidst which the green movement emerged ). Weale argues that “Once the conventional wisdom about the relationship between the environment and the economy was challenged, other elements of the implicit belief system might also begin to unravel” ( 1992: 31 ). Thus it is that, to radical greens at least, “The critique of environmental destruction necessarily becomes a critique of contemporary society” ( Smith 1995: 52; cf Harré, Brockmeier & Mühlhäuser 1999 ). In this sense “Ecocentrists ... are inherently radical” ( Peet and Thrift 1989: 89 ).<sup>53</sup>

One illustration of this ecological radicalisation is the formulation of alternative values to the dominant norm. Cotgrove argued that the ‘Environmental Problematic’ could not have become articulated as a problem if it were not for the formulation of alternative value systems and alternative criteria of evaluation based on environmental rather than economic goals ( 1982 ). Such alternative value systems are widely acknowledged amongst Greens. They may be used to explain the rejection of quick-fix technocentric or autocratic solutions ( Eckersley 1992: 172; Doherty 2002: 76 ), and they may provide an ethical foundation for anarchist political positions. The table illustrated in Figure F4.1 is typical of attempts to define the radical alternative that lies behind the environmentalists’ challenge.

<i>Competing Social Paradigms</i>		
	<i>Dominant Social Paradigm</i>	<i>Alternative Environmental Paradigm</i>
CORE VALUES	Material (economic growth) Natural environment valued as resource Domination over nature	Non-material (self-actualization) Natural environment intrinsically valued Harmony with nature
ECONOMY	Market forces Risk and reward Rewards for achievement Differentials Individual self-help	Public interest Safety Incomes related to need Egalitarian Collective/social provision
POLITY	Authoritative structures (experts influential) Hierarchical Law and order	Participative structures (citizen/worker involvement) Non-hierarchical Liberation
SOCIETY	Centralized Large-scale Associational Ordered	Decentralized Small-scale Communal Flexible
NATURE	Ample reserves Nature hostile/neutral Environment controllable	Earth’s resources limited Nature benign Nature delicately balanced
KNOWLEDGE	Confidence in science and technology Rationality of means Separation of fact/value, thought/feeling	Limits to science Rationality of ends Integration of fact/value, thought/feeling

**Figure F4.1** ‘Dominant Social Paradigm’ contrasted to a Counter Paradigm ( Cotgrove & Duff 1980: 341 ).

<sup>53</sup> Ecology, with its emphasis on interconnections and interrelationships ( Everndon quoted in Carter 1999: 82; Commoner 1971 ), has been labelled the ‘subversive science’ ( Paul Sears quoted in Manes 1990: 225; cf Scarce 1990: 34; Athanasiou 1997 ). Radical green theorists have taken this focus on interrelationships to mean that ecological principles, such as diversity ( Myers 1985: 254; King 1989; Bookchin 1971: 80; Carter 1999: 272 ), spontaneity ( Bookchin 1982: 58; Carter 1999: 71; Purhase 1994: 29 ) and stability ( Sale 2001: 41; Carter 1999: 303; Bookchin 1971: 80 ), lead “directly into anarchic areas of social thought” ( 1971: 58 ), and that they can be used critically to condemn authority ( Bookchin 1971: 77-78; Marshall 1992b: 423 ) and the multiple forms of domination in human society ( Bookchin 1971: 63; 1980: 76; 1988a; 1990a: 33 ). I am not in this thesis looking at anarchist arguments for their alternative vision, however, but at the practices and processes by which they make eco-anarchism alive now, today.



The confluence of these anti-authoritarian and co-operative values has provided sufficient grounds on which the libertarian revolutionary tradition and the new radical green generation could meet and cross over. We must consider whether or not it is coincidence that the 'Alternative Environmental Paradigm' presents so many of the traditional anarchist values. It is certainly true that typical green politics includes many anarchist themes. Thus Carter argues that "the most strongly defended elements of radical green political thought commonly include decentralisation, participatory democracy, egalitarianism ... self-reliance ... alternative technology, pacifism and internationalism" ( 1999: 197-8 ). He notes that each element is valued because it serves the end of environmental protection. Doherty, on the other hand, argues that "green ideology [ is ] based on three principles: ecology, egalitarianism and democracy" ( 2002: 82 ), and that only the first of these values is derived from nature. I accept Hajer's argument that democracy and community are not outgrowths of ecology ( 1995; cf Martell 1994: 51; Ryle 1988: 6; Kenny 1996: 20 ), and yet the radical *potential* of ecology may indeed be found in certain of its central ecological values ( Moos & Brounstein 1977: 267; Marshall 1992b: 443.

Opposition to economic growth is perhaps the most central innovation of a specifically green politics, and one that is not a part of the mainstream left tradition. The 1970 report, *Limits to Growth* ( Meadows et al. 1972 ) famously made the argument that the growth economy could not, ecologically, continue forever ( Martell 1994: 24-25 ). Although critiqued and mistrusted by many on the left for its failure to deal with social issues ( Cole, ed, 1973: 139-156; cf Naess 1991: 136-152; Pepper 1986 ), and despite its clear antipathy to anarchist thinking in that it advocates top-down, centralising solutions ( Hajer 1995: 80-85 ), *Limits* nevertheless set the tone for the environmentalist critique of 'economic thinking'. It quickly became commonplace for environmentalists of all political shades to argue against the very logic of large-scale industrial development, and to critique those who claimed that an improved GNP would solve the world's ills ( Daly 1977 ). The limits to growth principle has also tended to lead, as we shall see, to a rejection of piecemeal, reformist strategies, which are viewed as inconsequential in the face of the systemic nature of capitalism. Thus Porritt & Winner argue that "The danger lies not only in the odd maverick polluting factory, industry or technology, but in the fundamental nature of our economic systems" ( 1988: 11; cf Porritt 1997: 68; McBurney 1990; Doherty 2002: 70 ).

Market capitalism and the advocates of economic progress thus encountered, with the advent of the green movement, another adversary to their worldview. Moos and Brounstein, for example, argue that on ecological grounds "it would be difficult to see how anything less than egalitarian distribution of goods and resources could either be legitimated or prove politically tolerable" ( 1977: 18 ). The green critique thus added weight to the older socialistic opposition that rooted its condemnation in human, social impacts, and the potential of human progress. This remains true even once we recognise with Pepper that this opposition cannot always be viewed as full-blown 'anti-capitalism' ( 1986: 118-9; cf Doherty 2002: 70 ). The thrust of *Limits* and the other Green critiques provide a spur towards anti-consumerist and anti-capitalist positions, and this is true for both *political* green thinkers, and also environmental scientists ( Moos & Brounstein 1977: 268 ).

Doherty reminds us, however, that this is not in itself sufficient to explain "why the green movement took a particular anti-authoritarian and pro-egalitarian strain" ( 2002: 32 ): political traditions also played a crucial role in informing green discourse. I will look at this in the next section, and in section 5.2.2 I shall add a consideration of how the experience of environmental activism contributes to anarchist themes.

#### 4.2.4

### Green Ideas and Political Traditions

The major issue we face when discussing green thought in terms of political traditions ( anarchism, in my case ), is the aspect of 'newness' to green discourse. Hay, for example, argues that "Despite attempts to incorporate it within existing traditions, environmentalism is probably most appropriately seen as a new and separate ideological stream, in competition with the older contenders, and stemming



from radically different base principles” ( 1988: 28; cf Dryzek 1988: 91 ). Porritt expressed this with the proclamation that the green movement was ‘Neither right, nor left, but forward!’:<sup>54</sup>

“We profoundly disagree with the politics of the right and its underlying ideology of capitalism; we profoundly disagree with the politics of the left and its adherence, in varying degrees, to the ideology of communism... The politics of the Industrial Age, left, right and centre, is like a three-lane motorway, with different vehicles in different lanes, but all heading in the same direction. Greens feel it is the very direction that is wrong, rather than the choice of any one lane in preference to the others” ( 1986: 43; cf Porritt & Winner 1988: 256 ).

Naess sums up this situating of green thought ( in his case ‘deep ecology’ ) with a diagram illustrated in Figure F4.2:

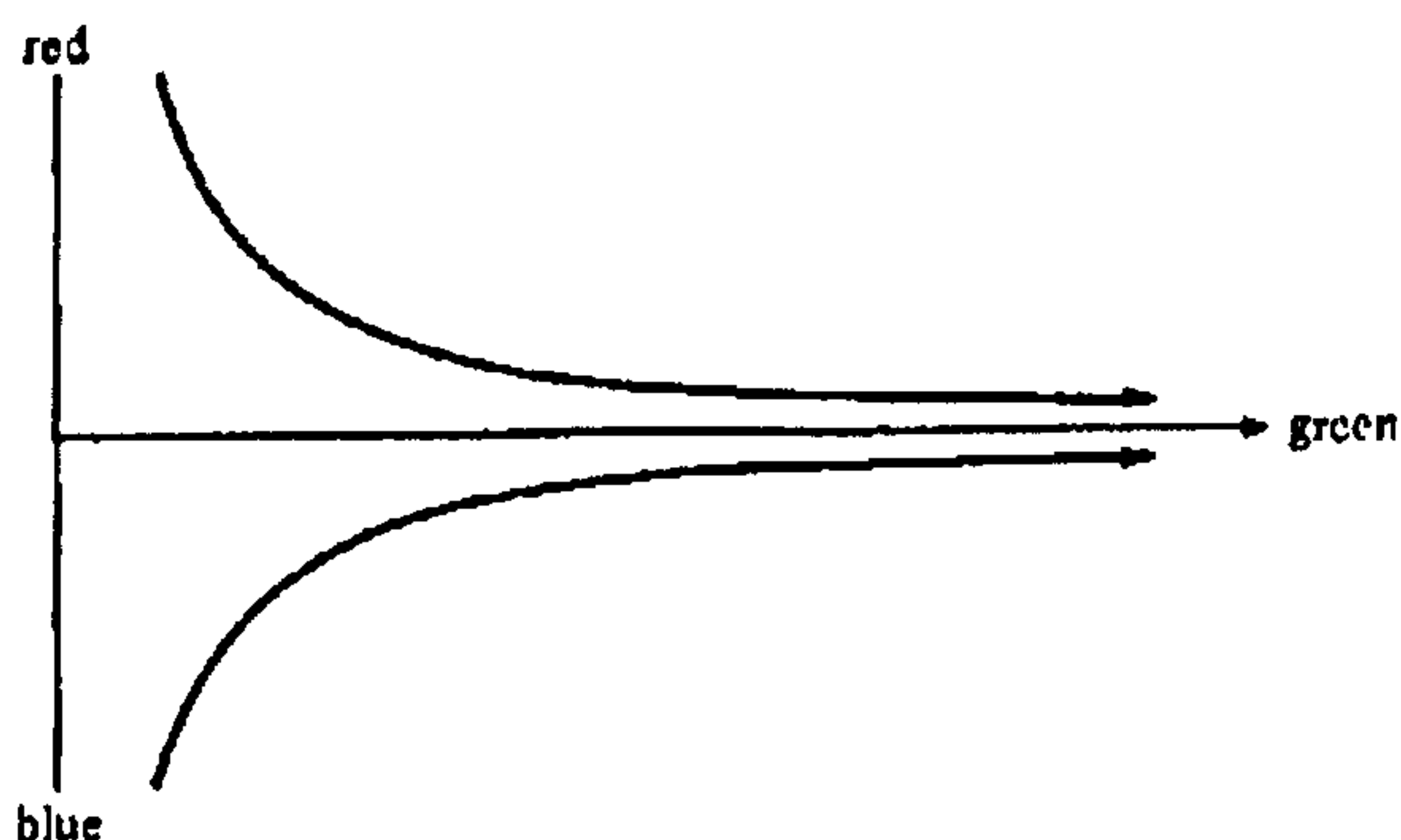


Figure F4.2 Relationship of Green to Left and Right Politics ( Naess 1991: 134 ).

In focussing on the similarities rather than the differences between the existing political traditions ( what Porritt termed the ‘superideology’ of industrialism ) greens could thus locate themselves as the one really radical challenge to the status quo. What I find most interesting here, however, is that the terms of this challenge were phrased in a manner remarkably similar to anarchist discourse. Porritt, for example, argued that “Both [ left and right-wing ideologies ] are dedicated to industrial growth ... to a materialist ethic as the best means of meeting people’s needs and to unimpeded technological development”. He linked this to their shared reliance “on increasing centralisation and large-scale bureaucratic control and co-ordination” ( 1986: 44 ). The ‘Left’ position signified centralised planning and control, and *not* the libertarian leftism of the anarchists. Most tellingly, those aspects of supposedly *right-wing* ideology praised by the greens included a distrust of planning, control and bureaucracy, and the valuing of freedom and diversity ( 1986: 81-89 ). Similarly for Naess, the ‘right-wing’ values embraced are personal initiative and the despising of bureaucracy: also shared by anarchists ( 1991: 133 ). In addition to these values, Naess adopts from the left tradition such notions as social responsibility, opposition to hierarchical structures and an ethical critique of capitalism: these are sufficient to distance his deep ecology from any truly right-wing positions. I would therefore follow Sylvan ( both an anarchist and a deep ecologist ) in his redrawing of the traditional left-right spectrum:

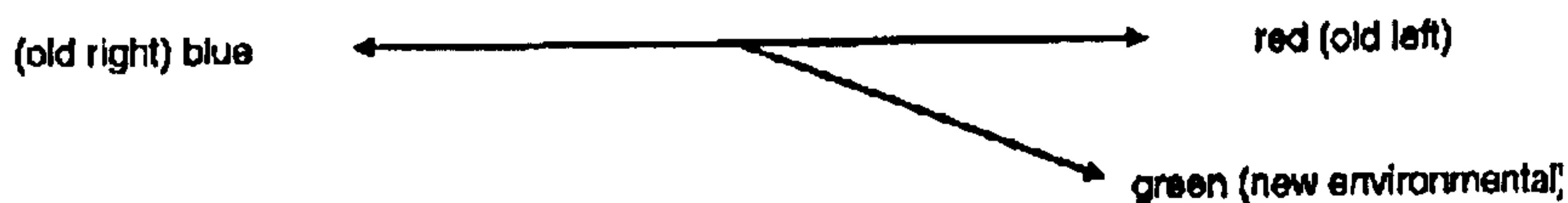


Figure F4.3 Green as an Equally Radical Position to Left ( Sylvan 1993: 232 ).

The greens’ re-formulation of many anarchist ideas and arguments supports the understanding of anarchism as discontinuous and capable of remarkable new flowerings, as established in section 2.3.1. Yet Pepper sounds a note of warning relevant to anarchists when he argues that green advocates such as Porritt, in presenting green thought as fundamentally new and unlinked to political tradition, “may mislead us into forgetting a whole lineage of socialist and populist thinkers who ... emphasised both

<sup>54</sup> Post-left anarchists, like the editors of *Anarchy* magazine, make a similar claim to newness when they state their position as “Neither left nor right, we’re just uncompromisingly anti-authoritarian” ( *Anarchy* 2002: 83 ). This brand of anarchism is not post-left in a right-wing sense, but has rather rejected certain of the trappings of ‘worker-ism’ or outmoded organisation ( Jarach 2004; Flaco in *Schnews* 2002: 217-218 ).



decentralisation and internationalism” ( 1986: 117 ). The anarchists, who emphasised anti-consumerism, self-sufficiency and decentralisation ( Kropotkin quoted in in Gould 1974b: 262; Woodcock 1992: 119-120; Purchase 1998: 6; Marshall 1992a: 307 ) are the most notable of these.

I follow Martell’s argument that the ‘newness’ of green political thought may be simplified into the introduction of nature “in two mould-breaking ways” for political theory. The first of these is the idea of natural limits, and the second is the idea of intrinsic value in non-humans. Martell argues that “They are revolutionary for political theory in the same way that the feminist insistence on including the personal in political thinking is, because they imply the need for bringing in previously excluded issues of concern” ( 1994: 138-9; cf Garner 1996: 75; Doherty 2002: 72 ). However, he does not believe that ecological ideas displace those prior political theories because, although “Radical ecology revolutionises traditional social and political thinking ... it also requires it” ( 1994: 198 ).

My own approach, assessing green activism in terms of the anarchist tradition, follows Martell’s point, and also Ryle’s argument that “The political meanings attributed to ‘social ecology’ or ‘the ecological paradigm’ really derive from, and can only be discussed in terms of, traditions and debates ( individualism versus collectivism, competition versus mutuality, authority and hierarchy versus liberty and equality ) which long predate the emergence of ecology as a scientific discipline” ( 1988: 12 ). I will now assess how green ideas relate to left and right-wing traditions.

Doherty emphasises the influence of the alternative and New Left milieus on the green movement ( 2002: 33-38; cf McCormick 1995: 75-77; Roseneil 2000: 13 ), and argues that “Greens have been shaped by a broader left discourse on egalitarianism and democratisation” ( 2002: 84 ). Carter suggests that most radical green values have their sources in the earlier political traditions of feminism, socialism and anarchism ( 1999 198; cf Carter 1993: 39; Doherty 2002: 4 ). Thus greens ( as opposed to environmental managers, conservationists and moderates ), should be placed within the left/libertarian tradition: “a new variant within the traditions of the left rather than an alternative to the left/right divide” ( Doherty 2002: 67 ).

However, the left and libertarian themes of green politics have not gone uncontested ( Doherty & de Geus 1996: 11 ). Some greens have sought to exclude them from their strictly ‘green’ politics ( Irvine & Ponton 1988; Capra & Spretnak 1984 ), and environmentalism may alternatively be linked with traditional conservatism ( Freedman 1996; Porritt 1986: 231; Bliese 1996 ). The central theme here is the idea of a right place in ‘natural’ order ( Dobson 1990: 30 ). Thus *Blueprint for Survival* “especially emphasises [ ( a ) ] the importance of returning to ‘natural’ mechanisms”, praises ( b ) “traditional hierarchy and authority ... [ and ( c ) ] explains environmental and social problems in terms of natural laws and physical factors such as the size of communities” ( Sandbach 1980: 22-23; cf Pepper 1996: 44; Garner 1996: 62 ). This direction for green thought has led to such expressions as Goldsmith’s “socially paleo-conservative views” ( Zegers 2002; cf Goldsmith 1998: 424 ). Pepper sums up the overall case, however, when he states that the “persistent strand of conservatism” in ecologism exists “despite the *emphasis* on left-liberalism” ( 1996: 44; cf Peet and Thrift 1989: 89; Begg 1991: 13 ). Notwithstanding the conservative and right-wing possibilities in green politics, left-libertarianism is the strongest and most dominant pole of attraction. Doherty demonstrates the strength of this emphasis when he records that “while some environmentalists have favoured the kind of authoritarian measures suggested by the eco-survivalists, they have generally been excluded from green movements” ( 2002: 33 ).

Clearly, “environmentalists are not necessarily allies in all situations” ( Torgerson 1999: 46 ). Where Knill warns of “The damage that serious inter-issue conflict could do to the Green cause” ( 1991: 241 ), however, I maintain that conflictual dialogue is a sign of vitality: indeed in terms of radical environmentalism: I would argue that it is a sign of *existence*. For the case of eco-anarchism, perhaps the most important conflictual dialogue is that between Marxism and ecologism. Historically, anarchism was heavily influenced by Marxism, but ecological insights have, in my view, undermined the fundamental framework of Marxism, such as its anthropocentric opposition of man to nature ( Marshall 1992b: 315-316; Martell 1994: 152; Atkinson 1991: 30 ); its narrow conception of human beings as workers ( Garner 1996: 66; Carter 1999: 48 Griffin 2002: 6 ); and its linear view of ‘progress’ ( Atkinson 1991: 182; Zerzan 1995a ). Anarchists add to this their traditional opposition to narrowing



revolutionary agency to the urban proletariat, and the premising of strategies for change on a productive basis, to the neglect of the role of the state.<sup>55</sup>

Eckersley argues that “an ecocentric perspective cannot be wrested out of Marxism, whether orthodox or humanist, without seriously distorting Marx’s own theoretical concepts” ( 1992: 94 ). In her study of the potential alliances between different political theories and ecocentric environmentalism, she found that eco-Marxism was the least ecocentric, expressing “the most *active* kind of discrimination against the nonhuman world” ( 1992: 180 ), and “ecoanarchism proved to be the most ecocentric” ( 1992: 179 ). It is the compatibility of ecology and anarchism that I shall look at now.

The anarchist tradition expressed three central ecological concerns long before these were fashionable or supported by the sense of an ‘environmental problematic’ ( Proudhon quoted in Marshall 1992b: 306; Reclus quoted in Purchase 1998: 14; Hayward quoted in Carter 1999: 105 ). First, Woodcock notes that “alone among the parties of the left, the anarchists ... were uncommitted to the goal of constant material progress, to the philosophy of the growth economy” ( 1992: 123 ). Second, Atkinson states that green ideology is distinguished from all others by the importance laid on the evils of consumerism. Yet anarchists have long advocated anti-consumerism, defined by Woodcock as the “inclination towards the simplification rather than the progressive complication of ways of living” ( 1992: 121 ), both to avoid becoming dependent on markets and corporations, and also to avoid the corrupting influence of a grasping materialism. This was not just expressed in the writings of individuals, but demonstrated by the example of anarchism as a popular movement ( Purchase 1988: 85; Bookchin 1977; Bookchin 1974: xix; Bookchin 1971: 82 ). In pre-revolutionary Spain, anarchist villages expressed a practical anti-consumerism in which “their goals seemed to be moral as well as politico-economic; they welcomed the unavailability of luxuries like alcohol and even of coffee with the feeling that their lives had not merely been liberated but had also been purified” ( Woodcock 1992: 123; cf Woodcock 1980: 343 ).

As Garner notes, the third key ingredient in anarchism’s historic greenness is that “all of the varieties [ of eco-anarchism ] are based on the fundamental principles of decentralisation and self-sufficiency” ( 1996: 69; cf Kropotkin quoted in Gould 1974b: 262 ). Yet it is not only the anarchists for whom this is a tenet of faith. As Dobson writes, “The decentralisation of social and political life is fundamental to the Green vision of a sustainable society” ( 1991: 73 ); Pepper notes that “Central to ecocentrism is a belief that revising the scale of living will solve, at root, many theoretical and practical problems” ( 1993: 306; cf Porritt 1986: 168; Goodin 1992: 185 ); and Atkinson points out that the various ‘Green manifestos’ invariably speak of the need for decentralisation” ( 1991: 182; cf Bahro 1982; Sale 2000; Naess 1991: 142; Red-Green Study Group 1995: 41 ). The power of this connection remains even once we recognise that many green advocates of decentralisation do not go the whole way, but often retain ( or even strengthen ) some elements of centralised infrastructure ( Porritt 1986: 87; Martell 1994: 55; Naess 1991: 145 ).

Pepper emphasises the “persistent anarchist streak in ecocentrism” ( 1993: 80; cf 1996: 45; 1986: 120-1 ). An interesting point to note is that he views anarchism both as a contributory tradition, and as an *inherent* constituent element of green thought ( 1990: 210; cf Hayward quoted in Carter 1999: 105 ). O’Riordan recognises that “The classic ecocentric proposal is the self-reliant community modelled on anarchist lines” ( 1981: 307 ) and Hay claims that the “‘typical’ set of environmentalist social values has obvious compatibility with contemporary anarchist theory” ( 1988: 22 ). Commentators on the green movement thus include eco-anarchism as one of its most accepted, and long-standing strands, and eco-anarchists maintain “not only that anarchism is the political philosophy that is most compatible with an ecological perspective but also that anarchism is grounded in, or otherwise draws its inspiration from, ecology” ( Eckersley 1992: 145 ). This is a more ambitious claim than just that of compatibility between environmentalism and anarchism, arguing that ecology in some manner *justifies* anarchism: I consider this further in section 4.2.5

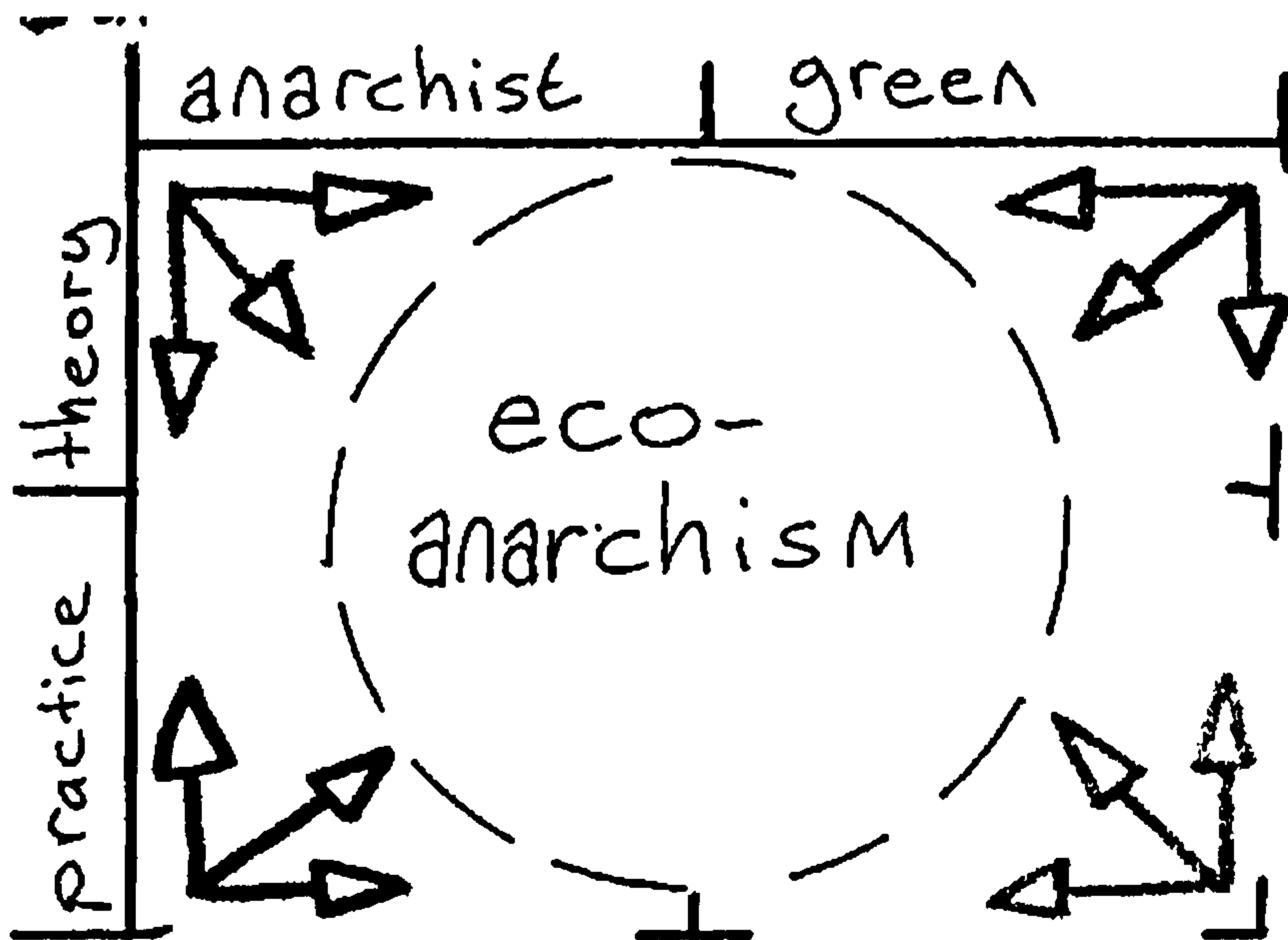
What is perhaps most important, is not that anarchists have contributed their activism to the green movement, but that the green movement itself has thrown up anarchistic ideas and practitioners. Green

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<sup>55</sup> With the decline of the working class as the proposed revolutionary subject ( Gorz 1994: 68; X in *Do or Die* 2000: 170 ), those in the anarchist camp who argue that “Ecological analysis needs to be part of a wider class analysis” ( ACF c1991: 2 ) are, in my view, outdated. However, while some radical greens oppose any mention of class conflict ideology ( Shadow Fox 1996: 27 ), others ( including several primitivists ) include class as one of many oppressions to oppose ( GA 1996: 28; GA 1997a: 12 ).



ideas are not universally accepted in the anarchist movement, and anarchist ideas are not universally adopted in the green movement, but the dialogue between anarchism and Green thought/practice is especially vital ( Chan 1995: 48 ). Figure F4.4 displays the location of eco-anarchism within such dialogues.



**Figure F4.4 The Location of Eco-Anarchism, as Constituted by the Interplay of Anarchist and Green Practice and Theory ( Duckett 2003: handout ).**

Some anarchists make the bolder claim that the green movement as a whole is *implicitly* anarchist even when it doesn't *explicitly* title itself as such ( Purchase 1994: 4 ). Purchase states that

“Deep Ecology ( the biological equality of all living things ), Social Ecology ( the ecoregionally integrated community as opposed to capitalist individualism and the nation state ), and Ecofeminism ( the need to repair the social and environmental damage resulting from patriarchal attitudes and structures ) are all inherent in anarchist philosophy” ( 1994: 5 ).

It is on such an interpretation that “anarchists believe that Greens are implicitly committed to anarchism, whether they realise it or not, and hence that they should adopt anarchist principles of direct political action rather than getting bogged down in trying to elect people to state offices” ( *Anarchist Faq 1* ).

Anarchists have been influential on the environmental movement in three ways. First, in their vision of a future society, which Carter terms ‘cooperative autonomy’ ( 1999: 303 ) and which Bookchin argues “has become a precondition for the practice of ecological principles” ( 1971: 76 ); second, in their analysis of the causes of, and the solutions to the ecological crisis, and particularly the anarchist critique of power ( Carter 1999: 63 ); and third, in their strategic advice, and the political methods by which to oppose environmental destruction ( Marshall 1992b: 461; Tokar 1988: 139-140 ). We will look at the strategic advice of anarchism in section 4.3.6, once the theoretical background has been explored. The three elements interlock and connect as the core dynamics of anarchist ideology. If an anarchist vision, analysis and practice are all in place, therefore, it is possible for us to say that anarchism exists. All three elements may be found within the green movement.

#### 4.2.5

### Deep Ecology



In contrast to the politically-informed projects of eco-anarchism, in this section I will assess the strongest attempt to 'translate' ecological ideas into the political realm. As opposed to liberal or shallow environmentalism, 'deep ecology' has become identified as the continuation of the radical project of environmental thinking: the logical articulation of full-blooded ecocentrism. Some "use the term to label themselves the real, bold, and serious environmentalists", while there are "others who use the term *deep* simply as a substitute for *radical*" (Rothenberg 1995: 203).

The motivations behind the development of 'deep ecology' were rooted in the perception that ecological values required a more radical philosophical approach than was extant. Naess famously stated that "The essence of deep ecology is to ask deeper questions", and these deeper questions were elaborated into "a critique of reformist or shallow environmentalism and a critique of industrial society" (Benton & Short 1999: 133). In regard to the content of deep ecology, we should note the central importance of biocentrism, and the consequent idea that intrinsic value pertains to non-humans.

The strategic purpose and content of deep ecology is most significant to our study, and what I shall therefore look at here. Rothenberg argues that it is a term "meant to gather activists around a common cause" and that it "offers specific tactical advice" (1995: 202-206). Others argue the opposite, that it "provides no guidance to activists" (Stark 1995: 274).<sup>56</sup> Deep ecology has been claimed as a justification for two key strategic routes, so that in my view there are two developments of deep ecological politics: pragmatic and militant. The first constitutes a pragmatic, gradualist approach, amenable to many different methods so long as they aim in the right direction. As Naess phrases it:

"We need not agree upon any definitive utopia, but should thrash out limited programs of political priorities within the framework of present political conflicts. Our questions are of the form 'What should be a GREENER line in politics at the moment within issue X and how could it be realised?' rather than of the form 'What would be the deep green line of politics within issue X?' Green is dynamic and comparative, never absolute or idealistic" (1991: 160-1).

Naess's mixed, multi-level approach to politics resembles the position of many other greens in their attitude to change. I will provide an anarchist critique of this approach in section 4.3.3. It is not only the anarchists that parted ways with Naess on grounds of political strategy, however, but also those amongst his own followers who sought to put the principles of deep ecology into practice. (U.S.) Earth First! made deep ecology politically relevant and politically radical by justifying a strategy of sabotage in deep ecological terms. This 'no-compromise' strand, unlike the gradualist strand, has adapted its strategy according to key aspects of anarchist analysis (notably the critique of institutions and reformism, which I consider in section 5.2.1). Yet it is also this 'extreme' strand that has been most critiqued by eco-anarchists. We shall look at the development and organisation of (U.S.) EF! in section 5.3.2, and the strategic implications of monkeywrenching in 6.3.5 and 6.5.2.

The success of Earth First!'s activism led commentators to note that "Deep ecology, in practice, has been transformed into a paramilitary, direct action ecology force" (Seager 1993: 225). Rothenberg suggests that deep ecology "has changed the way environmental protests are conducted: a nature with value in itself is worthy of preservation for itself, and this has led to the practice of eco-defence, in which trees may not be able to grow spikes to save themselves, but we can help them out a little" (1995: 204).

The political perspective of US EF!ers like Foreman was grounded in their no-compromise belief that what was good for the environment was all that mattered: "In any decision, consideration for the health of the Earth must come first" (Foreman quoted in Bradford 1989: 5). The perspective articulated by certain spokespeople for Earth First!, however, often revealed a misanthropic attitude, blaming humans for the present ecological situation and expressing little hope for a change in people's interaction with nature. This was particularly true with the two 'litmus' issues of wilderness preservation and human population growth (Eckersley 1992: 157). A popular EF! bumper-sticker stated "Malthus was right",

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<sup>56</sup> The eco-anarchist Peter Marshall, although sympathetic to deep ecology, states that "Although deep ecologists are philosophically radical, they do not try to transform existing society... As a strategy for change, deep ecology mainly recommends isolated acts of ecological vandalism, tampering with the legal system, changing personal lifestyle and increasing awareness through persuasion and example. It leaves however the main sources of human domination and hierarchy – private property and the state – intact" (1992b: 418-420). He even states that "deep ecology is little more than a tautology, like cold snow" (1992b: 423), and has thus added little to the arsenal of radical ecological ideas.



while EF! gatherings witnessed the camp-fire chant, “Down with human beings!” Foreman himself stated that “The human race could go extinct, and I, for one, would not shed any tears” ( Foreman quoted in Bradford 1989: 1; cf Des Jardins 1997: 216 ).<sup>57</sup>

Misanthropic, racist and right-wing statements were printed in the EF! *Journal* without serious contradiction from within the deep ecology fold. This provoked an attack on *Earth First!* and deep ecology by self-identified anarchists, feminists and anti-racists ( Manes 1990: 157 ). The ensuing exchange of polemics was part of an important process of self-reflection and refinement in political, ethical and philosophical ideas for the EF! deep ecologists ( Eckersley 1992: 147 ).

Critics like Bradford demonstrated an anarchist political critique through attacking the foundations of deep ecology ( Bookchin & Foreman 1991: 125; Zegers 2002 ). Elements selected for specific criticism included the tendency to oppose humanity and nature ( Biehl 1989a: 27; Bradford 1989: 50 ); the conception of ‘intrinsic value’; the failure to recognise humanity’s specific attributes ( Manes 1990: 158-159 ); and, most significantly, an inadequate analysis of capitalism.

Anarchists found deep ecology so repugnant because of the notion that “All people, regardless of their position in society, are held equally responsible” ( Zegers 2002; cf Des Jardins 1997: 217 ). Deep ecology’s social myopia blinds them to the role and power of capitalism ( Bookchin 1991: 19 ). There is thus a gaping hole in the middle of deep ecology’s ‘deeper questioning’; one that conceals the real sources of hunger, resource pressures, and environmental refugees ( Bradford 1989: 10; Bookchin 1990a: 9-10 ). To believe that mankind is pitted against nature is to accept as unchangeable a situation that is historically contingent and thus transformable.<sup>58</sup>

However, biocentric anarchists do undoubtedly exist ( BGN 2002: 13; Orton 1998, 2001; Scarce 1990: 39 ), and Merchant suggests that “Deepest ecology is both feminist and egalitarian. It offers a vision of a society that is truly free” ( 1992: 107 ). On this view, there is no essential opposition between anarchism and deep ecology, despite the controversies existing between them. This conciliatory position was exemplified by the meeting that took place in the summer of 1987. In a public debate Bookchin and Foreman, the most famous antagonists in the controversy, recognised three major points of agreement: awareness of urgency, opposition to hierarchy ( Levine in Bookchin & Foreman 1991: 3 ) and opposition to capitalism ( Foreman 1991b: 42 ). Both Bookchin and Foreman agreed that their two approaches should be seen as two aspects of “the same battle, regardless of what we emphasise” ( Foreman 1991b: 42; cf Naess 1988: 130; Rage 2002: 1 ). Without wishing to imply that this stated agreement eliminated all the tensions and diversity amongst the two camps, their recognition of the need for action, and opposition to state and capital, leads us to consider how the anarchist critique of state and capital informs the strategies for green change. I shall therefore outline the key elements of the anarchist analyses of capitalism ( in section 4.3.1 ), and the state ( in section 4.3.2 ), in order to consider ( in section 4.3.3 ), how these analyses may be used to critique the majority of strategies for green change. We may view this as the ecological use of anarchist analysis.

## 4.3 Anarchist Guides to Action

### 4.3.1

#### Eco-anarchist critique of capitalism

First, anarchists of all stripes argue that environmentalism needs an analysis of capitalism to rescue it from reformist attempts at “rationalising and humanising” it ( Bradford 1989: 20 ). In contrast to this

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<sup>57</sup> Such views became so notorious that commentators like Callicot were led to declare that “The extent of misanthropy in modern environmentalism may be taken as a measure of the degree to which it has become biocentric” ( quoted in Nash 1989: 154 ). I do not however share the view that eco-centrism need lead to anti-humanitarianism

<sup>58</sup> “While [ it is ] human beings and institutions that actively engage in the destruction of nature... it should not automatically be assumed that they are acting out the biological destiny of the species; that would be to take at face value the corporate and state rationalisations for exploitation ( ‘we do it all for you’ )” ( Bradford 1989: 10; cf Bookchin 1990a: 9-10 ). Anarchists instead have a fundamental faith that an alternative world is possible, where the absence of capitalist drives to exploit and consume would allow humanity and nature to live in peace.



reformist strategy, anarchists identify themselves in opposition to capitalism: “We anarchist-communists see through the Green veneer, we see that capitalism is the enemy of our environment, our autonomy, our freedom. We work for its downfall” ( ACF c1991: 24; cf Bookchin 1988a; Gaynor quoted in Heller 2000: 83; McKay 2001a; IE 2005: 15 ). The ecological critique employed by anarchists and other anticapitalists states that

“since capitalism is based upon the principle of ‘growth or death’, a green capitalism is impossible. By its very nature capitalism must expand, creating new markets, increasing production and consumption, and so invading more ecosystems, using more resources, and upsetting the interrelations and delicate balances that exist with ecosystems” ( *Anarchist Faq* 1; cf AF 1997a; Bookchin 1988a; Atkinson 1991: 5; *Schnews* 2002: 5 ).

The character of capitalism is therefore identified by a ‘grow-or-die’ logic ( indeed as a ‘cancer’ ( Reinsborough 2003: 7-10 ) ); it destroys natural and social harmony ( Reinsborough 2003: 5 ); and it is reliant upon over-consumption ( Carter 1999: 32 ). I will look at the anarchist hostility toward consumerism in 5.3.6.

‘Green greens’ and ‘red greens’ disagree whether it is ‘industrialism’ or ‘capitalism’ that should be considered as the main opponent. While most traditional and self-identified ‘anarchists’ tend to emphasise capitalism ( AF 2001c: 6; Bookchin 1995a: 33 ), the anarcho-primitivist school emphasise instead the defining role of technology and techno-centrism ( BGN 2002: 14 ). This demonstrates one more area of diversity and dialogue within the anarchist tradition, but in strategic terms I concur with Atkinson’s comment that “In practice there is no fundamental contradiction between these views” ( 1991: 5 ). One reason why this difference is not strategically crucial, is because capitalism is often seen in an all-encompassing way. At the 2000 EF! Gathering, a well-attended discussion on ‘capitalism’ displayed a variety of views which were loosely divided into two conceptions: a limited economic system of capitalism and a meta-capitalism that permeated and defined all society. Others argued that patriarchy was prior, and the only points of consensus reached were ( a ) that capitalism was opposed in both forms; and ( b ) it did not solely define our activism. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, capitalism is regarded by the vast majority of anarchists “as but a subset of a more deep seated problem, namely, social hierarchy” ( Eckersley 1992: 147; cf Bookchin 1982: 67; 1971: 218 ).

It is worth assessing how anarchists may critique both the systemic conception of capitalism, and also its active agency. Two pamphlets by Watson distributed around EF! UK, ‘We All Live in Bhopal’ and ‘Stopping the Industrial Hydra’, emphasise that such disasters as the chemical spill at Bhopal and the Exxon valdez oil spill are “not a fluke” that exists somehow out of the ordinary ( Bradford 1996 ). In both cases, the construction of these events as ‘disasters’ is condemned as “a deterrence machine to take our minds off the pervasive reality” of endemic poisoning ( 1996 ). As far as capitalism was concerned, these disasters constituted not an ecological crisis but “a public relations crisis” ( Bradford 1996: 8 ). Bradford argues that

“to focus on disasters as aberrations resulting from corporate greed is to mystify the real operational character of an entire social and technological system ... The real spillage goes on every day, every minute, when capitalism and mass technics appear to be working more or less according to plan ... As petro-chemicals are necessary to industrialism whatever the form of management, spills are also integral to petrochemicals” ( 1996: 11 ).

The AF define capitalism’s approach to the ecological crisis as ‘Survivalism’, prominent examples of which include Ophuls’ work and Hardin’s ‘lifeboat ethic’, but aspects of which may also be found in central green texts such as *Limits to Growth* and *Blueprint for Survival*. The AF state that, “Operating in a similar way to nationalism, survivalism masks social differences in an attempt to create a false social unity in the pursuit of shared interests” ( ACF c1991: 4; cf DA 32 2004: 5 ). They argue, alongside the social ecologists, that to counter the radical potential of ecology “to undermine the acceptance of a society founded upon hierarchy and exploitation ... capitalism needs to be seen to be embracing ecological ideas. In doing so it is able to redefine the ecological problem in terms which pose no threat to its existence and actually increase its strength” ( ACF c1991: 4 ). SDEF! concur, and argue that

“calls for environmental protection usually spring from a sense of revulsion ( conscious or otherwise ) at capitalism and its works. But this revulsion can be twisted against itself and to



capital's advantage ... the analysis that is eventually adopted gives rise to solutions that create enormous opportunities for expansion, creating new goods and services, new 'needs' ... many of the greatest polluters ... also snap up contracts to mitigate pollution. They are 'market leaders' in pollution, profiting at both ends of the chain ... environmentalists must beware of functioning as little more than company sales reps" ( SDEF! 1996 ).

We shall therefore see that the EDA activists of this thesis operate an anarchist refusal to be involved in 'the system', but rather stay outside, refusing the portals of access to institutional environmentalism and remaining antagonistic to 'mediation', 'partnership' or 'compromise' with institutions and corporations that they consider as the enemies of environmental survival ( IE 2005: 15 ).

### 4.3.2

#### Eco-anarchist critique of the state

To eco-anarchists, not only capitalism but the state, and all state-like forms, are antithetical to environmental health. The systemic analysis of capitalism is allied to a recognition of the active role of the state ( Carter 1999: 57-9; Knill 1991: 243 ), which Carter argues is integrated with capitalist logic in a "self-reinforcing" environmentally hazardous dynamic ( 1999 ). This is portrayed in Figure F4.5.

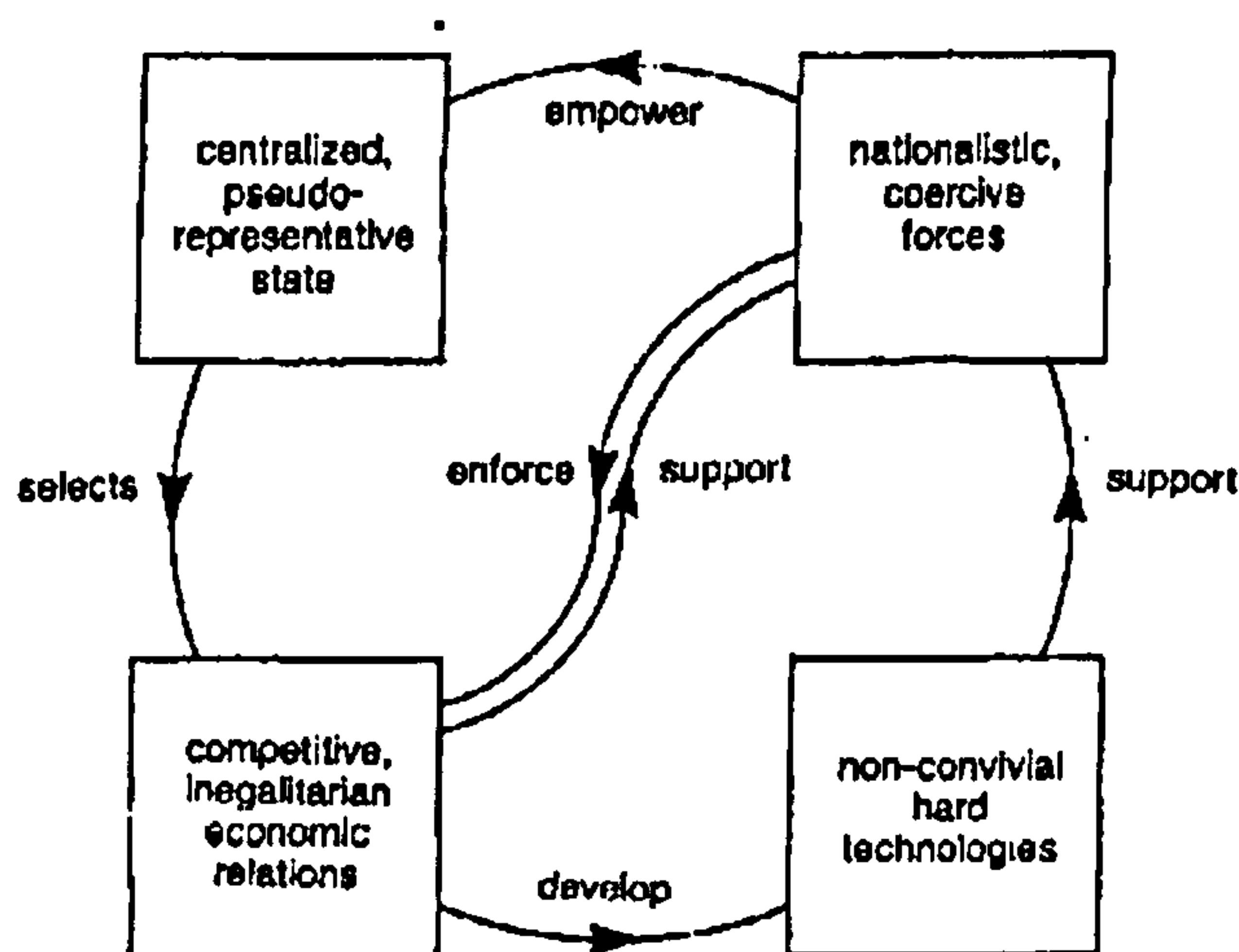


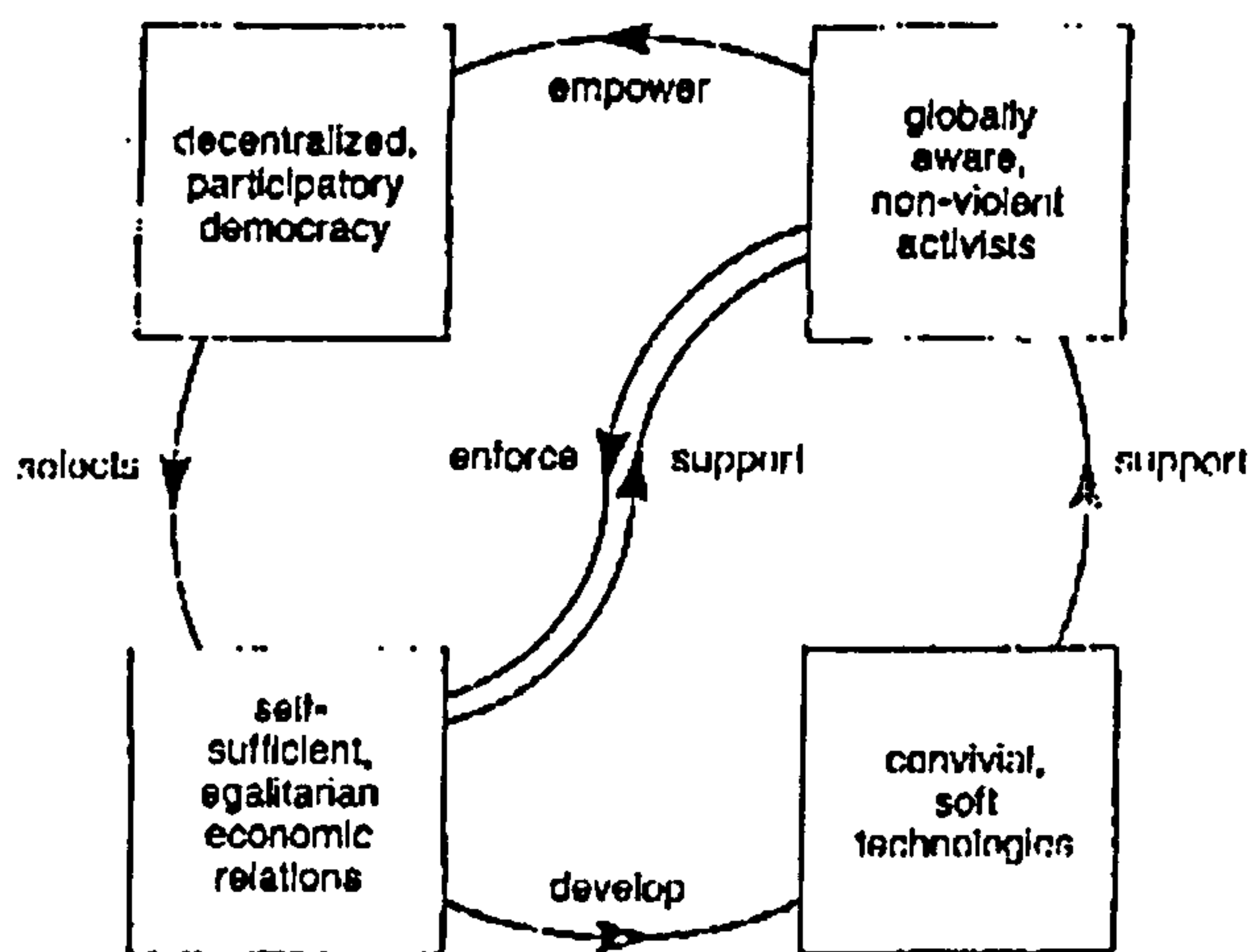
Figure F4.5 The Environmentally Hazardous Dynamic ( Carter 1999: 46; cf Clark 1981: 22 ).

Carter argues that "states have a very real interest in promoting attitudes and modes of behaviour that are likely to be environmentally disastrous in their effects" ( 1999: 215 ). Examples include "states' military requirements" ( 1999: 202 ), the adoption of "damaging forms of technology, which serve the interests of the bureaucracy and dominant economic class" ( 1999: 203; cf Heller 2000: 142-3 ), and "the promotion of the ideology of consumerism ... which, through taxation, maximises state revenues" ( 1999: 215 ). Dobson states that it is improbable that "a sustainable society can be brought about through the use of existing state institutions" because they "are always already tainted by precisely those strategies and practices that the green movement, in its radical pretensions, seeks to replace" ( 1990: 134-5; cf Begg 1991 ). The awkward task that reformist and electoralist Greens have set themselves is thus "to bring about a decolonised society through structures which are already colonised" ( Knill 1991: 243; cf Holloway 2002: 15-16 ).

According to eco-anarchist analysis, as illustrated in 4.2.4, the fatal flaws of eco-reformism, eco-Marxism and eco-authoritarianism are equivalent: each approach focuses on only one element of the environmentally hazardous dynamic. As Carter explains, "The problem is, unfortunately, that if we are within an environmentally hazardous dynamic, then it is mutually reinforcing and self-sustaining" ( 1999: 298 ). If one element of the dynamic were reformed, perhaps through a radical destabilisation of the state, "the other elements would simply reconstitute it in a form which is appropriate for serving



their purposes. Consequently ... every element of the environmentally hazardous dynamic has to be opposed if we are to reduce the risk of our societies being driven to inflict major harm on future generations” ( 1999: 298 ). Carter’s analysis underscores why eco-anarchists oppose, not only all hierarchical political structures, but also the economic relations of capitalism, the dominant norms of technology, consumerism, centralism and top-down activity, and all forms of coercion. He identifies the radicality of green discourse in terms of its opposition to this ‘vicious circle’ ( 1993: 48-53 ). The context, framework and aim of eco-anarchist practice is situated within Carter’s diagram of the environmentally benign dynamic, reproduced in Figure F4.6:



**Figure F4.6 The Environmentally Benign Dynamic ( Carter 1999: 52 ).**

The above analysis indicates why anarchists view that any strategy that seeks to use an aspect of the environmentally hazardous dynamic ( such as green consumerism ) is doomed to failure. The same applies to all simplistic, one-sided strategies such as the stereotypical anarchist call to ‘smash the state’, as Bookchin too recognises ( 1986b ). In the next section I will make the anarchist critique of green strategies much more explicit, and I will follow this in 4.3.4 with an analysis of how anarchists view correct ( revolutionary ) action. This latter section will give us a strategic/empirical sense of how anarchists do action, and how they make eco-anarchism work

### 4.3.3

#### Inadequate Green Strategies

I will now review in turn each of the green strategies that must be critiqued. This negative ‘ticking off’ of strategies viewed as inadequate by anarchists will provide a bridge to the more positive content of anarchist strategies for change in 4.3.4, Anarchist Action. This is not intended to provide an in-depth analysis of the various strategies greens have sought to use to bring about green change, but rather a brief account of how such strategies are perceived by anarchists, and particularly the activist anarchists of EDA that I will introduce in the next chapter.

First, eco-anarchists criticise ‘pragmatic environmentalists’ ( or “would-be planet managers” ( Andy c1995: 8 ) ) who campaign for top-down reforms such as the control of toxic wastes or restrictions on urban growth, because they inadvertently strengthen the state, and thus encourage future environmental problems ( Bookchin 1990a: 160 ). This recalls the anarchist argument against the discourse of ‘rights’ ( Walter 2002: 47; AF 1997b: 20; Bakunin 1990a: 17; Smith 1997: 345-346 ). The notion of legalistic rights is ultimately connected to the power of the state, the ‘neutral arbiter’ with its legally enshrined right to kill ( Hess 1989 : 179 ). This argument which also applies to those who seek to extend the discourse of rights to include the natural world ( Eckersley 1996; Eckersley 1995; Hayward 1998; Bell 2002 [D]: 703; Dryzek 1987; Marshall 1992b: 434; Pepper 2005: 15; Miller 1998 ).



Second, those who struggle to inject other factors ( of environmental wealth, of interdependence ), into a narrow economist outlook ( Callicott 1989; Hawken, Lovins & Lovins 1999; Nash 1989 ) are criticised for failing to recognise that reformist liberalism is based on private property and fails to counter market logic ( Carter 1999: 32; Knill 1991: 240; Chenevix-Trench 2004: 39-43; Sagoff quoted in De Shalit 2000: 87-88; Laschefski & Freris 2001 ). From this perspective, such attempts as Dryzek's project of ecological modernisation ( 1996: 108; Dryzek, Downes, Hunold & Schlosberg 2003 ) may be condemned as futile and even harmful in the long run ( Pepper 2005 ). So might all attempts to institute radical reforms through the existing state frameworks ( Mol, Lauber & Liefferink 2000; Doherty 2002: 83; *Do or Die* 1996: 276-277 ).

The "eco-establishment" belief "in free enterprise and in enlisting business as partners in environmental protection" ( Seager 1993: 225 ) is clearly anathema to the anarchist perspective - not least because "A significant proportion of society ... has a material interest in prolonging the environmental crisis because there is money to be made from administering it. It is utopian to consider these people to be part of the engine for profound social change" ( Dobson 1990: 135; Heerings & Zeldenrust 1995 ). The institutionalisation thesis that I elaborate in section 5.2.1 will outline the anarchists' argument for why.

Such liberal attempts to reform the crisis may be distinguished from anarchist or socialistic strategies by their failure to challenge fundamental property relations ( *Do or Die* 1995: 57 ). The anarchist critique of property can be traced back as far as Godwin ( 1986: 134 ) and Winstanley ( 1973 ). Carter provides a contemporary environmental elaboration, which flies against Hardin's 'Tragedy of the Commons' thesis. Carter notes that "What appears to be individually rational is collectively catastrophic" ( 1999: 34 ). As Hardin's individualistic rationality is based on private property, the abolition of property would also end the problem.<sup>59</sup>

Third, the anarchist critique of electoral strategies is well known and, with regard to the Green Party's radicalism we might note that no matter how radical the beliefs of the party members, their methods distinguish them as conventional ( Pepper 1996: 42-3 ) – at least in that role ( in Newcastle, Green Party members also took action suitable to an anarchist perspective on other occasions, other days ). Anarchists' analysis of power leads them to argue ( a ) that voting in a government is dangerous, and ( b ) that it constitutes, not an act of power but of *disempowerment*: "Apart from the fact that leaving the environment to governments and multinational corporations is 'like leaving a child batterer to look after the nursery', voting for Green policies to be carried out by the state is a thoroughly disempowering act which does a lot to bolster the strength of the state and little, if anything, to protect the environment" ( ACF c1991: 5; cf Carter 1999: 132; Miller 1984: 87 ). Anarchists maintain that the state cannot be changed: it is "constrained by its own nature to behave in certain ways", and this means that those elected to represent the people are unable to do what they promise ( Miller 1984: 88 ).<sup>60</sup> Bookchin puts this argument neatly: "Between a person who humbly solicits from power and another who arrogantly exercises it, there exists a sinister and degenerative symbiosis. Both share the same mentality that change can be achieved only through the *exercise* of power, specifically, through the power of a self-corrupting professionalised corps of legislators, bureaucrats, and military forces called the State" ( 1990: 160; cf Holloway 2002: 15-16; Miller 1984: 87 ).

Fourth, while the above condemnation of top-down strategies returns us to grassroots attempts at change, these also fail to escape from the anarchist critique if they do not challenge the systemic nature of the problem. Bradford states that "Boycotts, demonstrations and other forms of militant response focus on some of the real culprits who benefit from ecocide, yet fall short of an adequate challenge to the system as a whole" ( 1989: 27 ). Zerzan condemns them as "the parade of partial ( and for that reason false ) oppositions" ( 1995; cf POO 1998: 2 ). The AF argue that "Campaigning against 'bad

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<sup>59</sup> The ASEED *Forest Campaigners Handbook* provides us with a practical example of this case, identifying property and profit as the underlying causes of forest destruction, and not in a generalised way but in relation to specific forests, specific companies, and specific trade agreements ( ASEED 1999: 27; cf Manes 1990: 90 ). The agents of this might be the nation state, overconsumption in the West, particular companies, or such institutions of global capitalism as the IMF ( *EF/J* 22(5) 2002; *EF/J* 22(4) 2002 ). ASEED recognise that "ultimately we have to look to the basics of the system which has created these excesses of demand, and ask the question 'is environmental sustainability really possible within a society geared towards the accumulation of capital?'" ( 1999: 8 ).

<sup>60</sup> Bookchin emphasises that his aim is one of "creating dual power composed of directly democratic assemblies of the people in revolutionary *opposition* to the state" ( letter in *Organise!* No.44 1996; cf Bookchin 1986c ). Clark, however, argues that "the municipalist program and Bookchin's new 'revolutionary subject' cannot be deduced from the general premises of social ecological analysis, nor can they be shown to be the only plausible basis for an ecological politics" ( 1997 ).



companies; implies that there are good companies. The reality is that production for profit inevitably means the domination and exploitation of people, useless unhealthy production and the domination of nature and hence pollution and destruction. Big companies are only worse than small ones because they are bigger" ( ACF c1991: 42 ).

Fifth, anarchists attack the notion of green consumerism. Green consumerists like the Bodyshop's Anita Roddick argued that "As consumers we have real power to effect change" ( quoted in Pepper 1993: 850 ). To anarcho-communists in the AF this is based on a false, because individualised, notion of power ( ACF c1991: 43; cf Pepper 1993: 86 ). Systemic capitalism and ever-present domination require a stronger opponent. Pepper expresses the common objection when he states "The idea that, through the market, money can be a vote for desirable change is flawed from an ecocentric point of view" ( 1993: 85 ), because "consuming greener commodities ... would still entail far too much consumption: ( Carter 1999: 29 ). Most centrally, eco-anarchists argue that "Green consumerism, by its very nature, cannot challenge the 'grow-or-die' nature of capitalism" ( *Anarchist Faq* 1; cf BGN 2002: 15 ). Bookchin states that "The absurdity that we can ... moralise' greed and profit [ is a ] naivete which a thousand years of Catholicism failed to achieve" ( 1986b ). Pepper even suggests that "green consumerism is reactionary ... [ in that ] it is politically anaesthetising" ( 1993: 70; cf Luke 1997 ). In the sections of 5.3.6 I will nonetheless demonstrate that activists of this study successfully combine an attention to what they consume in their personal life ( although this is anti-consumerist rather than green consumerist ), with grander social strategies that are not inconsistent with the noblest sentiments of the anarchist tradition.

Sixth, the strategy of wilderness protection central to Earth First! in the US is viewed as flawed. This strategy ultimately comes down to the idea of 'saving what we can'. Foreman's aim, for example, is to save some bits of wilderness "So that there is something to come back after human beings, through whatever means, destroy their civilisation" ( Tokar 1988: 138; cf Naess 1988: 130 ). In practice, the strategy of wilderness preservation has led the conservation movement "to set aside and protect nature preserves, while trying to institutionalise, within modern capitalism and through the state, various safeguards and an ethic of responsibility toward the land" ( Bradford 1989: 20 ). However, the key problem here is that, when it comes down to money, institutions "have always chosen to exploit such preserves when it was decided that the 'benefits' outweighed the 'costs'" ( 1989: 21 ).

Attempts at protecting isolated areas of 'wilderness', however militant and 'no compromise', are thus considered to be doomed due to the overarching power and systemic nature of the environmentally hazardous dynamic. Tokar argues that the lessons of ecology should teach us the same lesson: "everything in nature is far more thoroughly interconnected... [ so ] no partial solution can really sustain life" ( 1988: 139; cf Bradford 1989: 50 ). Thus the attempt to retrieve areas of intact wilderness will fail, unless the global system of human society is transformed. Primitivists might demur with this conclusion to the degree that they hold apocalyptic visions of industrial collapse, and argue that wild reserves will be needed to repopulate and rewild the post-industrial landscape.

Seventh, a debate has taken place over another green strategy in which "changes in lifestyle ... [ are ] held to be the future society in microcosm" ( Begg 1991: 6 ). This tendency, equally prevalent within anarchism, is condemned as 'lifestylism' by left and politically engaged anarchists. The AF define it as "an individualistic theory: society is made up of individuals who have real choices about how they live; for example whether they do waged work or not ( and what job they do ), whether they live communally, pay rent, squat etc. If enough people make the right moral or ethical choices and act upon them, reform or major social change will occur" ( ACF c1991: 41; cf AF *Organise!* 34 1994; Dolgoff n.d.; Walter 1980: 171; Bookchin 1995a: 19; Neal 1997 ). In 5.3.6 and 5.3.7 I shall, however, defend these practices as a part of a whole ( holistic ) strategy.

The AF comment that such currents are part of "the same moralism, liberalism, rebelliousness and individualism that plagues the anarchist scene everywhere" ( ACF c1991: 47 ), and provide extensive lists of 'false anarchisms'.<sup>61</sup> For both ecologism and anarchism, the solution identified by left

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<sup>61</sup> Many other versions ( or corruptions ) of anarchism are identified by 'serious' anarchists. For example, in the pages of one edition of the AF's theoretical magazine, *Organise!* ( issue 42 ), the following tendencies are all condemned: the abdication of critical judgement regarding overseas revolutions; the 'unity-at-all-costs syndrome' involving alliances with Trotskyite and other authoritarian groups; the problem of egotistic individuals; localism; factionalism; and also being too tolerant of incorrect views; running anti-election candidates in elections; hippies and the alternative scene 'confusing the movement'; lacking a strong enough theoretical strength to turn activists into fully-fledged revolutionaries; and holding a pedantic obsession with philosophic



anarchists like the AF and Bookchin is an organised and explicitly ideological mass movement. Bookchin thus states that “without a self-conscious and thoroughly schooled libertarian left in their midst, the new social movements ... will not remain libertarian on their own” ( 1989a: 273; Bookchin 1990a: 171 ). I myself do not agree with the ‘strong’ version of this argument presented here, but I do see the role of traditional anarchist organisations such as the AF as valuable in a ‘weak’ version of this point: it is not *essential*, but it is still *positive*.

Anarchist denigration of those who seek to ameliorate only *aspects* of the environmental crisis as ‘reformist’ ( Carter 1999: 31 ) does not, however, mean that pragmatic campaigns go unrecognised as “necessary struggles”. Bookchin states that they “can never be disdained simply because they are limited and piecemeal” ( 1990: 160 ), and Bradford concurs that “it would be a grave error to simply give up such struggles on the basis of a more abstract image of a larger totality” ( 1989: 27 ). Anarchists have always been involved in limited, so-called ‘reformist’ or ‘single-issue’ campaigns, with the crucial factor that they have expansive, revolutionary aims. I will look at this further in the next section. One thing I must emphasise: the robust, perhaps overly ‘certain’ strategic views presented here, therefore, do not abolish the validity of EDA as a site of anarchist struggle

#### 4.3.4

### Anarchist Action

The strategic arguments raised in the previous sections against the majority of green strategies for change might lead us to view anarchists as speaking from a purist, revolutionary perspective. But if they are so doing, their arguments lose their value. Ehrlich warns that “‘reformist’ is an epithet that may be used in ways that are neither honest nor very useful - principally to demonstrate one’s ideological purity, or to say that concrete political work of any type is not worth doing because it is potentially co-optable” ( 1996: 169 ). Ward suggests, furthermore, that it is possible for the *right kinds* of reforms to eventually make up a revolution ( 1988: 138; cf Walter 2002: 34; Jordan 2002: 149 ). This notion of ‘radical reformism’ is also extant in radical green discourse, as Naess demonstrates with his project of deep ecology: “THE DIRECTION IS REVOLUTIONARY, THE STEPS ARE REFORMATORY” ( 1991: 156; cf Ruins 2003: 16; Ritter 1980: 154-8 ).

There remains the critique of reformism in the negative sense: when “reforms disperse and weaken the pressure for change, without ever tackling the actual problem that gave rise to that pressure” ( Begg 1991: 4; cf Wall 1990; Zinn 1997: 376; Jordan 2002: 37 ). Yet other reforms may serve “not only ameliorate effects but also increase the instability of the phenomenon that caused them” ( Begg 1991: 5 ). Jordan sees examples of these in many green proposals because such demands “cannot be met within existing structures” ( 2002: 34 ). I prefer Malatesta’s acceptance of the ‘reformist’ label, but only in the sense that “we shall never recognise the [existing] institutions. We shall carry out all possible reforms in the spirit in which an army advances ever forwards by snatching the enemy-occupied territory in its path” ( 1995: 81; cf Dominick 1997: 8 ).

I agree with Ward that despite the ‘fetishism’ and ‘posturing’ of many anarchists ( ‘I’m more revolutionary than you are!’ ), the distinction between reform and revolution is not the key marker by which anarchists can be defined. Indeed, Ward talks disparagingly of “the two great irrelevancies of discussion about anarchism: the false antithesis between violence and non-violence”, which I assess in 6.3, “and between revolution and reform” ( 1988: 142 ). Rather it is authoritarians with whom anarchists are most fundamentally and consistently opposed, and ‘revolutionary’ authoritarians are perhaps the most despised of these ( 1988: 143 ).

Some anarchists lament the radical reformist position as the pessimistic notion of ‘permanent protest’, in which no large-scale positive change is expected ( Stafford 1971: 90-101; Walter 1980: 171; Lerner 1971: 52; Miller 1984: 149-50 ). But when their activity is expressed through NVDA, such ‘permanent protesters’ should not be dismissed as non-revolutionary. The strength and value of protest and direct

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principle rather than social practice. My own approach when examining informal, hybridised and loose forms of anarchism is to highlight positive anarchist elements rather than exclude on the basis of impurity, naivete or doctrinal irregularity.



action is that it may provide a concrete education in freedom ( Wieck 1973: 97 ).<sup>62</sup> I shall elaborate upon this point now, and return to it in the context of EDA in 5.2.2 and in the anarcho-syndicalist format in 6.2.2.

The central theme of anarchism is that “Liberty can be created only by liberty” ( Bakunin 1990a: 179; cf Wieck 1973: 97; Bey 1991: 102 ). Ehrlich explains that “Liberation requires self-education and autonomy. Autonomous behavior and the regular practice of educating oneself are habits ... built up over years” ( 1996: 333; cf Ritter 1980: 104; Carter 1999: 267 ). Berkman notes the salient permutations of this theme: “If your object is to secure liberty, you must learn to do without authority and compulsion. If you intend to live in peace and harmony with your fellow-men, you and they should cultivate brotherhood and respect for each other. If you want to work together with them for your mutual benefit, you must practice co-operation” ( 1964: 62 ). My argument is that the strength and value of the EDA movement may be viewed on these terms. It is not just a site of protest and conflict, but of cooperative and right relations between people: the ‘power-with’ that, in Heller’s view, might “fracture the structure of domination” ( 2000: 8 ).

The foundation of freedom that I introduced in 2.2.2 has developed into a distinctive bundle of ethics, strategy and principles within the anarchist tradition, and it is the guidance for action provided by these that I examine in this section. I argue that anarchists frame revolution in terms of freedom versus authority ( Wieck 1973: 96 ). This perspective allows for both macro-revolutionary and micro-reformatory approaches, indeed it supports any process “through which people enlarge their autonomy and reduce their subjection to external authority” ( Ward 1988: 143; cf Zinn 1997: 653; Rejai 1984: 7 ). Begg repeats this theme in the environmental field when he states that “the goal of Green politics is achieved every time autonomy and development are increased” ( 1991: 15; cf Paul Goodman quoted in Clark 1981: backpage ). This section is devoted to an examination and formulation of this ethic.

Anarchists put the individual squarely in the centre of any action: personal autonomy and participation are key. Green overstates this as a quasi-religious principle - “a moral imperative for anarchism”- in which “Action may not bring tangible results, but it does bring ‘personal redemption’” ( 1971: 24; cf Horowitz 1964: 56 ). I will argue that anarchist direct action involves no necessary separation from practical efficacy, but it is true that “what unites and characterises all the various tactics advocated by the anarchists... is the fact that they are based on direct individual decisions... No coercion or delegation of responsibility occurs; the individual comes or goes, acts or declines, as he sees fit” ( Woodcock 1980: 29; cf *GA* 1999: 3; Begg 1991: 8 ). It is on this ethical basis that direct action is “particularly attractive to anarchists ... it is consistent with libertarian principles and also with itself” ( Woodcock 1980: 169 ).

The anarchism expounded in this thesis, however, urges not only that each revolutionary action *expresses* freedom, but also that it *supports* freedom. Reacting to the notorious association of Bakunin with Nechaev, who brutally applied a “systematic application of the principle that the end justifies the means” ( Deutsch quoted in Avrich 1987: 27; cf Camus 1971: 128-131; Nechaev 1989: 4-5 ), the anarchist movement came to emphasise the need for ethical and free means to achieve ethical and free ends. Kropotkin intones that “By proclaiming ourselves anarchists, we proclaim beforehand that we disavow any way of treating others in which we should not like them to treat us” ( 2001: 99; cf Bakunin 1990a: 208; Brown 1989: 8 ).<sup>63</sup> Anarchist practices which, while displaying autonomy, actually serve to close down spaces of freedom, may therefore be condemned. In 7.5 I shall consider whether this has become the case with the Mayday mobilisations of recent years.

I concur with sasha k that ethics are “at the heart of anarchism” ( 2001; cf Bakunin quoted in Skirda 2002: 17; Bufe 1998: 24 ), so much so that anarchism has been termed a “conscience of the left” ( Shatz in Bakunin 1990a: xxxvi ). These ethics are commonly articulated in terms of means-ends congruity ( Miller 1984: 93; Pepper 1993: 305 ). Thus Goldman writes that “No revolution can ever succeed as a factor of liberation unless the means used to further it be identical in spirit and tendency

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<sup>62</sup> Kropotkin pushes us towards the logic of ‘propaganda of the deed’ when he states that “By actions which compel general attraction, the new idea seeps into people’s minds and wins converts” ( 2001: 40 ). Similar ( if less grand ) sentiments were expressed in TAPP: “it’s doing actions that makes more actions happen” ( ‘Josh’, my meeting notes 2001 ). This position is criticised as ‘actionism’ by some anarchists, however, and in 6.3.3 we shall note the anarchist critique of Propaganda of the Deed forms that fail to meet the ethical directive of anarchism.

<sup>63</sup> The lesson was expressed by Bakunin, shortly before his death: “Realise at length that nothing living and firm can be built upon Jesuitical trickery, that revolutionary activity aiming to succeed must not seek its support in base and petty passions, and that no revolution can achieve victory without lofty and conspicuously clear ideas” ( quoted in Avrich 1987: 30 ).



with the *purposes* to be achieved” ( quoted in Zinn 1997: 648; cf Goldman in Woodcock 1980: 162; Marshall 1992b: 461; Bookchin 1971: 44-5 ). This may be linked to the ‘immediatism’ associated with direct action ( *GA* 1999: 4; Jordan 2002: 9 ), and the theme in the anarchist/Situationist tradition that views the reinvention of everyday life as a revolutionary act ( Roseneil 2000: 136; Moore 1997: 12; Vaneigem c1967; Clark 1981: 8 ). Ben Franks has done most to analyse this “particular ethic” within anarchist direct action, which requires both “that the means be in accordance with the ends ( prefiguration )”, and also that those who will benefit from the act are the subjects who participate in it ( Franks 2003: 13-24; cf 2006 ). By contrast, non-anarchist tactics such as “Constitutional methods do not practically resolve the social problem, nor are the agents of change – parliamentarians – the ones directly affected” ( Franks 2003: 167 ). We are considering the prefigurative elements of this formula now. The issue of whether the participants are also the ones affected may be seen in the terms of ‘representation’ illustrated in figure F2.3.

The historical development of means-ends congruity as an ethical principle has now been brought into service in the green movement. Thus Eckersley records that eco-anarchism promotes a “consistency between ends and means in Green political praxis” ( 1992: 145 ), and terms this “the ultimate principle of ecopraxis” ( 1987: 21; cf Begg 1991: 15; Ritter 1980: vi; Martin 2001: 175 ). However, if we take Frank’s view strictly, it follows that “those deep ecologists who seek to save nature by interfering with logging or dam construction, would not be involved in direct action, in a libertarian sense, as they are acting on behalf of others”: on behalf of ‘nature’. However, they may be re-included within the anarchist definition when they hold a wider, ecological sense of self: when “they see a connection between their well-being and the protection of nature” ( Franks 2003: 24; cf Moore: 10 ). Deep ecologists explicitly build this into their theorising, primitivists and others demonstrate it also when they equate wilderness to their own freedom ( *IE* 2005: 9; *GA* 1997a: 12 ). Beyond these particular articulations, however, I believe that it is more generally true that many if not most of those involved in EDA associated their own well-being with that of their beloved landscapes and, by embedding themselves in the wider systems of nature, expressed a wider, ecological self ( Heller [C] 1999; Smith 1999 ).

There are different versions of the means-ends argument within the anarchist plurality. Members of the peace movement, for example, affirm an intimate link between direct action and non-violence. Thus, when CD theorist Per Hørgren argues that “Direct action means that the end becomes the means” ( 1993: 11; cf *EEV* 1997: 1; Bufe 1988: 18; De Ligt 1937: 72; Martin 2001: 19 ) he means a very different thing from what the class-struggle anarchists mean by the exact same words. To Hørgren, direct action requires an additional injection of pacifist ethics before it can be either successful or coherent: “Neither the political *results* nor the use of the right *method* can justify an action’s negative consequences for people” ( 1993: 10; cf Baldelli 1971: 19 ). By contrast, class struggle anarchists view the means-ends principle of direct action in terms of workers’ self-organisation. I will look at the frameworks of CD theory in 6.3.2 and anarcho-syndicalism in 6.2.2 when I shall diversify our understanding of basic anarchist principle yet further. Here, however, I wish merely to emphasise that the inflections given to direct action by one tradition are not integral to the practice as a whole, nor binding on our understanding of the term.

Pacifists or Anarcho-Syndicalists may give Direct Action a pertinent inflection by smuggling in values from their own discourses ( see 6.3.4 and 6.2.2 ), but these do not define what direct action is ( Carter 1973: 22; cf Doherty, Plows & Wall 2003: 670 ). However, my argument is that the means-ends directive, and the injunction to use methods compatible with and conducive to freedom, do create an ethical centre no matter which particular version of direct action is being used. Walter acknowledges this theme in his consideration of anarchists’ roles within wider movements, such as environmentalism:

“The particular anarchist contribution ... is twofold - to emphasise the goal of a libertarian society, and to insist on libertarian methods of achieving it. This is in fact a single contribution, for the most important point we can make is not just that the end does not justify the means, but that the means determines the end - that means are ends in most cases” ( 1980: 172 ).

What is especially significant about the understanding of revolutionary action which we have now outlined, is that the means of action are what define it ( anarchism-through-practice ). Thus it is that in the quiet times of history, when revolutions in the conventional sense are not a part of life, activists can



remain just as 'revolutionary' if they employ direct action. It is on these grounds that I categorise EDA activists as anarchists in the truest sense.

Put at its most simple, direct action may be synonymous with revolution ( Carter 1973: 25; cf Grassby 2002: 192 ). Bookchin states that "Revolution is the most advanced form of direct action. By the same token, direct action in 'normal' times is the indispensable preparation for revolutionary action" ( 1971: 253; cf Dominick 1997: 16; *CW* 1997: 6 ).<sup>64</sup> Wieck suggests that "The habit of direct action is, perhaps, identical with the habit of being a free man, prepared to live responsibly in a free society" ( in Ehrlich 1996: 376 ). The *AF* support this argument with the case of EDA: "Whatever the label ... direct action against the means of environmental destruction and degradation is an act of resistance and ultimately one of the means by which revolution is realised" ( *AF* 2001a: 9 ). I will consider various of the stresses and tensions that arise through the actual performance of direct action, particularly with regard to the issues of coercion, violence and elitism, in later sections of this thesis.

NVDA has been claimed as the method to pursue the anarchist revolution, free of the dangers inherent in violent revolutions. Whichever term we use here – civil disobedience, NVDA, satyagraha – the quality of the method lies in its ability to achieve change without flouting anarchist principles and ethics ( Nettleau 1979: 388 ). As Nettleau records, Gandhi

"wanted resistance to evil and added to one method of resistance – that of active force – a second: resistance through disobedience ... do not what you are ordered to do, do not take the rifle which is given to you to kill your brothers" ( Nettleau in Tolstoy 1990: 17 ).

NVDA has been championed as a means "for the realisation of the fundamental objectives of anarchism" ( Bondurant 1965: 173 ) and "the most promising method for moving beyond capitalism" ( Martin 2001: 8; cf Woodcock 1992: 98 ). Woodcock argues that non-violent action "is not merely efficient as a social solvent, but it also avoids the loss of freedom which seems the inevitable consequence of civil war" ( 1992: 100 ). It enables both a method of struggle in keeping with anarchist ethics, and also suggests how order in an ideal society might be guaranteed - non-violent coercion ( Martin 2001: 184; Sharp 1973: 741-752; Purchase 1996: 86 ). It is to practical manifestations of NVDA that I will now turn.

#### 4.4

### Green Radicalism: Conclusion

In this chapter I began by emphasising the flexible and contested plurality of radical environmentalism, characterised by Benton and Short's argument that "While ... radical environmentalists agree that reformist environmentalism will not solve the environmental crisis, the debate *within* radical environmental discourse demonstrates numerous ideological positions, a mosaic of contested positions" ( 1999: 136 ). I looked at some of the contributory trends to this, particularly those relevant to the anarchist tradition, and clarified significant lines of resemblance and of difference between the different green radicalisms. Recognising that active green "networks are much more likely to be divided over strategy and praxis than ecocentrism versus anthropocentrism" ( Doherty 2002: 8 ), however, the second part of the chapter turned to the strategic advice advanced by anarchist writers and environmentalists-turned-anarchists in EDA. Here there is a tension, in that the strong strategic arguments of Bookchin and Carter's anarchism seem aimed at providing an overall direction to the movement ( Torgerson 1999: 29; Eckersley 1992: 153; Bookchin 1994a ), and insist on "theoretical and practical coherence" ( 1999: 26; cf Carter 1999: 252 ). This might raise a problem for a study that seeks to accept plurality and fluidity, if I were to accept either position as fixed and complete. In the next three chapters we shall look at many different viewpoints, and many strategic arguments that ground themselves in an anarchist ethics as they tell activists and environmentalists what to do, what to prioritise, and how to see their struggle. Yet these strategic arguments exist within a plurality, and they exist at the grassroots: they are not a vision presented from on-high, but an ongoing

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<sup>64</sup> The 1907 International Anarchist Congress urged its participants to "propagate and support only those forms and manifestations of direct action which carry, in themselves, a revolutionary character and lead to the transformation of society" ( quoted in Russell 1918: 84 ).



wrking-out and engagement with the dilemmas, the lessons and the ethical ideals of a living anarchist practice. So it is true that there is a tension between particular strategic viewpoints and a fluid, pluralistic acceptance of diversity: but this is not a tension that I need to resolve here in a rhetorical synthesis. Instead, it is a tension that is negotiated and solved, at the local, temporary level, every day by people 'doing it' on the ground. As Torgerson recognises, the paradoxes of practical life "cannot be logically reconciled but ... can sometimes be resolved through inventive action that bypasses, transcends, or unexpectedly reconfigures the abstract terms of the opposition" ( 1999: 103; Bakhtin 1993 ).

In this chapter I have explored the relationship between anarchism and ecological thought. It prepares the ground for an application of anarchist ideas to the practices of environmental protest, green networking and strategic discussion amongst the scenes of environmental direct action. I hope to have demonstrated that ecological ( even ecocentric ) thinking may be genuinely allied to the anarchist tradition, without us having to conceptualise this narrowly or proprietorially ( anarchism does not own or define environmentalism, and ecology cannot be explained by anarchism alone ). Many green and anarchist ideas are compatible ( and have been demonstrated so by practice over many centuries ), but this does not mean that they are blissfully harmonious. Rather, the diverse and fluid nature of environmentalism introduced in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 provides a range of positions that may confront, critique and amend anarchist ideas, just as the equally dynamic, varied and cuttingly critical discourse of anarchism provides a standard from which all green strategies and sentiments may be judged. Finally, I wish to emphasise that anarchism is not outside of the environmental movement, but rather eco-anarchists ( and also critical anarchists, and many green activists who would not label themselves anarchist ), have been a part of its lifeblood since it became a major force in the 1970s. As such, the subjects of this thesis do not become 'cut out' from the green movement when I label them anarchist and apply anarchist terms to their practices and discourse, but rather they may inhabit all these subject positions at the same time, shifting and re-forming all the time. The question of whether they are acting as a force for anarchist revolution, however, was the topic of 4.3.4. Here I placed the ethics of freedom at the heart of the anarchist project, and I argued that the twin principles of freedom and means-ends congruity may be applied to green practice. I placed freedom at the centre of the anarchist revolutionary project, and characterised direct action as 'revolution in the quiet times'. I identified the perspectives from which action can be identified as beneficial to the anarchist project, and supported by anarchists. This strategic understanding will be brought to bear on the actual practices of EDA covered in the next three chapters.



## 5.1

### Chapter Introduction

In 5.2.1 I first develop the anarchist critique of institutionalised environmentalism that I introduced in 4.3.3 to identify the reasons why anarchists condemn such institutions as vehicles for change, and to set the scene for the emergence of a radically different, extra-institutional movement of confrontational direct action. In 5.2.2 Radicalisation I look at the motivations of eco-activism and then follow it as an experience: here I consider why anarchists support it, and why it's important for anarchist hopes. I fill out my argument for an experiential anarchism, in which anarchism through practice is matched by psychological and social processes, both alienating and empowering, that support and encourage an anarchist mindset - at least temporarily and in that context, and with the possibility of extending beyond. In 5.2.3 I look at the immediate context of Earth First!, which arose as one of the 'disorganisations' of DIY culture. This milieu of counter-cultural and freedom-loving protest is significant as an example of informal anarchism in which diversity is not just tolerated, but celebrated.

Earth First! crystallised from the environmental wing of this movement, and in the sections of 5.3 I shall chart its arrival on the UK environmental scene, its anarchist tactics, aims and strategies, and I shall examine its organisational culture in order to draw out the diversity of anarchist arguments and identities that could co-exist therein. I will be considering the nature of an anarchist environmental network; the tension between individuality and collectivity; the transcendence of the old dualisms such as lifestyle versus materialism, micro versus macro, revolutionary versus reformist. I shall then look at the actual detail of how EF!ers articulated different negotiations of the issues of activism, in recognisably anarchist terms, within a broader consensus of anarchist theory. This will reveal the diversity of ideologies that can exist at the heart of activist anarchism.

## 5.2      **Activist Anarchism**

### 5.2.1

#### **An Institutionalised Environmental Movement**

“the campaign becomes an institution for the regulation and control of dissent”  
( Law 1991: 28 ).

Anarchists are greatly concerned by, and informed by, the historical tendency for once radical organisations to partake of a process toward institutionalisation and deradicalisation. As Walter states it, “Every group tends towards oligarchy, the rule of the few, and every organisation tends towards bureaucracy, the rule of the professionals; anarchists must always struggle against these tendencies, in the future as well as the present, and among themselves as well as among others” ( Walter 2002: 39; cf Chan 2004: 119; Clark 1981: 18 ). This ‘institutionalisation thesis’ is significant for my thesis, both analytically for anarchism in justifying extra-institutional, anti-governmental action, and also empirically, in going part-way to explaining why the EDA of the 1990s took the form it did.

The tendency toward institutionalisation, codified into an ‘iron law’ by Michels ( 1959 ), was tracked in the examples of the trade unions ( Woodcock 1992: 87; Alinsky 1969: 29; Polletta 2002: 37 ) and the socialist parties who uniformly abandoned their radicalism once they achieved power ( Boggs 1986; Michels 1959; Miller 1984: 89; Bookchin 1998b ). More recently it has been cited with regard to the Green Party ( Bahro 1978: 40-41; *Schnews* 2002: 23; Bookchin 1990a: 160; Jennings 2005: 26; ACF c1991: 53 ), and indeed anarchists have noted “the self-preservationist tendency of *all* organisations” (



Dowie 1995: 209 operating in their own networks ( Young 2001: 5 ): *Class War* dissolved their own organisation specifically to combat this conservatising trend ( *CW* 1997: 8-15 ). Contemporary SM theorists identify a continuing propensity for radical movements to 'normalise' to more institutional and conventional forms ( Crook 1992: 162, Scott 1990: 11; Lovenduski & Randall 1993; Piven & Cloward 1977; Klandermans 1997: 138-139; Tilly 1978; Della Porta & Diani 1999: 147 ). There are two main aspects of this process. First are organisational shifts ( formalisation, professionalisation, internal differentiation ) that change the social relations within an organisation away from the anarchist ideals of equal participation and exchange ( Della Porta & Diani 1999: 131-143; McCarthy & Zald 1973 ). Second, and concurrent with these structural changes are political shifts, in which once radical ideas and critiques lose their bite ( Purkis 2001: 49; Jamison 2001 ). In Chapter 3 we noted this with the case of feminism in the academy: here we shall examine the case of the environmental organisations, and so set the scene for the explicit radicalism and anti-institutionalism of Earth First!.

The 'second wave' of environmentalism that emerged in the seventies was informed by this tendency, as Jonathan Porritt demonstrated when he lamented "the tragedy ... that almost all of so-called 'dissent' have gradually been sucked into this nexus of non-opposition. Academics, the media, even the established Church, they all bend the knee at the right time" ( 1986: 118 ). The older 'first wave' environmental organisations were accused of losing their radical, emancipatory spirit. The National Trust, for example, that had begun the 20<sup>th</sup> century campaigning for common land for the people to enjoy ( Weideger 1994: 21 ), was by the century's end transformed into a bureaucratic landowner that excluded the common herd from encroaching on the land of the elite ( 1994: 86; Spokesperson for Friends and Families of Travellers quoted in *Schnews* 1996 No.27; Hetherington 2003: 11; Chevenix-Trench 2004: 39-43 ). The radical environmental protesters of my study therefore encountered the National Trust and similar institutions not as an ally but as a collaborator in environmental destruction and alienation from the land ( RA! 1997; Cresswell 1996: 78 ).

Environmental organisations such as Greenpeace and Porritt's Friends of the Earth ( FoE ) were formed in the 1970s out of a perception that the existing environmental groups had become too tame: "In contrast to older groups such as the CPRE, these new environmental pressure groups ... used high-profile symbolic direct action to create media attention, and so place issues on the policy agenda" ( Wall 1999: 25 ). Yet by the late 1980s, these organisations too were changing ( Lamb 1996: 182; Tokar 1997; Manes 1990: 59 ). Weston could state that "Friends of the Earth has moved from being the amateur, evangelical, fundamentalist ecocentric pressure group of the 1970s to a professional pragmatist organisation which is run virtually like any other modern company" ( quoted in Wall 1999: 37 ). Lamb related that "The momentum of FoE's campaigns seemed to some onlookers to slacken in [ the ] unwonted atmosphere of official approval", and disaffected activists "felt the organisation was becoming ineffective as an agent of change in relation to government and industry. Still others felt excluded from the campaign side of things" ( 1996: 166 ). In 5.3.3 we shall see that this dampening of activism and radicalism influenced the creation of EF! in the UK. I will look at how the organisational side of the ENGOS' institutionalisation was mirrored by a decline in confrontational politics.

As the membership of some ENGOS grew beyond even the membership of the main political parties ( Coxall 2001: 2 ), it meant "that much of their resources and energy must go into management, and in particular the maintenance of their memberships" ( Tom Burke quoted in Rawcliffe 1992: 3-4; cf Dowie 1995: 42-47; Morris 1995: 55; Scarce 1990: 52-53 ). The relationship between organisation and membership shifted and business attitudes were embraced, through partnerships, fund-raising and in their organisational structure: "These resources have allowed the national groups to develop into more corporate organisations, with administration, marketing, fundraising, media, and legal departments" ( Rawcliffe 1992: 3 ). In other words, the ENGOS came to resemble the institutions they work with, in both their structure and discourse. Earth First! writers criticised this on grounds familiar to an anarchist discourse concerned with co-option

"The personnel of NGOs and companies became ever more interchangeable - indeed, by virtue of their similar structures, they began to develop an affinity with one another, they began to understand each others' needs - they recognised, as Thatcher said of Gorbachev, that these were people they could do 'business' with. Cooperation began to replace confrontation, and the euphemistically named 'strategic alliances' between NGOs and particular companies started to develop" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 22; cf Foreman 1991b: 38; Burbridge 1994: 8-9; Letter, *Do or Die* 1994: 53; Dowie 1995: 116; Rawcliffe 1995: 29 ).



These organisational and discursive shifts were paralleled by a shift in political tactics, so that the 1980s saw a general move away from the original consciousness-raising and anti-establishment protest of the environmental movement, into organisations aiming to engage with - and develop solutions to the environmental crisis in alliance with - government and big business ( Porritt 1997: 67; Dowie 1995: 106; Rose quoted in Bennie 1998: 400; Richards & Heard 2005: 23; Grant 2000: 19-20 ). Greenpeace, for example, argued that ‘Ambulance chasing environmentalism’ had lost its value ( Taylor 1994; Melchett 1997 ) and its distinctive strategy of raising public consciousness through media ‘mind-bombs’ ( Hunter 1979: 67 ) had run its course: environmental concern between the sixties and nineties had moved from a marginal to a central concern of the majority, governments and business included ( Dowie 1995: 222; Rawcliffe 1995 ). The focus of Greenpeace attention therefore came to reside with “more enlightened companies”, who were identified as the most likely agents of positive environmental change, ( Grove-White 1997: 18; cf Melchett quoted in Bennie 1998: 403; Porritt 1997: 67; Richards & Heard 2005: 23 ). We shall see that the activists of EDA held a different view.

In its deployment of this strategy, Greenpeace utilised consumer pressure ( Dr. Jeremy Leggett in Greenpeace 1996: 18; Melchett 1997 ), and worked with businesses to develop ‘green solutions’, such as new commodities like fridges: “Alternatives which, while radical, can still ‘work’ within broadly the present structure” ( Greenpeace 1996: 22; cf Millais 1990: 55; Secrett quoted in Lamb 1996: 191 ). Greenpeace now ran “campaigns that aim to ensure specific business sectors expand, gain new markets and become far more profitable” ( Millais 1990: 56 ). Millais noted that “Some see this ... as evidence that we have jumped from the protest boat to the boardroom. But ... It is about defining ways forward” ( in Greenpeace 1996: 22 ). He even made the claim that “solutions intervention are a new form of direct action” ( Millais 1990: 52 ), but however prefigurative this strategy may be, the world it prefigures is one of capitalism, of consumers and of continuing disempowerment: not a direct action legitimate to anarchism.

EF! writers argued that the structure and strategy of Greenpeace had come to embody part of the problem many radical ecologists challenge: it engages in the conventional liberal politics of a pressure group; its hierarchical structure repeats unequal power-relations; and its ‘supporters’ are told to stay passive, and watch their representatives on the telly ( Eyerman & Jamison 1989; cf Wall 1997: 26; Rüdiger 1983; Corr 1999: 195; Steve 2001 ). Even the ‘Direct Action’ of Greenpeace represents publicity used to pressure the government and corporations according to its agenda, and to gain converts through the dramatic pictures produced by mass media: classically ‘liberal’ direct action carried out by an elite ( Hunter 1979: 251-2; Richards & Heard 2005: 33-4; ACF c1991: 53; letter, *Do or Die* 2000: 215; McLeish 1996: 40 ). I shall explore this distinction between anarchist and liberal direct action in section 6.2.1. ENGOs such as Greenpeace prioritised results – media exposure, increased membership, increased ‘power’ in the world of pressure politics., but EF! writers argued that “In the process, they disempower their staff and members and reduce the green movement’s potential effectiveness” ( Burbridge 1994: 9; cf Letter, *Do or Die* 1994: 53; Foreman 1991b: 38; Jasper 1999: 365 ). We shall see that EF!, by contrast, share anarchism’s concern for right process: of the equal importance of the *means* by which results are gained.

After the ‘first wave’ of conservation groups such as the National Trust, and the ‘second wave’ of populist environmentalism in the seventies, critical commentators characterised “free market ‘third wave’ environmentalism” as “the institutionalisation of compromise” ( Dowie 1995: 106-107 ). It was charged that the British Government succeeded in neutralising protest by incorporating environmental groups into its own *modus operandi* ( Richards & Heard 2005: 26; Rüdiger 1995: 225 ): the ENGOs’ “access to the policy making process” proved “sufficient for them to remain well-ordered and non-disruptive” ( Jordan & Richardson quoted in Doherty & Rawcliffe 1995; cf Jordan & Maloney 1997: 175-186; Grant 2000: 101-7; Rootes 1999: 156; Rawcliffe 1992 ). Chatterjee & Finger phrase the critique sharply:

“NGOs are trapped in a farce: they have lent support to governments in return for some overall concessions on language and thus legitimised the process of increased industrial development. The impact of lobbying was minimal while that of compromise will be vast, as NGOs have come to legitimise a process that is in essence contrary to what many of them have been fighting for years” ( Chatterjee & Finger 1994: 36; cf Burbridge 1994: 8-9 ).<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> This is demonstrated by the co-opting of the environmental movement’s own language and internal discourse ( Grove-White 1995: 269-270 ), such as with the case of ‘sustainable development’, where the radical hopes applied to the phrase by ecologists were overridden by the sustained growth ideology of the government, which then “facilitated the hijacking and compromise of



The argument exists that if the ENGOs had lost control of the environmental agenda to the government and MNCs, then that might mean it was at last being taken seriously ( James Thornton quoted in Dowie 1995: 58; Scott 1990: 151 ). By allying themselves with the establishment and the primary agents of environmental destruction, however, the big environmental organisations came under fire for themselves serving as the first line of defence against growing public consciousness of the ecological crisis. Thus contributors to *Do or Die* wrote that ENGOs “mediate and divert the environmental concern that can be so disturbing to the status quo, channelling it into less antagonistic, more manageable forms” ( *Do or Die* 1997: 22; cf *Do or Die* 1995: 63; *Do or Die* 1999: 13; Garner 1996: 129; Law 1991: 19 ). Robin Grove-White ( himself allied to Greenpeace ) argues that the real importance of ENGOs is as catalysts to “deeper structural tensions in the industrial societies in which they came to prominence” ( 1992: 11; cf Torgerson 1999: 25; Hjelmar 1996 114 ). On this same basis, Welsh advances the anarchist perspective that movements must remain marginal to retain their vitality: “new social movements do not and cannot operate within state space ... They can only exist at the margins, as to come inside would effectively kill the impetus for innovation, and cultural critique of the established system” ( Welsh 2000: 204-5; cf Jasper 1999: 375; Carter 1999: 127 ). Many in EDA believe the only way to stay effective is therefore to stay outside the institutions ( Mike Roselle quoted in *EF!J* 24(6) 2004: 48 ). By doing so, it is arguable that they have kept alive the radical challenge of environmentalism that I introduced in the previous chapter.

There is a danger that the tone of inevitability in the ‘institutionalisation thesis’ might lead one to assume, like Michels, that the above organisational processes are inevitable and total. But this would be to ignore the power of human agency. Human potential is the central plank in anarchist hopes for change ( Pouget 2003: 8 ). In this situation, with the institutionalisation and neutralisation of green radicalism, human agency was demonstrated by the emergence of new, militant and anarchistic groupings in the early nineties ( Doherty 2005: 131; Dynes & McCarthy 1992; Doherty 1999a; Lean 1994; Dowie 1995: 207; cf Rootes 1999: 173 ). In 1994, Taylor thus wrote that “the direct-action agenda has moved elsewhere, to the anarchic structures of Earth First!” ( 1994; cf Tokar 1988: 134; Garner 1996: 145; Rawcliffe 1995; Roger Higman quoted in Lamb 1996: 17; Scarce 1990: 103 ). As *Green Anarchist* phrased it, “Greenies voted with their feet against reformism. Instead of paying FoE bureaucrats salaries, they’re spending their dosh on D-locks” ( 1993 ). Aims were broadened to “wider cultural change as well as piecemeal legislation” ( Garner 1996: 145 ), and autonomous action was chosen above the deal-making and compromise of “conventional, hierarchical green organisations” ( B 1998; cf Garland quoted in Dynes & McCarthy 1992 ).

EF!ers, in defining the alternative to institutional environmentalism, expressed an anarchist logic which included the key components of anti-capitalism, the anarchist critique of organisations, and means-ends prefiguration. EF! voices charged that “you can’t fight business with business -regardless of the content, the form itself is barren” ( *Do or Die* 1997: 23; Letter, *Do or Die* 1994: 53 ); that “a movement, such as the green movement, which is essentially hierarchical, undemocratic and capitalist, will create a society which is hierarchical, undemocratic and capitalist”; and that the positive solution to this lies with the principle that “our means and ends must be consistent” ( Burbridge 1994: 9 ). What I find most interesting, is that these essentially anarchist principles were not restated due to a commitment to traditional anarchist ideology, but were arrived at afresh, *again*, as conclusions drawn from experience ( Beynon 1999: 295; Donnelly 2004: 48; St.Clair 2004 ). In the next section I will look at some of the processes by which those conclusions were arrived at.

## 5.2.2

### Radicalisation

“A Beginner’s Guide to Tree Protesting:

You will need;

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environmental goals” ( Thomson & Robins 1994: 10; DA 2004: 18-20 ). In Rose’s term, the radical green ideas were ‘colonised’ ( 2004: 3 ).



- A desire to protect the environment
- An identified area of land that is about to be trashed
- Some other enthusiastic people

Everything else just turns up. Honestly” ( Evans 1998: 154 ).

The converse to the institutionalisation thesis, and its antidote, is the process of radicalisation that anarchists and others identify with the experience of extra-institutional struggle, particularly by means of direct action. In this section, I will introduce both the negative and positive parts of the ‘radicalisation thesis’ ( political alienation; individual and community empowerment ), particularly as observed with the case of NVDA. In doing so, I am arguing for the value of experience in informing an anarchist sensibility, and so clarifying my notion of ‘activist anarchism’ in Chapter 2. The radicalisation thesis advances reasons explaining why positive impacts are produced through avoidance of, and opposition to, these institutional structures and processes. A crucial point for my thesis is that people *become* anarchist through a radicalisation process: they are not necessarily pre-formed anarchist identities ( Cox & Barker 2002: 13; Seel 1999: 333 ). It is to this experiential anarchism that I consider the most point of non-ideological anarchism. I will then examine Earth First! as the clearest example of an ecological activist anarchist organisation. Its very existence throws up questions about ideology and identity: how do environmental direct activists express their ideology through action? How do they negotiate the tension between autonomy and collective identity? If they are not traditional or ideological anarchists, then what brand of anarchists are they? In the final part of this chapter I will assess these issues through an examination of the arguments, proposals and critiques that EF! activists put to paper at a gathering in 1998, called the ‘Winter Moot’. These reveal that EF! does not express just one form of anarchism, but many; and they demonstrate that the anarchism that can be gleaned from activist debate is as strong and healthy as any traditional or text-bound formulation.

I emphasised in section 4.2.3 that the environmental critique served as a social and political critique, but I wish to temper that point now by returning to the environmental impulses for activism. Beynon states that “most environmentalists are anarchists primarily by intuition and by practice, rather than by conscious decision or education” ( 1999: 295; cf Chimpy 2 2002: 10; Scarce 1990: 9; Eisenhower 2004: 36; Seel 1997a: 111; IE 2005: 18 ). Their primary motivation is environmental concern ( Beynon 1999; Watson 1998: 59; Begg 1991: 1; Liz Galst in Roseneil 2000: 60-61 ): environmental activism is a genuine response to assaults on the environment ( Dowie 1995: 206 ). Beynon argues that “Those activists that have come to anarchist ways of thinking, as well as working, have done so through a dwindling personal faith in the current status of environmental protection, the toothlessness of the mainstream reformist agencies and an awareness of the problem being greater than any of these or of one road destroying one hill or one woodland” ( 1999: 295-296 ). Anarchism has not been imposed upon environmentalism by a few persuasive writers, therefore, but has been self-generated by the movement ( Seager 1993: 270-271 ). This is anarchism not as ideology but as practice.

The experience of environmental resistance is an educative process ( Tandon in Taylor 1995: 175; *Schnews* 2002: 9 ), particularly when “Mediated by the various discourses ... of feminism, anarchism and, to a lesser extent, civil liberties” ( Roseneil 1995: 149; cf Burgmann 2000: 87 ). Pepper states that “political action always politicises those taking part” ( 1986: 164 ) and Vester ( 1975 ) articulates a Marxist evaluation of the process in which social movements represent ‘collective learning processes’ ( cited in Cox 1998; cf Barker 2001: 187 ). An anarchist articulation of what I am here terming ‘the radicalisation thesis’ need not remain within the field of workers’ struggle and organisation ( although I do look at this in section 6.2.2 ), but can be applied to any movement of direct action, self-organisation and resistance. Woodcock gives the example of the Committee of One Hundred:

“as always happens when militant pacifism confronts a government irremediably set on warlike preparations, there was a spontaneous surge of anti-state feeling – i.e. anarchist feeling still unnamed – and of arguments for the direct action methods favoured by the anarchists” ( 1980: 457; cf Grassby 2002: 175 ).

The tone of inevitability in these pronouncements is interesting, suggesting a linkage to views on human nature, but to me they have an over-generalised air. I prefer to use the term ‘may’, not ‘will’: radicalisation is a tendency and a possibility that is dependent on the active agency of the people involved.



In this section I will first discuss some of the elements which, when encountered by participants in a local and specific environmental campaign, encourage a transgressive, indeed anarchist sensibility. To begin with the negative, disillusioning elements, we may note the change in attitudes to the supposedly 'neutral' institutions of police, media and democratic process. A road protester thus writes that "For a long time the police were seen to be really 'impartial keepers of the peace'. This is being replaced by open hostility and defiance of the law" ( Andy 1996: 8; WPH 1998: 1; Richards 1981: 125; *Schnews* 1997 Nos. 28/29; Roseneil 1995: 133-153; Roseneil 2000: 253-263 ).<sup>66</sup> Protesters often find that violent and prejudiced experience at the hands of the police is also frequently matched by a vilification in the media ( Welsh 2000: 195; Correspondence with Jacob, Third Battle of Newbury, 12.3.1996 ). 'Positive' coverage in the media can also be a soul-destroying thing, as individuals turned into the media creations of 'Swampy' and 'Animal' discovered in coverage of the anti-roads movement ( *Do or Die* 1998: 35-37; Paterson 2000: 156; Animal quoted in Evans 1998: 178; WWMM 1997; ). As a 'respectable' protester is quoted by Welsh, the experience of trying to change things from below can cause severe political disillusionment: "It really shatters you when you think about democracy. You become ... anti-establishment, they force you that way" ( 2000: 192; cf Chris Gilham quoted in Brass & Koziell 1997: 37; Welsh 1996: 31 ). Most interestingly, this disillusionment is often mirrored in the progression of tactics, from respectful lobbying, expressing faith in the institutional system, to militant, transgressive and state-defying repertoires ( Roseneil 1995: 99-100; Andy 1996: 8; Welsh 2000: 192 ).

In addition to questioning the system of representative democracy and its supposedly 'neutral' institutions, opposition to particular developments and issues broadened into a wider and more general critique. Andy reports from the anti-roads movement, for example, that "With increasing arrests and prison sentences since the Criminal Justice Act was passed, eco-activists have been forced to question the whole system. There is a growing awareness that it is Capitalism's nature to pollute and destroy the environment" ( Andy 1996: 8; cf SPCA 1998 ).<sup>67</sup> Indeed, "activism often leads to a broader analysis of power and how it might be transformed" ( Doherty 2002: 15; cf Roseneil 2000: 241; McKay 1996: 135 ). Amongst the implications of this for campaigners on specific local issues, is that the breadth of their opposition and critique will spread ( Doherty 2002: 208 ). In the case of EDA, this proved true, indeed it was often a stated aim of protest organisers, as Seel reports at the Pollok Free State: through participation "the core group hoped that the wider Free State 'citizenry' and supporters would learn about power, structural links between state and capital, and how these impact upon their everyday lives and environment" ( 1997a: 122 ).

The most uncontroversial demonstration of radicalisation is provided by evidence from life histories ( Jasper 1997; Newman 2001; Epstein 1991; McAdam 1988; Roseneil 2000: 246 ), which reveal how "the experience of campaigning often leads to changes in identity towards a more radical perspective" ( Doherty 2002: 6 ). We should not assume this change is shared equally across the community, but examples are manifest from EDA. After the Newbury anti-road protests receded, for example, Franks records that the radicalisation of some climbers and archaeologists remained ( 2003: 31 ).

Beyond the individuals taking part, the case can also be made that the activism, protest and challenge of social movements politicises attitudes in wider society: in a manner conducive to anarchism. Corr writes that

"Campaigns educate society about hidden inequalities and the ways which they can be overcome. Campaigns erode the culture of subservience that afflicts society as a whole. Campaigns encourage people, both on a societal and individual level, to free themselves of what are ultimately self-imposed psychological strictures. ... encourage other social movements to grow and expand movement goals" ( 1999: 182-3; cf Richards 1981: 125 ).

Anarchists do not consider this broadening critique to be a purely negative development, but it is also possible to identify more straightforwardly positive aspects, for as "these groups discover what they

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<sup>66</sup> As an EF!er puts it: "we have learned ... from our struggles. We have surely seen enough loaded public inquiries, enough police and bailiff violence, enough beautiful places trashed and enough of our friends sent down to see the state as our enemy" ( ATW 1998 ).

<sup>67</sup> There was a consensus in certain discussions at the 1997 EF! Gathering that "people in the movement had become more politicised over the years", as reflected in the move "away from single-issue politics" and "the growing willingness to identify capitalism as the root of the problem" ( SPCA 1998 ). I consider this further in sections 5.3.7 and 7.5. Although I did not participate in all the same experiences as the people in those discussions, my own story too is one where experience has confirmed, hardened and sophisticated my anarchist views.



considered primarily their individual problem is also a problem of the others”, they may come to realise they need each other ( Alinsky 1969: 156; cf Pepper 1986: 164; Della Porta & Diani, 1999: 92; GA 1999: 3 ). The struggle thus builds solidarity and community ( Welsh 2000: 191, 193; Pepper 1986: 164; Osha Neumann quoted in Epstein 1991: 8 ).<sup>68</sup> As RTS agitprop declares,

“By taking direct action, people make connections, they talk and communicate with each other, they break down the isolation and fragmentation of this alienated society ... people realise that their particular local struggles are part of a wider problem - the global economy” ( RTS Flyer 1998; cf de Cleyre 1912: 1; Clark 1981: 16 ).

The building of community takes place not only between movements in struggle ( Roseneil 2000: 2 ), but within particular pre-existing communities also. Epstein reports that “In each of the issue-based movements in which it has appeared, nonviolent direct action has involved building community” ( 1991: 1; cf Simone Wilkinson in Roseneil 2000: 57; Heller 2000: 124 ). This is especially true when a particular and well-loved local place is threatened and people rally together to defend it. We shall note in the next section that class was not a unifying thread in the DIY or EDA protests of the early nineties. Instead, the threat of losing a cherished local landscape or green space could provide a focus around which members of all classes could find common cause, at least temporarily ( Featherstone 1998: 24; cf Burgmann 2000: 87 ).

The method of NVDA is often placed at the centre of the process of radicalisation. Welsh relates that “The assumption that citizens will abide by laws and accept the precepts of wider governance is radically overturned by certain forms of non-violent direct action” ( 2000: 154 ), and for that reason, “No state would be prepared to risk training its populace in full nonviolence action techniques ... It would then be all too easy for them to ‘rout’ the police: civil obedience, for example, could no longer be ensured by customary violent means” ( Routley 1984: 132 ). It is worth considering the terms in which Welsh puts the case:

“In organising and participating in large-scale non-violent interventions people are required to take responsibility for every aspect of the action from the most basic, e.g. latrines, to unforeseeable events – perhaps the last-minute appearance of a barbed wire fence or riot police. Exposure to such situations on numerous occasions suggests to this observer that the diversity of human cultural capital prevalent within such sites nearly always provides a workable solution to fill every need as it arises. The more people are exposed to this kind of experience the greater the collective capacity for autonomous action in seemingly unlikely areas of a society becomes” ( 2000: 155; cf Pouget 2003: 5 ).

Welsh here restates the anarchist valorisation of human agency, and it is revealing that this is displayed precisely in the location where the state is opposed – is temporarily absent – and a grassroots collective ( but diverse ) will be proved capable of self-organisation. In addition to the negative, but anarchist, development of anti-statist feeling, therefore, direct action can provide a positive realisation of confidence, both in one’s own autonomy and in collective strength ( the twin poles of anarchism ).

This empowerment can take a prosaic, practical form, as with the many practical skills and confidence-building learnt through anti-roads protest ( Franks 2003: 30; cf Corr 1999: 23; Cockburn 1977: 64; Roseneil 2000: 93-109 ). But more crucial and central to the experience of direct action is the psychological involvement and expression that gives activists the bonding moments and peak memories that they hold onto afterwards. Merrick’s account of the ‘Reunion Rampage’ in 1997 when a crowd of anti-roads activists trashed and burnt a security compound at Newbury, presents us with one such occasion:

“Anyone brought up in a regimented hierarchical society is conditioned to have respect for the Powers That Be. With a mixture of the idea that They Wouldn’t Make Laws For No Good Reason and a Fear Of Punishment, they give us a deference to authority, we are taught to obey the voice that wears a uniform.

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<sup>68</sup> Della Porta & Diani claim: “Through collective action, individuals rediscover their ‘natural’ affinity with each other, like-minded people, which had, for too long, been hidden” ( 1999: 92; cf Jordan 2002: 12; Clark 1981: 19 ). As Notes from Nowhere phrase it, “Resisting together, our hope is reignited” ( 2003: 29; cf Camus 1971: 21 ). Solidarity, as the anarcho-sindicalists emphasise, is itself an entry-way into an anarchist world-view ( see 6.2.2 ), and can throw up unexpected allies, as the RTS-dockers experience demonstrated ( Franks 2003: 30 ) ( see 7.4 ).



This Fear Of Authority is the greatest force holding us back from realising our true power, our *real* capability for making things change. When a crowd realises there's a dozen of us for every one of them and decides to ignore the authority of the uniform, there's NOTHING they can do to stop us. This is what happened yesterday. We went for the fence and they couldn't stop us. We got to touch Middle Oak. Two hundred of us surrounded the tree singing 'Jerusalem', then did a massive celebratory hokey-cokey.

It was the most focused and clear thinking crowd I've *ever* known. Nobody held back; of the 800 or so people there, only about 30 didn't come in to the compound. We moved almost as one from area to area, unafraid of security guards, unafraid of damaging the machinery, but with respect for people. I have no right to risk anyone's safety but my own. I have no interest in, desire for or tolerance of violence against people, and as far as I could see nor did the crowd. We went and sat on the diggers and tipper trucks. After a while we went for the giant crane. Security guards surrounded it, but there were so many of us, we just prised them off, explaining that we'd won today and they should give up. A security guard next to me got knocked over, and protestors immediately helped him to his feet...

...It wasn't chaotic, there was a sense of purpose, of collective will, of carnival, celebration, strong magic, triumph of people power, of a small but very real piece of justice being done" ( Merrick 1997: 2; cf Roseneil 2000: 195 )

Many commentators and participants concur that the "inspiring, personally empowering side of activism is one of its key strengths" ( Maxey 1999: 200; cf Melucci, 1989; Starhawk 1989; Sian Edwards in Roseneil 2000: 275 ). Lichterman notes that activists possess a 'psychological developmental model' of activism, in which they move from 'denial' to 'empowerment' ( 1996: 87 ) and Franks concurs that "Direct action ... recognises that identities alter through the practice of such methods, in the most simplistic form – from passive victim to active resistor" ( 2003: 22-3; cf Roseneil 2000: 59 ). George Marshall, an organiser with Rising Tide, presents activism as the diametric opposite to the 'Passive Bystander Effect', arguing that once you know how to watch out for the effect, you never have to be victim of it again ( Talk at Newcastle University 2001 ). Activism is a powerful antidote to despair ( Roseneil 2000: 60 ).

I will conclude by returning to Beynon's assertions that eco-anarchism is driven primarily by environmental commitment. This is predicated on two significant issues: a sense of, or connection to nature ( "intuitive ecological consciousness" in Scarce's terms ( 1990: 9 ) ), and an emotional, rather than a primarily ideological or rationally articulated beginning ( IE 2005: 18; cf Jasper 1999: 113 ). This returns us to the point I made in 2.3.4 for an emotional as well as a rational basis for anarchism, and for the validity of an intuitive or experiential anarchism. Smith argues that, rather than theoretical argument or articulated 'principles', it is the experience and expression of a "practical 'ecological' sense" that is central to the possibility of a real, and radical, green future ( Smith 2001: 216; Osman quoted in Epstein 1991: 9 ). For anarchism, also, Neal argues that "when you get a group of people working together, organising and engaging in direct action against illegitimate authority, you're more likely to have folks sympathetic to anarchism than any other doctrine, which calls for obedience and passivity. The social struggle itself promulgates the anarchist idea, when waged anarchistically" ( 1997 ). The importance of actually doing things ourselves ( DIY ) cannot be overestimated: "successful attainment of objectives is much more meaningful to people who have achieved the objectives through their own efforts" ( Alinsky 1969: 174-5; cf Katrina Allen quoted in Roseneil 2000: 107 ).

In friendly disagreement with local Trotskyists, it is this factor that I have used to justify 'our' methods rather than SWP-style party-building, in which thoughts and decisions come down from on-high. Activities from campaigns to co-operatives "provide people with experience of direct action and autonomy" ( EFH 1998 ) Alan Carter emphasises the value of this practice in anarchist skills: "Just as any attempt to set up a participatory democracy seems to require of us that we learn democratic skills, *any* workable anarchy seems to require the acquisition of cooperative skills" ( 1999: 267 ). April Carter argues that "those forms of anarchism which seem to be least political often, in fact, promote a sense of individual social responsibility. Standing aside from conventionally conceived politics may paradoxically enable anarchists to realise certain values of citizenship, and an ideal of political community, almost lost within the present meaning of 'politics'" ( 1971: 105 ). Looking at this process optimistically, Alan Carter suggests that "self-organised environmentalist opposition to the state can, in the process, generate prefigurative anarchist forms capable of socialising individuals towards a cooperative autonomy" ( 1999: 269 ).



In this section, I have presented the counterweight to the gloomy institutionalisation thesis, in which anarchists and other radicals place their hope and delight in the processes of radicalisation. Elements included in this tendency are disillusionment with ‘democratic process’, police and media; a widening of political perspectives; greater confidence; stronger communities; and greater skills and skill-sharing. The power of direct action is predicated, in part, on this process, by which anarchists judge success ( in often non-quantifiable terms ). This marks out anarchist criteria of success from Trotskyite organisation-building or liberal policy-affecting. The power of EDA, inspired by ecological sentiment, thus stands at the heart of anarchist processes.

In Chapter 2, I argued for the legitimacy and possible primacy of ‘informal’, non-explicit anarchism, and I placed EDA within this category. The radicalisation process lies at the heart of this claim: it explains why such movements become a hotbed of anarchist practice and sentiment, just as the institutionalisation thesis is offered as an explanation of why bureaucratic organisations become a hotbed of accommodation and hierarchisation. Ideological or explicit organisations might demur from the idea that informal, experiential anarchism is enough to sustain a movement, and advocate instead the formation of explicit anarchist organisations ( AF 1996a: 20; CW 1997: 15; Alinsky 1969: 223-229; Epstein 1991: 276 ). They also argue against the embracing of difference, with the AF taking the strongest line, that anarchist-communist analysis is required to transform “activists into fully-fledged revolutionaries” ( 1996a: 15; cf Young in 2001: 5 ). In the next section, however, I will look at the counter-cultural milieu known as DIY Culture that remained fully informal and fully committed to difference, yet demonstrated numerous anarchist arguments, ideas and applications. It was out of this milieu – not the traditional anarchist movement – that EF! and the other manifestations of activist anarchism emerged.

### 5.2.3

#### DIY Culture

“there’s no point sitting around complaining about things. If you want change, you’ve got to get off your arse and Do It Yourself” ( *Pod* 1994: 11 ).

The EDA of the early nineties was embedded in a wider, broader milieu of activism united by themes pertinent to our understanding of activist anarchism. This was contemporaneously termed ‘DIY Culture’, and it provided many noteworthy and substantial instances of anarchist discourse, practice and development. I cannot provide a full narrative or summation of DIY: such attempts have been made by Stone ( 1994 ), McKay ( 1996a, 1998 ) and Brass & Koziell ( 1997 ), and the ‘flavour’ of the movement may also be found in movement publications such as *Schnews*, *Squall* and *Pod*, and contemporary newspaper reports such as Vidal ( 1994a & 1994b ), Berens ( 1995a ), Bellos ( 1995 ), Grant ( 1995 ), Mills ( 1994 ) and Malyon ( c1994: 2-5 ). Specifically anarchist ( or libertarian communist ) assessments of DIY Culture have in my view largely failed to grasp the anarchist qualities and possibilities of DIY, being overly concerned with applying a critical, class-and capital-centric analysis ( and denigration ) of the movement: I shall demonstrate this with the case of *Aufheben*<sup>69</sup>. Other left-wing commentary was similarly coloured by its concern for a reinsertion of traditional left themes, but it also celebrated many aspects of DIY in markedly anarchist terms ( notably *New Statesman and Society* and *Red Pepper* magazines ). The most significant themes for our study – and amongst the most recorded – were the celebration of diversity, the defence of civil liberties, anti-electoralism, and a commitment to extra-institutional protest allied to practical attempts at ‘living the alternative’.

DIY Culture reached its most visible flowering in opposition to the criminalisation of alternative lifestyles in the form of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill ( CJB ). The CJB was announced by Conservative Home Secretary Michael Howard to cheers at his party’s conference as “the most comprehensive package of action against crime”. It covered numerous different practices and lifestyles that were not “culturally acceptable to dominant groups” ( Parker 1999: 76 ), including ‘New Age

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<sup>69</sup> A libertarian communist theoretical magazine widely read by anarchists, pursuing a class- and capital-framed analysis of collective struggles, which effectively equates to a Marxist economics allied to an anarchist politics.



Travellers', hunt saboteurs, squatters and the followers of music "characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats". Yet instead of conveniently wiping out these practices, the many and diverse elements affected or outraged by the bill were politicised and allied together in "heterogeneous networks of diversity and plurality" ( Bolton in Grant 1995: 18; cf Brass & Koziell 1997: 8; Mills 1994: 5; Bellos 1995 ). *Schnews* were able to declare that "Your attempt to criminalise our culture has unified it like never before. Thanks to you we are now witnessing the largest grassroots movement of direct action in years" ( 1996: 1; cf Malyon 1994: 12; Moore 1994; Fairlie 1994: 14 ). Again human agency was demonstrated in response to the attempted exercise of state control and cultural domination, and it took the form of grassroots alliances of great diversity and creativity.

Definitions of DIY state the anarchist basis of the movement's character: "DO IT YOURSELF You are only accountable to yourself in this life, and all you have to believe is that you can make a difference" ( Kate in *Schnews* 1996: 3 ). With DIY, individual autonomy was made practical and collective ( this is the anarchist ideal ), and commentators recognised that "those involved in Do It Yourself Culture are taking responsibility and control over their own lives" ( Brass & Koziell 1997: 7 ). Doing it Yourself involved a dual political movement: both a withdrawal of support and involvement in established politics, and also a decision to act positively for oneself. This links DIY to the holistic and prefigurative power of direct action introduced in 4.3.4; to the processes of both negative and positive radicalisation outlined in 5.2.2; and also to the themes of civil disobedience discourse that I consider in section 6.3.4.

DIY Culture was united not by ideology but by action: as *Schnews* stated, "A single action is worth a thousand words" ( in McKay 1998: 12; cf Berens 1995a: 22-23 ). This prioritising of deeds over words allowed a diverse range of concerns, cultures and ideologies to co-exist ( Grant 1995: 18 ; cf Doherty 1999b ) without divisive dogma or exclusive sectarianism ( Puddephat quoted in Grant 1995: 19 ). Commentators were temporarily fascinated by DIY as a 'New Politics' ( Grant 1995: 18; Vidal & Bellos 1996: 5; Worpole 1999: xi; Hughes-Dennis 2001: 7 ), but they commonly recognised the dominance of traditional anarchist ideals such as freedom ( Campbell 1995; Bellos 1996; Doherty 1999b; McKay 1998 ), and also of environmentalism ( Grant 1995; Shane Collins in Brass & Koziell 1997: 36; Lean 1994 ). DIY Culture was defined as 'anarchist' as well as 'anarchic', and it demonstrated a profound preference for NVDA over constitutional politics. DIY should be seen as *both* a new self-generated culture, *and* a part of the age-old direct action tradition ( Grant 1995: 18; Styles 1994: 24; Monbiot 1996: 4; *Do or Die* 1998: 140; Ward c1994 ). As Porrit recognises in the environmental case, "the direct action campaigns are almost as established a part of the modern environmental movement ... as the mainstream NGOs" ( 1997: 66; cf Mueller 2004: 146 ). DIY and EDA activists saw themselves in a long lineage of, mostly pre-industrial, rebellion and alternative living: "our struggles are battles in an old war" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 70 ). This was made most clear with the conscious links made to the seventeenth century Diggers, both in words and in actions, for example with the Land is Ours re-enactment of the Diggers' land occupation near St.George's Hill ( *EF!AU* No.58 1999: 1; Heller 2000: 101; SDMT 1998; letter, *Do or Die* 1995: 90-91 ).

Emblematic of the embracing of many diverse viewpoints, struggles and lifestyles, the 'Union Jill' flag which flew at many road camps ( Malyon 1994: 13 ) was made, not out of the standard Red, White and Blue, but many different fabrics and coloured pink, green or any variety of colours: see figure F5.1.





**Figure F5.1 The Union Jill, at Rye Loaf Camp, December 1995.**

Elements of particular note for an anarchist understanding of the anti-CJB movement were the sense of betrayal created by the Labour party's lack of meaningful opposition, and the rejection of the processes of parliamentary democracy itself ( Berens 1995a: 22 ), which encouraged less conventional and more anarchistic forms of opposition. The opposition to the bill featured direct action stunts, and mass rallies characterised by a party atmosphere, colour and music ( *Pod* 1994: 10; Grundy 1994: 58-62 ). While anarchistic grouping such as *Schnews* sought to build on this disillusionment ( "Leave Labour ... Get Involved in Politics" ( 1996 No.43 ) ), many others who joined the opposition had never been interested in any form of politics before. Ironically, therefore, a huge section of youth culture was politicised by its alienation from politics ( Berens 1995; Brass & Koziell 1997: 7 ). Instead of relying on the politicians who were criminalising their lifestyles, the people in these subcultures decided to look to themselves, and in so doing created their own solutions to the alienation they felt ( John Bird in Brass & Koziell 1997 ). Colin Ward recognised that this was in keeping with the older anarchist tradition of self-help ( Ward 1994 ).

DIY activism was not premised on class ( Puddephat quoted in Grant 1995: 18 ), and was therefore able to encompass an astonishingly diverse range of individuals, campaigns and issues. As one participant explains the absence of class barriers, "If people are going to get off their butts I don't give a monkey's if they're upper-class, middle-class or working-class. It's an open movement" ( Benn quoted in Grant 1995: 18; cf McPhail *Time Out* No.1393; Colin in Seel 1997a: 134 ). Commentators noted that the alliance between radicals and many 'Middle Englanders' vexed the establishment and it gave a particular strength to the anti-roads movement ( Campbell 1995; Tilly Merrit in *New Statesman & Society* 1995: 5; Vidal 1993: 18; Vidal 1994a: 2; McNeish 1999: 75-79; Lamb 1996: 17 ), but others from a more left-wing frame warned that "The inclusiveness of DIY's call to resistance leads to an unwillingness to address divisions in society" ( Edwards 1998; cf AF 1996b ). The class perspective presented to the DIY subcultures, however, tended to offer little practical strategic advice, indeed at its worst it could be interpreted to suggest that the convivial, celebratory and freedom-loving protesters should give up all the partying to get a job, and then go on strike ( *Do or Die* 1995: 78 ). Clearly, no



matter the salience of the tension between democracy and class, this discourse demonstrated its irrelevance to the participants on the ground: even to those with a class consciousness themselves.

Class-struggle anarchists and libertarian Marxists applied a class critique to activism ( *CW* 1997: 12; *AF* 2000a: 9; Red Robbie 2001: 28 ). The anarcho-syndicalist Red Robbie, for example, criticises the *AF* for finding “more in common with *EF!* because of the latter’s emphasis on its narrow definition of activism and direct action than it does with proletarian struggle” ( 2001: 28 ). Instead of viewing the method – direct action – as the cornerstone of anarchism, Robbie insists on “the two main aspects of class struggle theory for anarchists:”

“( 1 ) that the major part of the working class has to be involved in any revolutionary activity; ( 2 ) that the struggle of the working class is sited in the social and economic domain... The revolution must take the people ( and specifically the working class ) and not the Earth as subject and object” ( 2001: 28 ).

The *AF* replied to this by arguing that “For us the criteria is simply whether their actions lead to a greater sense of combativeness or lead to greater passivity” ( 2001b: 30 ): the radicalisation effect charted in 5.2.2, therefore, is recognised as a significant force for anarchism. *AF* and *Aufheben* anyway used their class analysis to argue that the integral place of roads within the capitalist system meant that “when roads campaigners were trying to fight motorway expansion they were in a very real sense fighting part of the class struggle against capitalism” ( *AF* 2001a: 29; cf *Aufheben* 1994: 11; *ACF* 1991; *GAY* No.9 2002: 13; *Faslane Focus* 2002: 11-24 ). I do not consider the application of class analysis here to be the most useful way to analyse the anarchist importance of *EDA* and *DIY*, however. Indeed from the same perspective, class-strugglists argued that *DIY* was not a fully-fledged anarchism but merely ‘militant liberalism’ ( *Aufheben* 1995: 22 ). This was due to *DIY*’s failure to see the “class meaning” of the *CJB* ( *Aufheben* 1995: 8 ), and the ‘liberal’ basis of alliance around notions of civil liberties and the Liberty slogan ‘Defend Diversity – Defend Dissent’ ( *Aufheben* 1995: 14 ). They condemn *DIY* for celebrating individuality and diversity, and condemn the anti-*CJA* alliances for *CD* assumptions of a ‘common humanity’ ( 1995: 12 ) ( I will clarify this *CD* theme and examine its relationship to anarchism in section 6.3.4 ).

Yet the *CJB* demonstrated that from the perspective of the state, all this anti-establishment diversity did indeed count as a threat ( Stone 1994: 16-17 ), and the act may be seen as the reassertion of property rights and a clampdown on deviancy ( Sibley 1997; Halfacree 1996 ). The *CJB* was passed and became the *CJA*. The new penalties were effectively used against hunt saboteurs ( Parker 1999: 77 ), and traveller culture was further devastated ( many travellers left the country for more tolerant climes ) ( “Assemblies of Celebration, Assemblies of Dissent” *Schnews & Squall* 2000: np ). The *DIY* movement’s direct action, however, – particularly as it was expressed in environmental protest – did not cease. Indeed *DIY* crossovers benefited the anti-roads movement, both tactically and politically ( *EF!AU* No.4 1993: 2; No.5 1993: 3; Vidal & Bellos 1996: 5 ). Many of the original protesters at Twyford Down, for example, were New Age Travellers looking for a safe place to stay, and outdoor living skills were passed from traveller to direct action scenes ( *Schnews* 2003: 21; *Do or Die* 1998: 51; *Do or Die* 2003: 10; *Monolith News* Nos. 13 & 14 1993; *Tribal Messenger* 1993: 12-15; *Musicians Network News Notes* No.22 1993 ). The experience of the *CJA* politicised many, who came to view the police, the politicians and the law and political system behind them with suspicion if not outright contempt, in a demonstration of the radicalisation thesis elaborated in 5.2.2. This was expressed, for example, in the progression “from a position of just lobbying for legal rights to one of defying the law as well” ( *Aufheben* 1995: 19; cf Griffiths quoted in Grant 1995: 18; McKay 1996: 135 ). All this was grist to the anarchist mill, and aided the development of many anti-state, anti-police and other traditionally anarchist perspectives.

Even the most trenchant class-struggle critics of *DIY* recognise that it contained a revolutionary content “in the road protesters’ refusal of democracy, the squatters’ refusal of property rights, and the ravers’ pursuit of autonomy” ( *Aufheben* 1995: 22; cf Seel 1997a: 130 ). I myself view the anti-*CJA* alliances and the wider *DIY* movements as activist anarchism in its own right. As Brass & Koziell argue, “so-called ‘single’ issues are just a focus and a starting point for debate and action on a wider scale. *DIY* Culture encompasses far more” ( 1997: 8 ). This embracement of diverse views and areas of engagement led to the ‘multi-issue’ protest culture that had revolutionary ramifications, which I shall explore in 5.3.7.



To conclude with a consideration of the class critique, *Aufheben* cite a fundamental contradiction between class subversion and liberal lobbying ( 1995: 13 ), but I do not accept that these are the only categories into which we may place activism. It may be true that DIY was not a perfect expression of Marxist notions of an upsurge in class struggle, but this does not mean that it did not express anarchism or did not have an anarchist worth. By failing to generalise all struggles under a common category of 'anti-capitalism', the diversity of DIY activism ( and not just in its protest guise ), did not lose its relevance to the anarchist project but rather demonstrated the strength of the anarchist project above and beyond narrow categories of class struggle. One can act like an anarchist, and be an anarchist, even when stark collective conflicts do not make one's choices simple. Autonomy can be expressed, direct action can be enacted, common ground in freedom can be discovered, and the oppressive, violent impacts of state and capital can be identified in any age by any individual ( whatever their class upbringing ).

## **Earth First!**

### **5.3.1**

#### **Introduction**

In the sections of 5.3 I will build on the understanding of activist anarchism to look at how activist anarchist organisation holds together. As the most explicitly anarchist network of ecological direct action, I chose to examine Earth First! UK for its expression of activist anarchism: in particular of organisation and identity, direct action tactics and revolutionary holism. First, I intend to demonstrate that EDA should be seen as a legitimate expression of anarchism. I use the practice and debate of EF! to develop our understanding of what this activist eco-anarchism actually *means*. In this chapter more than anywhere else that I have the eco-activists themselves demonstrating their anarchism, and applying their anarchist principles, attitudes and critical repertoires to the structure and identity of their own network. This provides powerful support for my argument that anarchism may most strongly be found in the dialogue of activists talking to each other. I do draw upon textual sources in this chapter, but this is mainly for their value as a residual, public record of the much broader, contextually diverse and more participatory debates that have flowed through EDA ( and to which I have in my own small way contributed ). Although ideological views cannot be bracketed and kept outside these debates, it is their application to the practical experience and issues of eco-activism that constitutes the focus here. The different political traditions, and the radicality of green and/or anarchist thought, provide only a background and a reference point to the content of this case study. I do not seek to build a monolith of 'Earth First!' thought, therefore, but rather draw out some of the most striking and revealing facets ( some 'revolutionary', some not ) revealed by the broad, diverse and ever-moving EDA experience. In doing so, I hope to reveal certain truths about the nature of anarchism itself.

In this chapter I do not present a complete history for EF!, simply because it is a too diverse and decentralised network to be 'neatened' into any such story. My own perspective is limited to my own experience and that of my local group, but this has been quite extensive and I was able, over several years, to consciously adapt my experience in order to gain insights into areas of interest or relative ignorance. Derek Wall has provided an assessment of the conditions and milieus from which early EF! first emerged, using extensive interviews with key activists ( 1999a; 1997: 13-15 ), and *Do or Die* present one long-term EF!er's assessment of the gradual progression and development of the network ( 2003: 3 - 35 ). There is no need for me to repeat this work and, more fundamentally, any attempt at a comprehensive summary of EF!UK must fail because for each person the meaning and impact of an event ( or non-event ) is different. Even within TAPP, our annual review of the year revealed as many different versions of what was significant and successful as there were participants: to undertake such a task on a national scale is beyond me ( this is especially true as EF! has porous boundaries, and it is therefore not clear where EF! begins and ends ).

In 5.3.2, I frame EF!US as a radical reaction to the institutionalisation thesis presented in 5.2.2, and a 'radical flank' to the tamed and timid ENGOs. In considering the location and character of anarchism in EF!US, I consider that it expressed both a practical anarchist critique and a positive anarchist desire. I identify EF!US as an activist anarchist organisation, bound not by dogma but by core commitments to



anarchist organisation and tactics; I note that radical ecological principles facilitated this development; and I adopt Daktari's distinction between libertarian and communitarian anarchisms in order to indicate some of the diversity contained within EF!UK's anarchism.

In 5.3.3, I consider the factors that allowed EF!UK to form when it did, and the divergent impacts it had on British media, ENGOs and green radicals. I apply 5.3.2's characterisation of EF!US, but introduce the specific elements of the UK context to introduce the more socially concerned and self-consciously anarchist network that I shall interrogate in the next few sections.

With the next four sections I develop our understanding of the political and activist character of EF!UK, introduced in 5.3.3 with a presentation of the character and impact of its arrival. In 5.3.4, I introduce and compare the chief political influences on EF!UK, which, in 5.3.5, I will develop with a presentation of the broad and mixed repertoires employed, and the range of issues interrelated by activist critique. In 5.3.6, I undertake a narrower and more holistic assessment of EF!UK's nonprotest and ecological actions, and in 5.3.7, I conclude by assessing the impact and revolutionary nature of EF! activism.

With the next four sections, I build on the characterisation of EF! as an activist anarchist network with a closer and more complex assessment of its organisation. In 5.3.8, I emphasise the priority and autonomy of the network's decentralised groups, and assess the relations between them through an assessment of TAPP's relationship and identification with the wider EF! network. In 5.3.9, I use my experience editing the Earth First! Action Update (*EF!AU*) to place the newsletter in relation to the wider network, and in 5.3.10, I use my experiences of the Summer Gatherings to draw out the communitarian impulses, and negotiations of tensions, most clearly demonstrated there. With the 'trappings' of the EF! network thus evaluated, in 5.3.11, I focus on the dilemmas and debates that have been expressed in the EF! network, concerning issues of elitism, accidental cliques and informal hierarchies. These prompted the Moot debates of 1999, which I utilise in 5.3.12, to demonstrate the variety of opposing positions available within a broad common ground of activist anarchist values.

## 5.3.2

### Earth First! US

Earth First! formed in the USA as a radical reaction to the effect of environmental institutionalisation, such as I have detailed in relation to the UK case in 5.2.1. Its 'No Compromise' position stands as the reaction to perpetual compromise by the 'Big Green' institutions; the anarchistic organisation stands as an intuitive reaction to, and a safeguard against, the top-down form of organisation of institutionalised ENGOS; and the anarchist politics of many Earth First!ers represent the lessons learnt from the experience of conflict and communality. EF!US therefore supports my argument for the existence of an informal, intuitive anarchism born of experience and expressed through practice, in addition to the explicitly titled anarchist movement.

EF!US was founded in 1980 by ex-reformist environmentalists who had experienced the destruction of vast areas of wilderness after pragmatic trade-offs and deals between the 'Big Green' ENGOs and government. They stated, in a founding and definitive principle, that "We will not make political compromises. Let the other outfits do that. EARTH FIRST will set forth the pure, hard-line, radical position of those who believe in the Earth first" (EF!US 1980: 1). No-compromise thus became definitive of EF!'s discourse, tactics and strategies, and this was later adopted by the UK group (*Do or Die* 1995: 5-6).

EF!US also made the pragmatic argument that, by creating a no-compromise group, they would aid the environmental movement by making mainstream environmental organisations look respectable:

"we in Earth First! tried to create some space on the far end of the spectrum for a radical environmentalist perspective. And, as a result of our staking out the position of unapologetic, uncompromising wilderness lovers with a bent for monkeywrenching and direct action, I think we have allowed the Sierra Club and other groups to actually take stronger positions than they



would have before and yet appear to be more moderate than ever” ( Foreman 1991b: 39; cf Foreman & Haywood 1993: 16; Zisk quoted in Wall 1999: 155; Manes 1990: 18 ).

The notion that direct action groups aid more moderate organisations by acting as a ‘radical flank’( Epstein 1991: 14; Mueller 2004: 146; Zinn 1997: 125-129) is an instrumental notion that was also claimed for EF! in the UK context ( WWF quoted in Lamb 1996; GA 1993; Purkis 1995: 8 ): see 5.3.5. In 5.3.7, we shall note that the strategic, practical rationale behind Earth First! is one that is only achieved through being uncompromising and ‘unreasonable’ ( EF!US 1980: 1 ).

EF!US’s repertoire grew to include stunts such as the symbolic ‘cracking’ of the Glen Canyon Dam with black material; covert acts of ‘monkeywrenching’ such as sabotaging machinery or spiking trees to prevent their sale as timber; and blockades and mass campaigns of NVDA to obstruct wilderness destruction. EF! has also engaged in more conventional and legal campaigns, which garner less anarchist praise but have sometimes proved as successful in preventing wilderness exploitation. There is no purism in the practical methods used by EF!: the purism lies in the ethics behind those methods. “We believe in using all the tools in the tool box – ranging from grassroots organising and involvement in the legal process to civil disobedience and monkeywrenching” ( *EF!J* 21(1) 2000: 4; cf Purkis 2001: 18 ).<sup>70</sup> The same is true in the UK case, with each group adapting the available methods to its own use.

The main strategies behind these tactics have been ( 1 ) to mobilise large numbers of people into practical defence, ( 2 ) to raise publicity about the issue, and ( 3 ) to increase the economic costs of wilderness exploitation and thus render it less profitable. The end aim of EFUS! is to render large tracts of land inviolate from human exploitation and control ( EF!US 1980: 1 ). Direct action is justified on ground of wilderness protection and biocentric values; instrumental success; and political pragmatism: these are ‘liberal’ justifications of direct action and the strategic thinking which I will criticise from the anarchist perspective in 6.2.1 and 6.5.3 respectively. None of these strategic aims have a good ‘fit’ with the strategic arguments of section 4.3.3 or the terms of anarchist direct action we shall establish in 6.2.1: indeed EF!US was explicitly non-revolutionary at its inception ( Foreman & Hayward 1993: 10; Purkis 2001: 132 ). However, the anarchist implications of EF!ers’ practice and experience meant that over time, anarchist positions came increasingly to the fore ( Daktari 2000: 66; Scarce 1990: 89 ). I will look at this through EF!US’s organisational expression, before noting the role of radical green beliefs in stimulating the development of activist anarchism.

After the initial call for an Earth First! movement had been put out by the ‘founding fathers’, several other groups quickly appeared. Instead of then forming a bureaucratic organisation, the first national gathering of EF! activists in 1981 declared that “There are no members of EF!, there are only EF!ers. EF! is a movement, not an organisation” ( quoted in Lee 1997: 122 ). This declaration was both a ( negative ) response to the institutionalisation of the ‘Big Ten’ US ENGOs and their “statist, bureaucratic models of organisation”. It also ( positively ) “expressed EF!ers anarchist ... desire for dynamic, activist modes of organising” ( Daktari 2000: 66; cf Lee 1997: 122-3 ).

The decentralised model of Earth First! organisation represents not only an expression of the anarchist critique ( Foreman quoted in Lee 1997: 123 ), therefore, but also a positive expression of the alternative ( anarchist ) organisational paradigm ( Doherty 2002: 188 ):

“The organisation managed to grow and perform an increasing number of well-publicised actions despite its lack of formal leaders, board of directors, permanent administrative staff, official headquarters, membership fees, or any formal code of conduct for its members. The local groups operated in fairly autonomous ways, invoking only the name of Earth First! in the planning and implementation of their actions” ( Foreman 1981: 42 ).

In terms of internal coordination, decisions which affect the whole movement can be made at the annual gatherings, known as Round River Rendezvous ( RRR ), but the only centralised institution the movement developed was its *Journal* ( *EF!J* ). Precisely because it was the only centralised institution, the *EF!J* attracted ideological disputes and power-struggles ( Daktari 2000: 67; Maenz 2000: 76; Scarce 1990: 89 ).

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<sup>70</sup> *Do or Die* focus on the most radical repertoires: “Diggers trashed, forests occupied, billboards subverted, logging roads dug up, trees spiked, offices invaded, windows smashed, snares disabled, computers scrapped” ( 2003: 5 ).



It is not these institutional mechanisms that tie Earth First! together as a movement, however: they are crucial for communication and for Earth First!'s identity, but they do not and cannot contain it. The fluid, non-membership, autonomous nature of the organisation is instead unified by the simple commitment to put the Earth First! ( Flyer quoted in Foreman 1981: 42 ). This was not an exclusive ideology in the sense I distinguished from EDA in section 2.3.5, but connected by action. This non-dogmatism is displayed by the diversity within the movement:

“from animal rights vegetarians to wilderness hunting guides, from monkeywrenchers to careful followers of Gandhi, from rowdy backwoods buckaroos to thoughtful philosophers, from misanthropes to humanists – there is agreement on one thing, the need for action!” ( EF!US 2000: 1 ).

It behoves us to consider what is the place of anarchism in EF!US? Daktari places EF!US squarely within the anarchist tradition and I agree. This does not mean it arose from within the old leftist tradition, however – far from it ( Purkis 2001: 18 ). Instead, the history of Earth First! represents another example of anarchism's tendency to crop up in history whenever new fields of struggle are opened. This is the radicalisation thesis and the hope of anarchism.

In Chapter 4, I argued that eco-radicalism was at odds with industrial society, and in the EF!US case it was the biocentric and ecological fundamentalism that gave anarchism a way in: “The EF! movement was born with an avowed purpose of subverting the dominant anthropocentric paradigm, and promoting a new ecocentric worldview” ( Daktari 2000: 66; cf Plows 1995: ). This made the movement not only oppositional, but radical in an all-encompassing way, providing challenges to the old movements for liberation as well as the conventional mores of society. It does not matter that EF! did not proclaim itself the “anarchist environmental movement” at its inception. Such a label would have been, not only off-putting to most of its potential recruits, but also self-limiting in that it would be accepting an already-established ideology instead of pursuing new avenues of thought.

Anarchism as a theory was not unknown to Earth First!, even at the beginning ( Tokar 1988: 134; Daktari 2000: 66 ), but I agree with Daktari that the anarchism of EF! arose over time through the attitudes and experience of its diverse proponents ( 2000: 6 ). Within this activist anarchism, Daktari usefully identifies two different and sometimes opposing strands which define the character of the Earth First! movement: libertarian and communitarian. They “are complexly interwoven in EF!, accounting for much of the movement's creativity, diversity and dynamism.” The first, libertarian element is expressed through the autonomy of

“activists taking direct action based on their own situations, issues, interests and desires without authorisation ( or even approval ) by other EF!ers. On the other hand, EF! is more than a random collage of individuals or actions – it is a collective movement emphasising egalitarian, direct, democratic decision-making and unity in its internal organisation. Communitarian anarchy is displayed in the mutual aid and voluntary cooperation exhibited by affinity groups using consensus process” ( Daktari 2000: 68 ).

In 5.3.8 I shall assess this same dynamic in the case of EF!UK. However, Ritter claims that “Anarchist individuality and community are patently discordant” ( 1980: 137 ), and in the case of EF!US, the tension contributed to the ‘great split’ of 1990, when the old-guard of radical conservationists sought to re-establish control of the *EF!J* from a new, more left-leaning generation and ended up leaving the network for pastures new ( Maenz 2000: 76; Scarce 1990: 89 ). But the arguments arising from this split resulted in a greater political sophistication and a commitment to anti-capitalism within the Earth First! movement ( Bookchin 1991: 59 ), and once this had been achieved then the final obstacle to us seeing EF! as a fully anarchist ecological movement was removed. I will argue that a recognition of the tension or discordance between individuality and community need not lead one to assume that a stale antagonism or exclusion must result. Instead, the sense of creative tension I established in Chapters 2 and 4 may lead to many negotiations of the issue, as the practical examples of 5.3.12 will demonstrate.

I will now look at how the EF!US model was transplanted to the UK context, and identify similarities and shared characteristics between the US and UK movements. The later sections will work to nuance this comparison, and draw out the particular, unique identity of EF!UK. Here, however, it is helpful to my overall argument to show how the EF!UK network served as a radical ( anarchist ) reaction to institutionalisation, informed both by critical frustration and positive passion. Themes of politicisation



and activist anarchism from 5.2.2 are made concrete, and the hopes of green radicalism from Chapter 4 are given a living form.

### 5.3.3

#### Earth First!'s Arrival in the UK Environmental Movement

“Green bureaucrats move over! The real green movement is on its way!” (Burbridge quoted in Torrance 1999: 25).

In 5.2.1, we noted that, in the years preceding Earth First!'s appearance in the UK, the radical edge of the green movement had evaporated and confrontation seemed a thing of the past (Wall 1999a: 37). Earth First! UK may, like its US cousin, be viewed as a radical reaction to this ENGO institutionalisation (Seel & Plows 2000: 117), its creation similarly linked to a frustration with “the unemotional and compromised activities of established green groups” (Burbridge 1994: 8; cf Seel & Plows 2000: 117). Earth First!'s passionate activism and anti-authoritarian attitude, and its emphasis on autonomous action and participatory non-hierarchical organisation, was fresh and appealing to many environmentalists (Marshall quoted in Wall 1999a: 106; cf Chris Laughton in Wall 1999a: 45). It was thus not a solely instrumental ‘radical flank’ manoeuvre, but was intended to encourage “grassroots direct action” (Seel 1997b: 172) and have a powerful, empowering impact on the personal experiences of environmental activists (Wall 1999a: 107; cf Wood 2001: 268; Scarce 1990: 55): the theme of 5.2.2. Earth First! UK was formed not only as a negative expression of the anarchist critique of institutionalisation, therefore, but also as a passionate striving for positive anarchist ideals.<sup>71</sup>

Wall uses a critical realist approach to examine which structural influences enabled EF! to form at the time it did, including perceptions of political closure (as embodied by the CJB, see 5.2.3), and such economic factors as an accelerated road building programme and a pool of youth unemployment (1997: 17-18). But he recognises that “structural influences ‘do not march in the streets’ or determine the nature of collective action: instead, they provide opportunities that must be consciously exploited” (1999b: 81; cf 1997: 19). Wall uses SM approaches to present useful findings such as that, in the early years, EF!'s ‘No Compromise’ standpoint and militant NVDA tactics were encouraged by both lack of government responsiveness, and also lack of severe state repression” (1999b: 93; cf 1999a: 125-9; 1997: 24). I feel that this language – even though Wall strives to avoid its deterministic implications, is nonetheless inappropriate to the spontaneous, passionate spirit of EF! and fails to capture its anarchistic and anti-authoritarian ethos (Goaman 2002; Purkis 2001: 373). The slogans on the first *EF!AU*s may supply a corrective by conveying the urgency of the new EF!: ‘No compromise!’ (Nos. 4-6 1993: 1); ‘Just do it!’ (No.7 1993: 1); ‘Resist much, obey little’ (No.8 1993: 1); and ‘Never submit!’ (No.10 1994: 3). Although the next decade would see the character of the network – its repertoires and rhetoric - change somewhat, this passionate impetus would not be lost.

The aspect of early nineties militant EDA that was most immediately novel and exciting for press commentators, was the use of the name ‘Earth First!’ (Shane Collins in Wall 1999a: 107). EF!US had gained a reputation that not only provided a dramatic story for the papers, but also carried with it the ingredients for alarmist scare-mongering (Dynes & McCarthy 1992). In the early days of Earth First!, it was the name that allowed the scattered radicals in the green diaspora to come together under a common identity (Wall 1997: 19). The idea of a definable ‘Earth First!’ organisation, movement or network is problematic, however. Although the label ‘Earth First!’ seems, superficially, to give us a concrete specimen to analyse, it actually stands a critical distance apart from the activities to which it is applied. Issues and queries with the name came up at EF! Gathering after Gathering, and by the time of my involvement, very few groups in the network still used it. Each local group is very different, and the

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<sup>71</sup> Instead of the supposedly ‘effective’ but actually ‘bureaucratic’ machine of Greenpeace, writers for Earth First! argued that it is another spirit of resistance that will be effective: “An unbridled, exultant, unapologetic and deeply ‘irrational’ affirmation, both of your own life and of all that surrounds you, must be set against the nullifying language of death. That is why we have achieved so much with comparatively little - we have learned to give up trudging and to start dancing. This is the reason why, as Fourier says, it takes ‘workers several hours to put up a barricade that rioters can [erect] in a few minutes’” (*Do or Die* 1997; cf Wall 1997: 26).



diversity of the network is demonstrated by the *EF!AU* including reports and advertisements for a much wider range of groups than the self-proclaimed EF!ers: from Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) to 'Women Speak Out' and McLibel. In 5.3.9, I will indicate the breadth of actions and issues supported by the *EF!AU*, in 5.3.10 I will note the range of networks and workshops at EF! gatherings, and in 5.3.8 I will use my experience of EF! to reject notions of a cohesive and bounded EF! identity.

The companion point to make about the enthusiasm of disaffected radicals for EF!'s arrival, is the hostility with which the dominant ENGOs reacted: EF! "was regarded... as having the potential to discredit the whole green movement" (Doherty 1998: 376). Antagonism from FoE and the established environmental movement was a part of the Earth First! story from the very beginning (Burbridge quoted in Wall 1999a: 51; Vidal 1994b), with FoE expressly forbidding its local groups from working with EF! (*Do or Die* 2003: 9; Marshall quoted in Wall 1999a: 122; Snorky the Elf *GA* 39; Lamb 1996: 9).

When FoE bowed down to legal threats at the Twyford Down roads protest, EF!ers and other EDA radicals (with no assets to threaten) stepped in. While they did not ultimately stop the road being built, their struggle changed the UK's environmental scene. *Do or Die* proclaimed that "Twyford Down has become a symbol of resistance, a training ground, a life changer and a kick up the arse to the British green movement!" (*Do or Die* 1993b: 17; cf *EF!AU* No.13 1995: 1), and John Vidal reported that "By not admitting defeat, even when the road was being carved through what Judge Alliot...described as 'one of Britain's loveliest places', the Dongas, groups like Earth First! and others have managed to radicalise many thousands of people into openly defying government" (Vidal 1993).<sup>72</sup> The experience left many EF!ers feeling that FoE, which had condemned their actions in the media and to their local groups, had betrayed them (Notts ef! 1998; Schnews 1998: No.103; *GA* 1993<sup>73</sup>). Even when relations became more cordial, some EF!ers remained hostile, seeing it as a change in FoE's strategy "from one of strength to one of weakness" and an attempt "to capitalise on direct action" equivalent to the later 'vampirism' of the SWP in the anti-globalisation protests (*Do or Die* 2000: 134-135; *Do or Die* 2003: 9). The uneasy relationship between Earth First! and FoE is significant in that it draws the line between two different types of organisation, and between two distinct political attitudes (RA! 1998; cf Ream 2004: 6-7).<sup>74</sup> It was not only the organisation and methods of 'FoE Ltd' (B 1998; cf *GA* 1993:) that received the institutionalisation critique (see 5.2.1), but also the media-centric and non-participatory (elitist) direct action of Greenpeace (Seel 1999: 310-311; Seel 1997a: 121-122; Ream 2004: 6-7; Steve 2001).

SDEF!'s public message to Greenpeace spells out the difference between 'revolutionary' and 'reformist' EDA most clearly from an anarchist perspective: see Figure F5.2

"At Gorleben today, over three thousand unarmed people faced fifteen thousand heavily armed riot police, tear gas and water cannons. They were trying to stop a radioactive waste shipment being delivered...

Today three thousand people resisted. Three thousand people stood up and attempted to stop the invasion of the radioactive state machine. They came from different backgrounds, local farmers, eco-anarchist revolutionaries, green party activists, old ladies with handbags, doctors, teachers, whole flocks of schoolkids. What united this disparate crowd? ... their desire for a viable future...

These people were not looking for a fight: people whose prime motive is fighting will pick on groups smaller than themselves, and avoid situations where they are heavily outnumbered or outgunned. These people were there to save the earth.

We saw on the TV...men and women savagely beaten... Then as the death convoy rolled past we saw one of the women leaning against a tree, her body racked with sobs. We have been in similar situations, we have a good idea of what was in her mind. It's the emotional devastation caused by overwhelming mindless brute force. Immediately after this a spokeswoman for Greenpeace appeared and stated that you 'condemn the violence of the protestors'.

<sup>72</sup> Concomitant with this perceived success for extra-institutional protest went the perceived failure of the top-down, expert-led style that had dominated British environmentalism: "After Twyford, with its plethora of special status designations, it was acknowledged that no site in Britain could be deemed to be safe from road development" (Welsh 1996: 31).

<sup>73</sup> *GA* phrase this hostility well: "They're happy enough to use EF! as cannon-fodder – good dramatic stuff for catching the attention and bringing the subs in – but if there's 'uncontrollable' direct action like ecotage, that's going too far" (*GA* 1993: ).

<sup>74</sup> Road Alert! (RA!) illustrate this difference in their account of the relationships RA! held with the organisations: "FOE and Greenpeace used RA! as their sole contact, acknowledging frankly that they wished to work hierarchically as this was what they were used to and it was less trouble. This extended even to funding - 'group A has asked us for some money, does RA! think they are alright and deserve it?' - something we were totally uncomfortable with." In contrast to this attitude, RA! state their claim for in terms fitting for an anarchist attitude: "we never, ever lost sight of our perspective as radical ecologists and were not wooed into a careerist position by rubbing shoulders with FOE and Greenpeace, nor were we afraid to disagree with them" (RA!1998).



What makes you think that you have the right to pass judgement on these people? ... The nearest the vast majority of your workers get to a real ecological struggle is their fax machine...Even the minute proportion of your employees who are allowed to take direct action ( i.e. your Direct Action Unit and your ships crews ) have been subjected to near tyrannical control -we know this from personal communication.

Unfortunately, many millions of people set great store by what you say. Stop abusing your position and start supporting the very few people who are making a genuine effort to stop the destruction of our planet.”

**Figure F5.2 SDEF! open letter to Greenpeace UK 8.5.96 ( *EF!AU* No.27 1996: 3 ).**

Here we are provided with EF! use of the traditional anarchist revolutionary themes of mass, participatory, unincorporated grassroots action, engaged in direct struggle with the state. Yet to only contrast EF!UK to its NGO equivalents runs the risk of drawing a too simplistic anarchist identity for the network. By contrast, as an activist rather than an ideological anarchist network, EF!UK is a site of many influences, where many traditions meet, merge and conflict. It is to this mix of political influences that I will turn in 5.3.4, and I will relate them to the broad and mixed strategies, repertoires and issues engaged by EF!UK in 5.3.5. I will then return to the ecological identity of EF!UK in 5.3.6 by emphasising the holistic practices of its activists, and conclude in 5.3.7, by interrogating more directly the notion of revolution in EF!UK.

### 5.3.4

#### Political Influences

In the early years, EF!US was the key influence on EF!UK ( Seel & Plows 2000: 127; cf Purkis 1996: 199 ).<sup>75</sup> It is for this reason that I have presented its keynote themes in 5.3.2, and matched them with the UK context in 5.3.3. EF!US was not the only influence, however, and in this section, I shall introduce the contributions of peace, animal rights and anarchist traditions. Furthermore, although EF!UK adopted much of the rhetoric and form of the EF!US movement, it was always more socially-oriented: “Whereas early Earth First! activists in the USA emphasised their non-revolutionary positions, their direct action campaign focusing on simply preserving the American wilderness, in Britain, Earth First! is fundamentally more radical, more located in a wider context of social criticism” ( McKay 1996a: 200; cf Purkis 2001: 299; *Do or Die* 2000: 46-7 ). Purkis, Plows and Seel agree that EF!UK’s worldview relates better with the social ecology viewpoint of Murray Bookchin than with the deep ecology associated with EF!US’s founders ( Purkis 1996: 205; 1995: 12-13; Plows 1998: 154; Seel 1997b: 173; Seel & Plows 2000: 114; Goaman 2002: 226 ), although deep ecological statements may still occasionally be found within the EF!UK network ( My notes, EF! Moot debate 2003; Purkis 2001: 237; *Do or Die* 2000: 46-47 ).<sup>76</sup> One reason for this is the lack of any real ‘wilderness’ in the UK ( Purkis 1995: 6 ), but another reason comes from the background of many UK EF!ers in the peace movement and other socially-concerned causes. Wall traces some of these influences: “Feminists who brought with them the experience of Greenham sought to introduce social goals to EF! ( UK )’s diagnostic frame, as did militants influenced by anarchism” ( Wall 1999a: 145; cf ACF c1991: 38 ).

I will leave until 5.3.8, a consideration of EF!UK’s engagement with “the lessons and legacy of the womens liberation movement”, which Purkis states are “internalised if not always openly acknowledged” ( 2001: 317 ). I will also leave untouched the ‘lesser claims’ for influences from indigenous ( *Do or Die* 2003: 2 ), or indeed situationist legacies ( Purkis 2001: 150; ‘68RPM’ *Schnews* 1999: np ). To focus on the anarchist, however, Purkis emphasises that “EF!’s way of organising itself

<sup>75</sup> This remained true until ‘anti-capitalist’ events such as Mayday 2000, which demonstrated a greater attachment to traditional anarchist mores ( *Independent* 22.4.2000 ): see section 7.5.

<sup>76</sup> EF!UK’s rhetoric has also been consistently much less ‘spiritual’ than that of either the Dongas or EF!US ( expressed, for example, through placing parties or publication dates on the solstices and equinoxes ) ( Purkis 1995: 12 ). Although the first few *EF!AUs* were published on solstices, and the very first *EF!AU*’s contained the EF!US slogan ‘no compromise in defence of mother earth’ ( *EF!AU* No.2 1992: 8 ), neither of these persisted past 1993. The ‘mother’ was consciously dropped from the EF!UK slogan ‘no compromise in defence of the earth’ and only made one reappearance in 2000: but that was because I myself included it, and so I can state with certainty that it did not represent any shift back to EF!US or pagan inspiration ( *EF!AU* No.72 2000: 1 ). Views harshly critical of ‘New Age’ ideas are equally likely to be heard amongst EF!ers as are openly voiced sentiment ( Heller 2000: 97 ).



and its non-hierarchical and non-violent ethos owes much to the co-operative tradition within the anarchist movement” ( 2001: 154; cf Seel & Plows 2000: 116 ).<sup>77</sup> Explicit anarchist links are evident in the *EF!AU* from 1994, when issue 12 advertised the ‘Anarchy in the UK’ festival ( No.12 1994: 3 ), and from issue 37’s announcement of an EF! stall at the Anarchist Bookfair ( No.32 1996: 2 )<sup>78</sup>: the links are manifest in *Do or Die* from 1992 ( No.1 1992: 9 ). We can note with Seel and Plows note that “an increasingly articulated form of anarchism has emerged alongside an anarchism of the deed” ( Seel & Plows 2000: 130 ). There are also, however, variations within this articulated anarchism, with primitivist notions particularly advertised by the Leeds collective who edited the *EF!AU* before we in Newcastle did ( 1999-2000<sup>79</sup> ), and more traditional class-struggle themes expressed by the Norwich collective who followed us ( 2001-2002 ). With their first edition the Norwich collective identified EF! as anticapitalist and wished a “Happy New Year to all those involved in workers’ struggle” ( *EF!AU* No.73 2001: 1-2 ).

Doherty records that “Ecological direct action groups such as Earth First! often work with anarchist groups that are not necessarily committed to ecological goals” ( 2002: 9; Plows 2006: 464-465 ). These groups criticise EF! for not putting class at the forefront of their critique ( ACF c1991: 38; AF 1996a: 15; Young 2001: 5 ), but nonetheless “suggest that readers get in contact with their local Earth First! group ... and get involved with what is already going on” ( AF 1999a: 9 ). This demonstrates a practical tie of solidarity and sympathy based on action, more significant than the ideological differences and debates which, given the strong hostility to ecological currents on the part of class-struggle anarchists ( as evidenced in webforums such as urban75 and enrager.net ) prove much less fruitful and, I would argue, partake less of the spirit of anarchism.

Despite strong ( and somewhat unrepresentative ) voices of ideological anarchist and revolutionary rhetoric, EF! remains most anarchist in the little ways: in the methods, relationships and experiences of an activism that does not ask permission or follow a well-marked path, but follows its own impulses and gives practical outcome to its ideals. At Twyford, for example, the protesters learnt their methods of protest as they went along, in “equal measures of impulsiveness, innocence and action” ( McKay 1996: 134 ). It is the methods brought to the environmental cause that are definitive of EF!UK, and which are the central focus of my study, and so it is to these that I turn in the next section.

It is arguable that, when it comes to EF!UK’s tactics and strategy, more influential than either EF!US or traditional anarchist groups were the peace movement ( Seel 1997b: 174; cf ACF c1991: 38; Purkis 2001: 258 ), and the animal liberation movement ( *Do or Die* 2003: 13 ). The first action under the Earth First! banner, for example, drew on the peace and anti-nuclear tradition for its target; its participants; and its NVDA tactics ( Jason Torrance, quoted in Wall 1999: 46 ). Non-violence ( the key discourse for the peace movement, as I shall discuss in 6.3.4 ) is included in the definition of the network presented by many EF!ers ( *EF!AU* No.3 1992: 5; Purkis 2001: 57; SDEF! 1994 ), and the *EF!AU* features repeated advertisements for NVDA training, commonly led by peace movement activists ( No.5 1993: 2; No.13 1995: 2; No.43 1997: 2 ; No.69 2000 ). Yet the range of repertoires I list in 5.3.5 includes many drawn from the animal rights tradition.

I concluded the previous chapter by noting that most tensions in direct action movement rotate around strategy rather than ideology. For example, while the EF!US and animal liberation movements supported covert sabotage ( *Do or Die* 2003: 2 ), “activists drawn from peace networks were uneasy about the use of covert repertoires” ( Seel & Plows 2000: 127 ). As Wall notes, “Ideological disputes, where they have occurred [ in EF!UK ] ... have focussed on the nature of direct action and organisational questions” ( 1997: 21 ). The tension between NVDA and ‘physically effective’ repertoires of animal rights activism will later come to the fore in the debates which we shall assess in 5.3.7 and 6.5.3. I will now present a survey of EF!UK’s repertoires, and in doing so will develop our understanding of how different traditions of activism inform different repertoire styles. The activist

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<sup>77</sup> Note that Purkis associates anarchism with the pre-anarchist millenarian tradition. This is a link made by many anarchist writers, but while I consider there to be a broad truth to the association, I find it unhelpful to allow the religious terms of the earlier, pre-enlightenment movements to bear on post-industrial movements such as EF!

<sup>78</sup> This connection with the arenas of traditional and ideological anarchist gatherings has continued: I myself sat on the EF!AU stall at the Mayday 2000 ‘Festival of Alternatives’.

<sup>79</sup> Already in 1997 the EF!AU recommended the American journal *Fifth Estate* for its critique of technology and civilisation ( *EF!AU* No.36 1997: 2 ). In EF!UK, the influence of primitivism is significant, but not dominant. *Green Anarchist* has republished many primitivist articles; the Re: Pressed book service, has sold primitivist texts at Earth First! gatherings since 1999; and when I first attended EF! gatherings, significant primitivist essays had already been copied and distributed for free or for very low prices by Dead Trees EF! / South Downs EF! ( *EF!AU* No.29 1996: 2 ).



anarchism of my thesis is not a textbook model, but is a product of these tensions, cross-fertilisations and experimentations.

### 5.3.5

#### Strategy, Protest Repertoires and Issue Range

In 1994, Jake Burbridge defined the objectives of EF! as ( 1 ) to halt destruction, ( 2 ) to attack bad companies, and ( 3 ) to educate people ( EF!ers included ) ( 1994; *EF!AU* No.3 1992: 5 ). The strategic message of EF!UK was the same as its American predecessor: “no compromise, no argument, just stop” ( TMEF! 1998; cf *Do or Die* 1993a: inside cover ). Earth First! would use all the tools in the toolbox, but most significantly NVDA, to defend the environment from a position of no compromise: “For example, when other green groups respond to a new road project by coming up with an alternative route or tunnel, we campaign for no road at all. When other groups have backed down to court injunctions or police threats, we refuse to be intimidated into inaction” ( SDEF! 1994 ). As in the US, Earth First! intended to provide a radical flank for the British environmental scene: both to counter the prevailing institutionalisation and deradicalisation of ENGOs, and to make their reforming efforts more effective ( Seel & Plows 2000: 117-119; Purkis 1995: 8; GA 1993: ). In 5.3.3, however, I emphasised that EF!UK also wanted to provide a participatory and non-institutional network for activists ( Wall 1999a: 107 ), and Seel & Plows accept that “Since the early 1990s, EF! activists have become much more concerned with the development of their own movement rather than being primarily concerned with how their activities influence EMOs” ( 2000: 118 ). My own experience supports this view, and the assessment of organisational debates in 5.3.12 will chart the development and articulation of this concern.

In the previous section we noted that different milieus, traditions and historical movements informed the EF! repertoire ( Carter 1973: 24; cf Zinn 1997: 622; Jasper 1999: 245 ). The womens peace camp at Greenham in the 1980s, for example, extended these repertoires with camps, blockades and sabotage ( Roseneil 1995: 172 ): all tactics which were utilised and adapted by the EDA of the nineties. Amongst the numerous tactical innovations developed during the anti-roads movement, we can track the development of tree-sitting tactics from the Cradlewell protest in Newcastle in 1993 ( Little Weed 1994: 5 ); to a habitable treehouse at Georges Green in the No M11 campaign; to an entire tree village at Stanworth Valley ( Evans 1998: 50-65 ); and then taken below the ground with tunnels at Ashton Court and the A30 camps ( *Do or Die* 2003: 15 ). As a participant at the Cradlewell wrote:

“Lots of people got together at the Dene, from Newcastle to Twyford to London, as far as Finland and New Zealand. We’ve learned a lot of useful lessons in fighting the likes of the DoT and the security firms and the local council bureaucrats. And what we’ve learnt will spread out to other road and environmental protests: from direct action, to legal stuff to hammock building, to face-painting, it just gets bigger and bigger” ( Little Weed 1994: 9 ).

Many different repertoires of action have been used and promoted within Earth First!, from disruptive action aimed at increasing the economic costs of projects, to more symbolic acts of NVDA.<sup>80</sup> There is a general pragmatism about using whatever tactic appears most suitable to the given situation ( although each local group tends toward its own preferred methods and styles ). Good assessments of the repertoires of EF!UK are provided by Purkis ( 1996: 202; 2001: 299-307 ), Seel ( 1997b: 174 ) and Plows ( 1998: 154; cf Seel and Plows 2000: 114-127 ). Seel, for example, argues that EF!UK deploys confrontational, obstructive showdowns “which try to show where power lies, whose interests it is being used in, and what is passing for ‘progress’ or ‘development’” ( Seel 1997b: 174; cf Plows 1997: 4; Chesters 2000b: 7 ). Purkis focuses on the manner in which EF! temporarily colonises “private or

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<sup>80</sup> Seel suggests that EF!UK has emphasised NVDA rather than covert monkeywrenching and economic logic ( 1997b: 173 ), but I have found it difficult to support this finding. NVDA has a numerical advantage over ecotage in the *EF!AU* reports, ( and in *Schnews*, *TGAL* and the mainstream media ), but this is countered by the strong emphasis on sabotage in *Do or Die* and *Green Anarchist* reports. While I consider the latter two magazines to show a stronger editorial bias and selectivity than the former, there remains the additional point that sabotage, by its nature covert and unaccountable, makes less of a public ‘splash’ than public acts of NVDA, which often seek to amplify their impact in order to convey a message ( Plows, Wall & Doherty 2001 ). I interrogate the apparent contradiction between the use of both civil disobedience and sabotage ( Scarce 1990: 11 ) in sections 6.3.4 and 6.3.5



capitalist space” ( 2001: 299 ), reaching the public in “the very places that are normally conceived of as safe from political agitation. The superstore, the hypermarket, banks, indeed the very places ... designed to put people at ease for the purposes of spending more money – become sites ripe for symbolic attention” ( 2001: 302 ). I accept and appreciate this evaluation, yet it is difficult to convey the sheer diversity of the methods and styles of EDA in such a short academic summation: indeed there is a tendency to ‘overcharacterise’ and neaten a more messy reality. Instead of repeating such an approach I will here present some of the repertoires featured in the *EF!AU* in order to (1) express something of the range of methods and issues used and approved by EF!UK, and (2) to collapse any notions of boundaries between the different labels we apply to such repertoires: I shall argue that all tactics are interchangeable and can merge into each other.<sup>81</sup> It is the ethics and the energy that count.

The most common and proudly reported repertoires are (1) blockades and acts of stopping work; (2) occupations and camps; (3) critical masses and street parties; (4) disruptions of AGMs, corporate recruitment fairs and official ceremonies, and (5) acts of sabotage, particularly with the trashing of GM plants which I assess in section 6.4. Yet the diversity within these broad labels is astonishing, and each method can be utilised in a different style, according to a different strategy and political discourse ( as I considered in 5.5 ). Sometimes, for example, lock-ons are done to get the attention of top management ( *EF!AU* No.10 1994: 7 ), or to make information public ( *EF!AU* No.11 1994: 3 ), thus representing liberal rather than anarchist action ( cf Seel & Plows 2000: 119; Purkis 1996: 199 ) in the distinction which I shall establish in section 6.2.

We should not confuse the radicalism of EF! with a purist approach to methods.<sup>82</sup> Conventional campaigning methods such as letter writing and seeking to affect parliamentary and other governmental decisions are also employed ( *EF!AU* No.2 1992: 7; No.58 1999: 7 ): indeed an early *EF!AU* report describes complaining to the advertising standards agency as ‘paper monkeywrenching’ ( No.5 1993: 2; cf No.65 2000: 2 ). Yet the lobbying involved need not be respectful or take place through the expected channels. When the *EF!AU* provides the details of how to ‘Fax your MP’ ( No.77 2001: 2 ), for example, it could equally be interpreted in terms of the pestering tactics more usually associated with the animal rights movement. These can include pestering by phone ( No.15 1995: 3 ); mounting electronic blockades ( No.68 2000: 2 ); ordering unwanted junk and generating other nuisances, such as placing the offender’s name on mock prostitute calling cards ( No.29 1996: 2; cf *Schnews & Squall* 2001: 220 ).<sup>83</sup>

Applying divisions and categories to EF! repertoires misses the fluidity, diversity and spontaneity involved. Walks along proposed road routes ( *EF!AU* No.16 1995: 3 ) can serve to encourage an attachment to the area, or to develop a practical knowledge of the geography to aid future actions; processions through towns can sometimes develop into road blockading ( No.17 1995: 3 ); mass trespasses can feature both picnics ( No.11 1994: 6; No.15 1995: 2 ) and sabotage. Occupations can be temporary takeovers of corporate offices to send a message of outrage or solidarity, but they can also be used for practical information-gathering or feature additional forms of obstruction or sabotage – billed as “fun with computers” in one *EF!AU* guide ( No.57 1999: 5 ). Other occupations stand as attempts at community take-overs of disused buildings ( No.57 1999: 7 ), and these merge into proactive attempts at realising ecological and communal habitations ( see 5.3.6 ). Seel and Plows note that EF!UK uses both material and consciousness-changing strategies ( 2000: 115 ), but sometimes the

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<sup>81</sup> Note, also, that while the *EF!AU* is the best source for EF! reports, it is by no means comprehensive. Wall, Doherty & Plows suggests it has a 60% coverage rate of local actions ( 2003 ), but this is perhaps over-generous. The *EF!AU* often featured only one or two instances of a repertoire when I have known many more to have been carried out – such as the production of spoof papers. As an editor of the *EF!AU* it was very difficult to decide what ‘counted’ as EF! and what was covered by other newsletters and publications: priorities of coverage varied between editorial collectives, between members of the editorial collective, and between individual issues. There was a tendency to report novel or ‘inspirational’ first-use of tactics, which may continue within their issue field ( such as stopping nuclear convoys ) but receive no more attention. A comparison of the *EF!AU*’s coverage of blockades, stunts and other protest events conducted by TAPP ( for which *TGAL* had a higher than 90% coverage rate, compared against my diaries ) indicates little better than a 20% coverage for actions. Many of these actions did not have an ecological theme, and almost all partook more of a ‘liberal’ than ‘anarchist’ direct action character: this, combined with TAPP’s only partial identification with EF!, might explain the lower ratio for TAPP coverage in the *EF!AU*. However, TAPP did regularly send in reports and *TGAL*s to the *EF!AU*, and for groups which did not regularly send in reports, or were even more marginally EF!-like, the ratio would be much worse. When we in Newcastle edited the *EF!AU*, we featured a greater proportion of our own actions, but our sense of the *EF!AU*’s editorial remit still encouraged us to exclude a majority of actions and events. From my reading of the *EF!AU*, only cross-network ‘national’ EF! actions received a 100% coverage.

<sup>82</sup> As a cartoon in the 2<sup>nd</sup> *EF!AU* declared, “you’ve got to get your hands dirty when your dealing with shit” ( *EF!AU* No.2 1992: 6 ). See also my characterisation of revolutionary non-purism in 5.2.

<sup>83</sup> *Do or Die* make the pertinent point that EF!UK chose not to regularly utilise other animal rights tactics, such as home visits ( 2003: 12; *Schnews* 1999 No.153/154; *EF!AU* No.89 2003: 7 ).



tactics most clearly aimed at ‘consciousness-changing’ involve the most physically destructive actions, for example with the ‘subvertising’ of billboards ( No.59 1999: 2; No.68 2000: 2; No.87 2002: 3; cf *Do or Die* 1992: 13 ), the sticking of polluting cars ( No.70 2000: 2 ), sabotage and graffiti ( No.59 1999: 4; No.78 2001: 2; No.79 2001: 7 ). I consider the issues that arise for anarchists with regard to physically destructive repertoires in Chapter 6.

One of the great energies of EF!UK was provided by the cross-fertilisation of tactics and repertoires from one issue to another, and the linking of issues into an inter-related and ‘multi-issue’ form of protest culture ( Plows 1997: 4-5; Seel & Plows 2000: 114; *Schnews* 1997 No.100 ). Of the issues most regularly covered in the *EF!AU*,<sup>84</sup> reports of roads and other anti-development actions ( against houses, quarries, pylons, out of town shopping centres etc ) are, as might be expected, the most common and consistent. More surprisingly, perhaps, the next most regularly featured issue is anti-nuclear protest, reported in almost two thirds of the editions from No.5 in 1993 to No.83 in 2002. In descending order, the next most regular issues for which actions and advertisements are covered, were oil; animal rights including hunts, live exports and circus demos, but most commonly HLS and ALF actions; the arms trade; McDonalds; and asylum seekers and refugees ( from 1995 onwards ). Solidarity with other communities across the globe extended from the Phillipines to Colombia, demonstrating a marked consciousness of the global south.

Of particular interest to our consideration of the social concerns of EF!UK, we find reports of anti-discriminatory direct action on all conceivable areas. There are reports of women’s only camps and actions ( notably in the peace movement ) and the inclusion of declaredly feminist networks such as CAAT Womens Network, Women Speak Out and Womens Global Strike ( Nos. 66, 75, 76, 77, 78 ). There are anti-racist and anti-fascist reports ( Nos. 6, 55, 74, 75, 78, 79 ), actions by Direct Action Network ( DAN ) and others on disabled rights ( Nos. 8, 74, 75 ); lesbian and gay actions ( Nos. 66, 67, 71; cf *Do or Die* 1994: 4 ), with the formation of the ‘!eco-faeries! Network’ “to directly challenge homophobia and also to target queer capitalists” ( No.62 1999: 2 ); Mad Pride is reported in issues 68 and 70 in 2000; a pensioners blockade in No.76 ( 2001 ); and solidarity with asylum seekers and refugees is reported in 16 issues from 1995 ( when Group 4, of Twyford fame, were awarded the contract for guarding asylum seekers ( No.20 1995: 5 ) ) to 2002. In *TGAL*, the concern for non-environmental focuses was even more manifest: over 90% of issues featured a report, article or action point on asylum seekers or human rights. *TGAL* also paid greater attention to other ‘social’ issues such as empty homes ( No.26 1999: 8 ), school meals ( No.32 2000: 1 ), child poverty ( No.60 2003: 8 ) and social exclusion ( No.51 2002: 6 ); as well as support for any strike or workers’ dispute in the North East, and opposition to many profit-driven developments involving destruction of green space or existing communities/ community resources. In this *TGAL* is similar to other regional newsletters such as Oxyacetalene ( Oxford ), Loombreaker ( Manchester ) and Porkbolter ( Worthing ) in covering a broad range of local issues and social discontent.

Returning to the *EF!AU*: reports of actions on some campaigns are not even over the period. The first few issues are dominated by actions on rainforest timber ( Nos. 1-17 1991-1995 ): this was the first issue focus for EF!UK as Wall has documented ( 1999: 51-53; cf *Do or Die* 2003: 7 ), but it did not persist as the main focus. There were ten reports of Lamb – the Lloyds and Midland banks Boycott - from 1994 to 1996, and it is listed as a local contact ( *EF!AU* No.8 1993: 4; *EF!AU* No.35 1997: 8 ), but there is nothing after 1997. Similarly, the peat campaign that I assess in section 6.5 garnered many reports in 2001, anti-GM actions dominated from 1999 until 2003, and antiwar protests dominated during the early months of the second gulf war. Other topics only make a brief or even single appearance, such as solidarity with skateboarders ( *EF!AU* No.75 2001: 8 ) or the right to be naked ( *EF!AU* No.66 2000: 8 ). Some developments signal responses to new technology: GM crops from 1995, human genetics from 1999, and more recently nanotechnology. Some indicate responses to state developments, such as new legislation, environmental policies and involvement in international warfare. Other changes signal developments from within protest culture itself, from innovations in camp defence to shifts in political colour: at the 2000 Summer Gathering, for example, several EF!ers pledged to make anti-racism and anti-fascism a higher priority ( *EF!AU* No.70 2000: 3 ).

There is a definite shift around 1995 and 1996 towards a broader, more socially concerned outlook, demonstrated by the introduction of reports on toxics and anti-pollution; the benefits system and Poll Tax; and, most clearly, solidarity with workers’ struggles. The first factory strike report is included in

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<sup>84</sup> Note I am missing 4 ‘lost’ issues and have not been able to factor these in.



the 'News in Brief' column in issue 23 ( 1995-1996: 2 ), the same issue as the Liverpool dockers' strike is supported, with a note of the dockers' "long history of supporting other campaigns" ( 1995-1996: 4 ). The next issue follows up the story with a 'support strike' ( No.24 1996: 3 ) and in 7.2, we shall see the ongoing links that developed between London RTS and the dockers.<sup>85</sup> EF! "articulated an increasingly systemic critique", identifying "capitalism itself where, in the early 1990s, they were more likely to communicate about particular issues" ( Seel & Plows 2000: 127; cf Kingsnorth 2001: 46; *Freedom* 19.10.2002: 6 ). This was particularly evident at the 1998 Summer Gathering, with discussions on whether the various EF! targets could "be united under the banner of capitalism, patriarchy, civilisation, the State or some other definition?" ( Summer Gathering Programme 1998: 8 ). The 1999 gathering continued this discussion with a total of eight debriefs on the J18 'carnival against capitalism', including the question "Is capitalism really the heart of the beast? Does focussing on it simplify our analysis of what it is that is really oppressing us"? ( Summer Gathering Programme 1999: 5 ). I myself will argue that it does indeed mark a simplification in 7.5, and the 2003 Summer Gathering saw some EF!ers launch a concerted appeal to "return to an ecological perspective" ( sg2003 list 16.1.2003, 16.2.2003, 13.3.2003; Plows 2006: 463 ), evidenced by the *EF!AU* from 2003 onwards. From this point, however, I consider the *EF!AU* to have lost the representative and movement-grounded character that I advocate for it in 5.3.9. Here, I wish to focus on the ecological roots that have always underlain EF!UK, to distinguish it from other narrowly 'political' networks by reinserting its protest direct action into a more holistic frame.

### 5.3.6

#### Anticonsumerism and Positive Action

In this section I will look at the holistic and lifestyle aspect of EF! and EDA, and I will follow this in the next section by arguing that a revolutionary characterisation still applies to EF! activism. The pursuit of more positive and non-protest forms of action is one broad area of Earth First! activism, often neglected because it is conducted not in the EF! name ( Seel 1997b: 176-7; *EF!AU* No.16 1995: 2 ).<sup>86</sup> One outgrowth from the protest camps of the anti-roads movement is the development of ecological settlements ( Seel & Plows 2000: 120; Summer Gathering Programme 1999: 8 ), and this is a route that one of the founding TAPPers took, along with two Newbury veterans who had previously been the Newcastle EF! contacts. EF!ers also encourage each other to take a break from the strain of campaigning and take part in positive solutions: "We need to recognise that we can help to actively heal the earth, as well as carrying out the essential work of stopping business and governments from wounding it further" ( *Do or Die* 1993a: 2 ). Non-protest ecological direct action deployed by EF! activists ( and consistently advertised within EF! circles ) includes reforestation projects, community gardens, festivals ( green and/or free ), environmental education and permaculture. Articles on ecological restoration and guerrilla gardening, for example, are featured in 7 out of the 10 issues of *Do or Die*. Figure F5.3 illustrates this facet of EF! activism:

<sup>85</sup> The Norwich group which took over after our editorship paid much more attention to workers issues, with 6 issues featuring reports on GAP and additional attention to construction safety ( *EF!AU* No.73 2001: 3 ), casualisation ( *EF!AU* No.72 2000: 5 ) and privatisation ( *EF!AU* No.74 2001: 2; *EF!AU* No.80 2001-2002: 7 ). These are topics more characteristically covered by the anarcho-syndicalist paper *Direct Action*: conditions in the workplace and solidarity-based campaigns.

<sup>86</sup> I noted in 5.2.2 that preventing destruction should not be seen as a purely negative action: "if what those grey-suited masses in the city do is positive, then GET NEGATIVE! and if you can't handle that remember, NO more roads is good for the earth and is therefore positive" ( *Do or Die* 4 1995: 35 ). The positive and negative aspects of ecological action have been combined most clearly ( because most extravagantly ), by anarcho-primitivists, who position themselves not only "For the destruction of civilisation" but also "for the reconnection to life!" ( *Gay* 9 2002: 16 ). Anarcho-primitivists often frame their project in terms of 'reconnecting' with the roots of pre-domesticated society, to wildness ( or 'going feral' ), and "to rediscover the primitive roots of anarchy". They differ from class struggle anarchists in viewing hunter-gatherer tribes as "ecological anarchists" from whom we should learn ( *Do or Die* 2003 ).



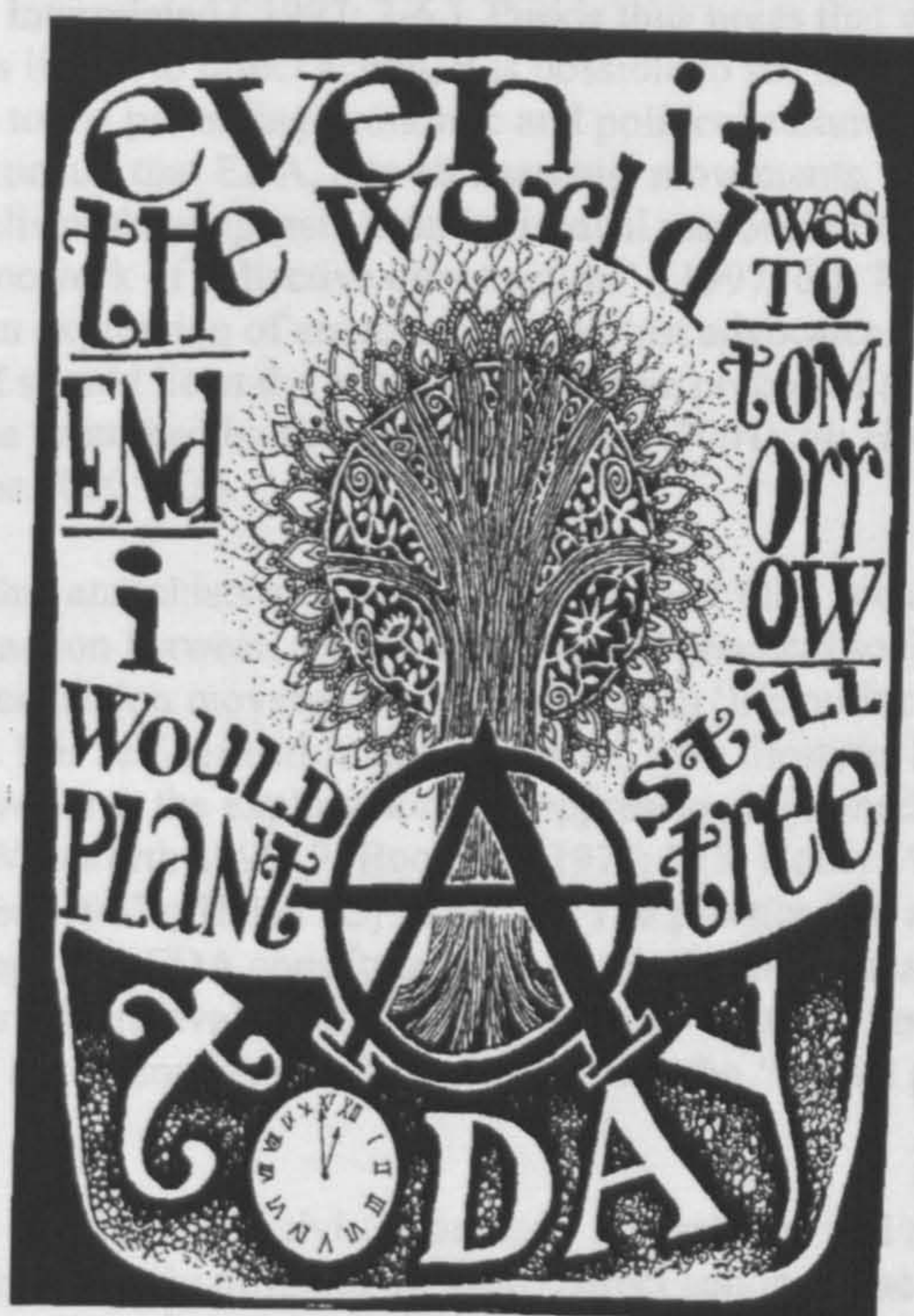


Figure F5.3 'Even if... I would plant a tree today' ( *Do or Die* 1996: 153 ).

EDA activists provide a living critique of contemporary norms of consumerism, rejecting much of what most citizens consider essential for life as 'tat'<sup>87</sup> ( Keith Johnson in *EF!AU* No.3 1992: 4 ). DIY culture's "disdain for consumerism" was claimed as one of its most politically radical and effective dimensions ( Jay Griffiths quoted in Grant 1995: PAGE; *Schnews* 1996 No.45 ), especially as it was undertaken in a celebratory rather than a moralistic way ( IE 2005: 18; cf Heller [C] 1999: 23; Epstein 1991: 210 ). The anti-roads protest camps displayed public and collective challenges to consumerism and demonstrated, in Seel's phrase, the "positive abolition of private property" ( Seel 1997a: 115 ). Seel notes that "EF! activists' personal and community-based attempts to realise a sustainable and ethical lifestyle are based around anti-consumerism rather than just green or ethical consumption" ( 1997b: 172; Scarce 1990: 6; Marshall 1992b: 347 ). Anti-consumerism asks much bigger questions than green or ethical consumerism, and represents a radical politics, certainly on the micro-level ( *Do or Die* 1998: 17; London Greenpeace c1999d ). As anti-political anarchists refuse to vote, so radical ecologists refuse to consume. In both cases, this refusal represents an assertion of autonomy and a refusal to accept either the limits imposed ( vote for choice A or choice B ), or the work-consume-die ethic.<sup>88</sup> It is sometimes augmented by practices of 'self-actualisation', such as learning new skills, to reduce EF!ers "amount of dependency on the formal economy" ( Purkis 2001: 249 ) ( foraging skills, for example, have been taught at successive summer gatherings ).

Purkis notes that anti-consumerists, by "challenging contemporary consumer society" ( 2001: 294 ), are attacking "capitalism's alter ego ... as a means to try to create a better society" ( 2000: 100-104 ). Commentators who criticise such 'lifestyle commitments' as a "distraction from green political activity" misunderstand the nature of holistic ecological politics ( Wall 1997: 25; cf Purkis 2001: 294 ). As Plows argues, "Individual actions – boycotting products, living on the land, growing organic vegetables, cycling, recycling – are seen as complementary direct action, and ... interdependent strategies" ( 1998: 164; cf *Do or Die* 1998: 158 ).

Plows argues that EF! transcends the redundant dualisms of red versus green, individual versus collective strategies, and values versus structure. The material and the ideological, physical and

<sup>87</sup> A word used for belongings on road camps.

<sup>88</sup> Anticonsumerism is also displayed through public events such as No shop day ( *EF!AU* Nos. 7, 33/34, 43, 87; cf Purkis 2000: 105 ); 'Commonpoverty' events ( Nos. 81, 83, 84 ); and a 'money defacement league' ( Nos. 30, 31, 36 ).



consciousness-raising are interrelated ( 1997: 3-6 ). Purkis thus urges that when the holistic, anti-consumerist “sensitivity is linked to direct action, it is possible to see a dual type of resistance – both symbolic and economic – to the prevailing economic and political culture” ( 1996: 204; 1995: 11 ). Plows also argues, and I concur, that EDA, like all anarchist movements, transcends the old Marxist collective-individual “dualism: the emphasis is on individual responsibility ( ‘Do it Yourself!... If not you, who?’ ) within a framework of collective direct action” ( 1997: 6 ). This is a central reason why we should view EDA as an expression of anarchism. Anarchist advocates of direct action have always emphasised that one’s self should lie at the centre of collective processes ( Pouget 2003: 3 ), and indeed that direct action should be prompted by self-interest ( Franks 2001: 24; Heller 1999 [C]: 100; IE 2005: 16; Ruins 2003: 16; Maybe 2000: 20 ).

As I emphasised in 2.2.2 that anarchists are both self-centred and fully social, and that there is no contradiction in anarchist action between self-centredness and practical social change, so I argue here that the environmental direct action movement is a form of both ‘life politics’ and ‘emancipatory politics’ ( Giddens 1991 ). It is self-reflective and concerned with lifestyle, but it also seeks to produce a liberatory politics that overturns the exploitation and oppression ingrained in existing society ( *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 29; Whitworth 1999: 9; Bookchin 1971: 218; Heller 1999 [C]: 1; Szerszynski 1998; Plows 1998b: 32; Seel 1997a; Heller [C] 1999: 2 ). The practice and analysis of TAPP support the conclusion that contemporary EDA constitutes both nonmaterial and material strategies ( Thornton 1999: 6 ). This is a more crucial re-evaluation than just ‘adding’ material and moral rationales: it must be recognised that the two are intimately interlinked and this is the ‘special power’ of direct action, and of anarchism.

In the next section we will see that EF! activist anarchism successfully and routinely contradicts and collapses another similar, but slightly different dualism. Direct action transcends the “dichotomy between instrumental and expressive orientations” ( Roseneil 1995: 98 ), and activists may view self-actualisation and empowerment as part of the same struggle. As McCalla phrases it, “the goal of the process of discovery is transformation ( self and societal ) as much as understanding” ( 1989: 47 ). Unfortunately, where this theme of self-transformation is covered in SM literature, it is often reduced to a ‘moralism’ far divorced from the anarchist project of revolutionary social change ( Epstein; Shephard? ) and strongly critiqued within the anarchist tradition ( *CW* 1997: 12; Jonathan X 2000: 163; IE 2005: 8; *Do or Die* 1996: 155; Begg 1991: 6 ). EF! has contributed through its anarchist qualities, to the dissolution of false dualities such as those between instrumental and expressive action, idealism and realism, and reform and revolution. In the next section I will interrogate this hypothesis further, and assess EF!UK’s ‘success’ in the anarchist, revolutionary terms established in Chapter 5.

### 5.3.7

#### Success and Revolution

This section will build on the sense of ‘radical reformism’ I established in 4.3.4, and the radicalisation outlined in 5.2.2, to assess how EF! combines pragmatism with revolutionary aims. We shall see that the direct action idealism explored in this chapter achieved some remarkable successes, but that revolutionary ideals require revolutionary measure of success, so the easy gauges of success, such as media reflection or economic costs, are insufficient.

Purkis argues that Earth First! successfully combines reformist and revolutionary impulses: “although EF! are being idealistic in their long term vision of a society adhering to some of the principles of Social Ecology, in their day to day activism they show a pragmatism and a reflexivity of purpose as to what is feasible” ( 1996: 212; cf 1995: 10; Plows 1998: 157-158 ). The strategy of not playing the game acts as both an indicator for the vision of a society which EF!-ers actually want, and also as a position from which to argue and negotiate. By avoiding negotiation and compromise EF! managed to act as a competent pressure group without backing down on their revolutionary principles ( Wall 1997: 22; Purkis 1995: 7 ).<sup>89</sup> This is the attitude that EF! feel has gained, not just their own limited successes, but

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<sup>89</sup>In campaigning to stop the big DIY companies stocking hardwood from indigenous forests, for example, tactical irritation was used to try and play one company off against the others rather than calling for an all-out government ban ( *EF!AU* No.5 1993: 2; Purkis 1995: 10 ).



also all the achievements of the past, from the provision of allotments to the right to form trade unions; “So you fight for revolution, and if you lose you get reforms, if you win you get revolution. Revolution is extremely unlikely but it is the only thing that is realistic” ( My notes, GVGS 1998, also Jeff 1998; cf Plows 1998: 172; Seel 1997a: 128 ). This fits the characterisation of anarchist revolution presented in 4.3.4, and allows us to view the revolutionary intent present in the eminently *practical* character of contemporary EDA.

What EF!UK contributed to the traditional anarchist intention of rousing the masses into direct action, was the replacement of class solidarity as the mobilising chord, with “‘militant particularisms’ based on cherished landscapes” ( Wall 1997: 25; cf Featherstone 1998: 24; *Do or Die* 2003: 66 ). EF! UK “succeeded in working with very diverse groups including hedonistic dance cultures, middle-class conservationists and radical trade unionists ( Wall 1999a: 8 ), and thousands of ‘ordinary’ people took to direct action as their preferred method of campaigning in the nineties. There are signs that Earth First! gained a greater legitimacy for direct action ( Wall 1997: 23; 1999b: 9 ), and in the early nineties the NVDA tactics pursued by EF! proved an inspiration, allowing a militant green rhetoric to be heard and encouraging greater involvement and support for NVDA, particularly from Greenpeace, the Green Party and Friends of the Earth ( Marshall quoted in Wall 1999: 156; *Do or Die* 1993b: 50; Welsh 1996: 28 ). Many of the anarchist criteria for success were thus achieved by EF!UK, demonstrated both in the number of people for whom the tactics gained a resonance, and in the way in which these tactics were used to raise fundamental issues about the status quo ( Purkis 2000: 94 ).

A contributor to *Do or Die* proclaims their success in anarchist terms:

“A great saying runs: Mankind marches to annihilation under the banner of realism’ – we must resist the weasel words of ‘realism’ at all costs- after all, it was a ‘realistic’ attitude... that led FoE to abandon Twyford Down, and that leads people into passivity and defeatism on nearly every occasion. Some pride in our achievement is warranted here – we have given many people in the UK – and especially within the environmental movement – a concrete illustration that direct action works and produces results. This is an antidote to the prevailing attitude of powerlessness and hopelessness that keeps people down and the planet under attack” ( *Do or Die* 1995: 94 ).

This was the success of passion over dry strategising, of confrontation over negotiation, of grassroots agitation over elite negotiation, of direct action over following ‘the accepted channels’, and of ‘having a go’ over everyday disempowerment.

EF!’s success should not just be measured in liberal, instrumental or single issue terms, but according to its broader, anarchist aims. EF!UK is not just a militant pressure group for wilderness, but committed to “radical social change to reverse, stop and ultimately overthrow the forces that are destroying the planet and its inhabitants” ( EFWP 1998; cf *Do or Die* 2003: 38 ). Indeed Ben Seel argues that Earth First! represents an “embryonic counter-hegemony”, and is “perhaps the only part of the wider green movement today which asks questions of systemic rather than just reform-oriented scope” ( 1997b: 178; cf Purkis 1996: 203; *Do or Die* 2003: 37; Plows & Seel 2000: 127 ). *Do or Die* recalls that “A consensus in plenary at the 1997 EF! Gathering was that we saw ourselves as an ecological revolutionary network” ( *Do or Die* 2003: 38 ) and, whether or not this was true before, my experience confirms that it has remained so since.

Jasper has noted “how tricky definitions of success are” ( Jasper 1999: 295 ), and this is especially true in the case of anarchism. By looking at the meaning of success for EF!, we can gain a greater understanding of what makes anarchist standards and guides for action distinct ( Welsh 2000: 180; Bonanno 1998: 5 ). This builds on the difference between a conventional top-down ( liberal ) approach and the alternative anarchist approach laid out in Chapter 3. Anarchists are opposed to conventional notions of ‘success’, such as gaining government ‘protection’. Environmentalists have also recognised that such ‘protection’ proves not a permanent but a very temporary victory that can be overturned at any time ( Dix 2004: 22-23; Lutzenberger quoted in Dowie 1995: 174 ). Indeed some state-centric terms of success may be viewed by anarchists as the opposite: as signs of failure, of cooption and the loss of revolutionary opposition ( Adilkno 1994: 83 ): we introduced this theme in section 4.3.3 and developed it in the presentation of the institutionalisation thesis in 5.2.2.



Anarchists suspect easy measures of 'success'. For instance, "In authoritarian groups like the SWP success is measured almost purely on recruitment to the party or paper-sales. For the rest of us, the effects of our efforts are more hidden", and Class War warn against the consequent "temptation to see our reflection in the media as a guide to our success" ( *CW* 1997: 9; cf Franks 2003: 30; *WWMM* 1997 ). The easiest means of gauging EF! success, such as media reportage ( "Today's 18 year olds were 12 when Twyford burst onto the screens. Almost their entire understanding of resistance and social conflict comes from watching us and our mates on telly" ( *WPH* 1998: 2 ) ), or economic costs, ( Twyford was "so successful that Tarmac construction spends just under a quarter of a million a week on security to combat it, and the DoT employs a private detective firm to find out who activists are" ( *Eldrum* 1993: 15; cf *Roseneil* 1995: 170; *Schnews* 1996 No.23 ) ), are therefore insufficient from an anarchist perspective. This is because the anarchist standard of success is much higher: indeed from the revolutionary perspective there is no 'success' until the war is won and the whole world changed ( *CW* 1997: 9; *McCalla* 1989: 53; *Grassby* 2002: 144 ). One EF!er uses this lofty perspective to lament that EDA is "marginalised, ghettoised, stuck in a rut and no more than a minor irritant to global capitalism" ( *B* 1999 ).<sup>90</sup>

The counterbalance to these faulty notions of success ( and a negative, 'purist' repudiation of them ), may be found in the consistent ability of direct action to produce unintended and important consequences ( *Welsh* 2000: 153 ). Various of the facets of 'radicalisation' that I detailed in section 5.2.2 may be seen in this manner, including the development and legitimation of alternative critiques of power and organisation. 'Success' on anarchist terms may thus include the symbolic undermining of the authority of state- and science-backed 'expert' discourses ( *Welsh* 2000: 202; *Epstein* 1991: 10-15 ), changing "public perceptions about risks, encouraging further challenges to authority and scepticism about the interests of government and business" ( *Doherty* 2002: 207; cf *Wall, Doherty & Plows* 2002: 2 ). This relates to the wider purpose of such movements to challenge the way people view the existing way of life ( *Doherty* 1998: 73; *Grove-White* 1992: 10-11 ). Discussion documents thus state that between 1992-6, EF! achieved phenomenal success in this way, "in politicising ecology, in politicising others into direct action and in politicising itself away from its biocentric macho wilderness US history" ( *BAT* 1998; cf *EEV* 1997: 1 ). This was achieved by staying outside the institutions and using grassroots direct action.

As I argued in section 4.3.4, in my study of anarchist action I have found it useful to drop the revolutionary rhetoric and focus instead on the smaller scale angle of direct action. Amongst the latent effects of direct action identified by Welsh, for example, was the adoption of direct action as "a form of intervention used by wider and wider constituencies" ( 2000: 180; cf *Welsh & Purkis* 2003: 11; *Epstein* 1991: 10-15; *Roseneil* 2000: 224 ). The diffusion of direct action strategies throughout broader social networks marks another case for anarchist approval. I considered this in 5.2.2 from an anarchist perspective, but it has also gained an echo in academic SM appraisal in terms of the development of 'repertoires of action' ( *Della Porta & Diani* 1999: 167-184; cf *Waddington* 2000 ), and "capacity building" ( *Welsh* 2000; *Wall, Doherty & Plows* 2002; *Plows* 2006: 468 ). In the terms of repertoires of action, for example, diversity and flexibility is recognised as a positive: "Any movement can be located on a continuum according to the degree of flexibility or rigidity of its repertoire" ( *Roseneil* 1995: 99 ), and anarchists too urge that activists must "avoid universalising any single method" ( *Franks* 2003: 31 ). EDA groups demonstrate a very high rating in this regard ( *Heller* 2000: 81 ). TAPP, for example, staged actions that varied from banner-drops to street stalls, letter-campaigns to 'die-ins', and street parties to squats, all within a time-span of four years.

#### Top Ten examples of EF! repertoire

NVDA, lock-ons, tunnelling, tactical frivolity, office occupations, sabotage, samba, protest camps, street parties, blockades, pitched battles, tripods, squatting, indymedia, spoof newspapers,

#### Top Ten examples of the SWP repertoire

1. Newspaper selling and petitions
2. Meetings
3. Building the vanguard party
4. Marching from A to B
5. Whining about betrayal by trade union leadership

<sup>90</sup> The contrast between instrumental and revolutionary success was displayed in the case of the anti-roads movement. There, camping in the path of proposed roads worked as an economic tactic, intended to push the costs of building the road up so high that other roads could not be built. "If we can stop the bastards totally we can COST them, show there's no easy profit in earth rape" ( *Little Weed* 1994; cf *Merrick* 1996: 66; *Do or Die* 2003: 19 ). Vindication for the camps was therefore cited in the drastic cuts in the government's roadbuilding budget ( *EF!AU* No.23 1995-1996: 2; *Do or Die* 1998: 2 ). Thus "in 1992 we set ourselves the task of stopping 600 roads, which were ripping through a significant proportion of Britain's most important habitats. Within five years 500 had been cancelled" ( *Do or Die* 2003: 61 ). But an activist then puts this evaluation of success in revolutionary perspective: "just a little bit of reform in a world full of shit" ( *Oli*, quoted in *Evans* 1998: 10; *Do or Die* 1996: 19 ).



web sites, pie-ing, digging up Michael Heseltine's garden, crop decontamination, critical mass, working with groups without trying to convert them, *not* forcing ancient turgid crap down each other's throats, self-reflexivity, prisoner support, global coalition-building, skills share, non-hierarchical meetings, cool posters, billboard liberation, self-catering etc.

6. Entryism  
7. erm, that's it

**Figure F5.4 Contrast between EF! and SWP repertoires ( Cattleprod & Friend c2001: 1 ).**

The 'repertoires of action' angle is more compatible with anarchist frame than other views on strategy because it avoids built-in assumptions of state-centrism, Marxism or particular views of what counts as success.

It is not just with tactical repertoires that EF! demonstrated its radicality, but also with the political analysis and aims which, notwithstanding its activist ( not ideological ) basis, demonstrated a complex multi-issue consciousness and critique. To set aside the textual and ideological pronouncements to be found in such organs as *Do or Die* ( cf 2003: 37 ), we may identify EF!'s revolutionary character in the form of its activism, as I sought to characterise in 5.3.5 and 5.3.6. Plows argues that the "conclusively 'multi-issue'" nature of EF! protest "challenges society's isolationist cost-benefit evaluation of 'single issues' and by pulling one thread, as it were, exposes the 'rug' of interrelated issues/effects" (1997: 3-5; cf Heller 2000: 4; Chesters 2000b: 7; Seel 1997: 123 ): see Figure F5.5. She maintains that EF! stays true to the intention to subvert the dominant paradigm ( cf Purkis 1995: 7 ): to question, challenge and eventually overturn the destructive "structure/values/structure spiral which promotes and perpetuates exploitative unsustainability, and terms it 'progress', 'development' " ( Plows 1998: 164 ). Purkis concurs that EF! "undermines the dualistic notion – progress/stagnation or even civilisation/nature" ( 2000: 107-8 ), and both Plows and Purkis valorise the "alternative, holistic ethic" with which EF! wishes to replace it ( Plows 1998: 164 ): see 5.3.6.<sup>91</sup> As I have endeavoured to demonstrate, EF! is difficult to pigeonhole as "Reformist or Revolutionary in classical political terms" ( Purkis 1995: 13 ). But I would argue it is precisely this difficulty which indicates the true revolutionary/anarchist challenge of EF! and the green radicalism to which they have given teeth.

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<sup>91</sup> In 5.3.4 I argued that the relative disregard for revolutionary rhetoric ( most noticeable for its absence in the first five years, and fragmentary and non-synthesised from then on ) is due to activists' internalisation of the lessons of their radical ideology. Instead of expressing sweeping views of how society should be, they apply the radical critique and the ecological ethic to their own actions, choices and ways of being. I maintain that this holistic message may actually be more revolutionary than allegiance to an explicit revolutionary platform.



Earth First! and Shoreham Wilderness Defence  
 present:  
 The Importers from Hell



Figure F5.5 'Shoreham ... Why We Hate it All' ( Leaflet, 1997; cf *EF!AU* No.39 1997: 3 ).

Purkis suggests that "It is possible that the new political aesthetic evident in groups like EF! is evidence that the old structures are not only antiquated but also incapable of dealing with new cultural and ethical agendas" ( 1995: 13-14 ). It is unlikely, therefore, that EF!UK will become institutionalised and 'slotted in' to existing power structures in the manner of FoE and Greenpeace ( Doherty 1998: 379 ). One sign of the vitality of Earth First!'s radicalism is the consistent expression of concern that the network might be losing its vitality: "EF! stands for no compromise. Other groups have been swamped by well-meaning but naïve recruits and lost their original radicalism. In fact there is a general process by which radical groups get recuperated into the mainstream. If we don't want this to happen to us we're going to have to work hard" ( *Do or Die* 1994: inside cover; cf Davey in *Do or Die* 1993a: 17; Cattleprod c2001a: 1 ). This expression of alertness demonstrates a hostility to conventional notions of 'success': the kind of success that kills the radicalism of grassroots movements: success as betrayal ( Noddy in *Do or Die* 1993b: 51 ). EF!ers thus determined to stay on the outside, holding fast to the position of 'no compromise' ( Stauber in *Do or Die* 1995: 98; Purkis 2001: 51 ). In the next four sections it is to the organisational expression of this that I turn. We shall see that concerns over the radical 'outsider' identity and the grander revolutionary aims of activists came to be expressed through dispute, critique and reassessment directed at the network's limited institutional trappings. Through this process the identities of EF! were reaffirmed.

### 5.3.8

#### EF! Organisation and Identity

In this section, I provide a characterisation of EF! as a paradigmatic activist anarchist network, identifying elements and tensions that will give rise to the debates that I will look at in 5.3.11 and 5.3.12. As Becca Lush puts it, EF! "doesn't have one big belief system... people congregate under the EF! banner rather than an FoE banner because they believe in NVDA, they are revolutionary rather than reformist, they are anarchic and don't believe in government" ( quoted in Wall 1999: 150 ). The self-definition carried on the front page of each Action Update proclaims the extent of EF!'s ideology:



a commitment to defend the earth from its destroyers and to employ direct action and non-hierarchical organisation to do so:

“Earth First! is not a cohesive group or campaign, but a convenient banner for people who share similar philosophies to work under. The general principles behind the name are non-hierarchical organisation and the use of direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces that are responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants” ( *EF!AU* banner ).

This definition is very open-ended, and in some ways expresses more what EF! isn't ( a controlled organisation tied to a party line ) than what it is. Plows puts it in a pithy phrase: “ideology is autonomous, autonomy is the ideology” ( 1995; cf Seel & Plows 2000: 113 ), and Derek Wall emphasises that “EF! ( UK ) activists reject the need for formal adherence to a fixed and detailed ideological programme. Instead, they emphasise the pursuit of green political goals via direct action and a loose participatory organisational form” ( 1997: 20; cf Doherty 1998: 377; Seel 1997a ). Wall also provides a useful comparison with those groups who come closest to Earth First!'s political perspective:

“Even the green political organisations which refer to decentralisation as a key element of their ideology seem highly formal in comparison. For example, [ *Green Anarchist* ] and [ *London Greenpeace* ] articulate distinctive political programmes which they promote to would-be supporters” ( 1999: 154 ).

Earth First! thus stands as an activist anarchist network rather than an ideological anarchist group ( or anarcho-syndicalist union ), although those elements of a political ideology which it *does* hold ( the shared perspectives that bind EF! into an identifiable entity ) become all the more interesting for that reason. In this section I wish to examine the intersection of these beliefs with the organisational structure and process of EF!, as this is the place where they have been most clearly and practically articulated.

EF!'s critique and confrontation of “social hierarchies” is clear from the range of issues and repertoires I examined in 5.3.5, wherein “means and ends are merged into prefigurative strategies” ( Seel 1997b: 173; cf What is EF! MEF! 2001: 1; Seel and Plows 2000: 116 ). This prefigurative concern is recognised by Purkis, Seel & Plows as a demonstration of anarchist analysis and allegiance ( Purkis 2001: 345; cf Seel & Plows 2000: 116 ). Activist anarchism is an anarchism of methods and relationships – not a pledge of policy to sign up to and follow. As Manchester EF! put it, there is an “underlying principle ... that how far people go is entirely a matter for their personal choice, commitment and responsibility” ( MEF 1994: 1 ).<sup>92</sup> In terms of EF! organisation this translates into a participatory, diverse and porous association of individually committed, multiply-concerned and strong-willed individuals ( Purkis 1996: 207 ) - and their friends who get dragged along! This organisational basis supports spontaneous creativity, and works against “unified, homogenous, fixed or clear” strategy ( Seel & Plows 2000: 130 ).

Seel notes that “in the last instance local groups are responsible for their own actions and tactics” ( 1997b: 173 ). Just as EF!'s direct action expresses “individual self-determination; and the consistency between one's behaviour and one's ideals” ( Purkis 2001: 345 ), so EF!'s organisation embodies the anarchist ideal of decentralisation. The local groups are the real hubs of EF! activity ( Summer Gathering Programme 1999: 8 ).<sup>93</sup> The anti-roads movement provides a perhaps even more illustrative example of this model. Anti-roads direct action was supported by two limited networks – Alarm UK for information ( McNeish 1999: 70; cf *EF!AU* No.4 1993: 2 ) and Road Alert! for direct action support ( RA! 1998; *EF!AU* No.9 1994: 7 ). But the movement was led from the bottom up with local alliances, and repertoires of action were developed and passed on by the participants themselves.<sup>94</sup> RA!

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<sup>92</sup> This may lead to some ‘non-radical’ actions, but if they are arrived at in a free, anarchist manner then in my view they may represent a more properly anarchist action than methods that are militant but obligatory.

<sup>93</sup> The first *EF!AU* contains nine contacts, including personal names ( *EF!AU* No.1 1991: 4 ), and the fourth *EF!AU* reveals an exciting spread of groups ( *EF!AU* No.4 1993: 3 ). By the time we took on the *EF!AU*, several of the contact groups had started to go quiet, requiring periodic culls: the Norwich group which followed our editorship thus culled the action groups to 14 ( *EF!AU* No.74 2001: 6 ).

<sup>94</sup> It is with regret that the focus of this thesis leads me to downplay the role of the local ( non-anarchist ) campaigners. I do not wish to equate ‘grassroots’ only with those of radical beliefs, nor claim all the ‘success’ of the movement for the radical contingent.



consciously limited its role ( Doherty 1998; cf Ward 1973: 387 ) and eventually folded on the anarchist basis, familiar from our discussion of institutionalisation, that “we started to become too indispensable and any movement with indispensable parts is not going to be strong enough to continue” ( RA! 1998 ).

I should also note the relations between EF! and the road camps. Some camps did have a strong connection with and identification with the Earth First! network ( Seel 1997a: 120; Routledge 1997: 360; cf *EF!AU* No.13 1995: 5; No.15 1995: 2 ), but this was never an exclusive relationship ( Seel 1997a: 117 ). In Newcastle, for the protests against the Cradlewell Bypass, the textual evidence would indicate that EF! played a very strong role, as figure F5.6 indicates. EF! was named in both the movement literature ( Little Weed 1994: 1; cf *Do or Die* 2003: 12 ) and in the legal proceedings ( Affidavit of Frank Malcolm ORR, made on behalf of Newcastle City Council against ‘Persons Unknown’ 14.7.1993 ). Yet local campaigners downplay EF!’s role, emphasising instead that of the veterans of Twyford Down, the hunt saboteurs network and ordinary people from Newcastle.



Figure F5.6 EF! at the Cradlewell ( *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* 5.7.1993 ).

Earth First!’s involvement in the Cradlewell protest was not central or directing: they were one network of people, and one pool of activists, who could be drawn upon to join in the protest, but the protest itself was run by the people who lived on site. Earth First!’s link to the Cradlewell was provided by individuals at the camp: if there were not camp members who identified with Earth First!, then its role disappeared.

EF!’s predominantly urban groups represent the complementary part to the typically rural protest camps ( Eldrum 1993: 15; Plows 1998: 153; Purkis 1995: 12; 1996: 205; 2000: 95; Seel 1997b: 175 ).<sup>95</sup> It must be emphasised that Earth First! is NOT based in London, with a head office nestling amongst those of other ENGOS. Indeed in much of my experience of EF! networking there has been a sense in which London is effectively bypassed by the EF! network ( cf sg2003 list 16.2.2003 ), while communication between the provinces is much more energetic. EF! is based directly on the local affinity groups or radical networks, and around the most active of eco-activists. Each local group is autonomous and chooses its own concerns and methods of acting. These groups are fluid, disappearing and appearing all the time ( Wall 1999a: 60 ), which Seel notes “makes it difficult to quote figures” (

<sup>95</sup> The rise of activist ‘social centres’ ( as opposed to protest camps ) was approved at the 2003 Summer Gathering as “more accurate cos we live in cities” ( My Notes, Summer Gathering 2003 ).



1997b: 173 ). However, certain strong and enduring groups have played a large role in keeping the network active, through hosting network gatherings and providing ongoing points of contact ( 1999: 88 ). Different local groups developed quite varied and specific characteristics and different abilities and histories. This has contributed a source of both tension and capability.

Purkis provides an analysis of Manchester EF! as a group of individuals seeking to organise direct action campaigns in an anarchist manner ( 2001 ). My own local group, TAPP, differed from the Manchester group in having less of a defining relationship to the EF! network, being instead more of a Tyneside network in itself, of peace, anarchist and animal rights activists amongst others ( *Do or Die* 1999: 108; cf Purkis 2001: 331-341; Wall 1999a: 60 ).<sup>96</sup> TAPP began as an autonomous group and remained one throughout its involvement with EF!UK ( *Do or Die* 1999: 105-108; Duckett 1999a ): the relationship it had with the Earth First! network should not be overplayed. Nevertheless, EF! was the national network that I personally had most connection with, which I considered our group to share most affinity with, and to which we demonstrated most practical attachment.

TAPP's place in the EF! network was recognised through inclusion in the groups listing in the *EF!AU* ( I originally wrote to request our inclusion ), and participation in Earth First! gatherings and other events. It is a convention at Earth First! Summer Gatherings for a go-round of groups to be made, in which a spokesperson for each group lists what activities and issues their local group has been involved with since the last gathering. By taking part in this go-round, TAPP was accepted as an equal part of the Earth First! network, its actions and concerns part of EF!'s actions and concerns, even while TAPP's avowed differences were accepted. The most important manner in which TAPP was linked into the Earth First! network, however, was through individual friendships with others involved in the network, ( although relatively few of those would see EF! as their own primary identity either ).

There are no rules that groups must abide by, or directives which they follow, but local groups collaborate nonetheless. SDEF! report that "If one group needs a helping hand, we all try and help out. 'Family outings' to other groups' campaigns happen regularly. Groups also carry out solidarity actions for each other" ( 1994 ). This is true, but informal and therefore 'patchy'. Members of TAPP did regularly travel away to join and support other peoples' protests. Groups of five or more of us attended, for example, a Reclaim the Streets party in Hull; Hillgrove & Huntingdon Life Sciences demonstrations; a route walk at Bingley Relief Road; and the 'Doing it up North' EF! actions in Sheffield ( *EF!AU* No.59 1999: 7 ) and Halifax ( *EF!AU* No.64 1999: 1 ). On such occasions, members of TAPP met new or old acquaintances, and shared in the experience of direct action. My own emotional connection to Earth First! was first most strongly made by risking arrest with, and in spending time in cells with, other Earth First! activists. As a slightly peripheral group, we in Newcastle found we did more travelling to support other groups' actions than we received in return. Partly this was because we did not provide the most inspiring and thought-through actions, but this in itself is a revealing indication of our relatively 'junior' role in the network. There was a sense that the ideas for grand actions ( which in my experience included J18, the 'Smash Genetix' mass trashing of a GM site in Lincolnshire ( see 6.4.2 ), and a co-ordinated shut-down of Sainsburys distribution centres ), always came from 'somewhere other than us': we did not feel it was likely that we ourselves would be able to gain the support for such grand actions.

As the Twyford injunctions demonstrated, the fluid, decentralised and informal structure gives EF! certain advantages, making it hard for hostile agents to infiltrate or paralyse it, and giving it a flexibility and quickness of response ( Plows 1997: 2; Seel & Plows 2000: 118; Lee 1997: 127 ) that anarchists commonly claim for affinity groups. Wall states that "At times it seems almost invisible. Yet EF! has been able to kick off what has seemed like a tidal wave of action" ( 2000: 23 ). Earth First! is perceived by many to have played a central co-ordinating role in environmental protest during the nineties. Before EF!, the UK environmental movement had "never had a mass grassroots wing which uses civil disobedience tactics unlike ... the Peace Movement and the Animal Rights/Liberation movements during the 1980s" ( Purkis 1996; cf SDEF! 1994 ).

However, even if all Earth First!ers are involved in ecological direct action, the reverse is not necessarily the case. With no membership or real organisation, Earth First! is best understood as a ( limited ) network of contacts and organisers of action ( Seel 1997b: 177 ). Indeed Wall notes by 1996,

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<sup>96</sup> A note of warning regarding the accuracy of movement literature might be provided by the fact that although TAPP folded in 2002, the TAPP contact address was retained on the *EF!AU* contacts list until 2004 when, after our requests, it was finally removed.



EF! had 'biodegraded' into specific anti-roads campaigns ( Wall 1997: 19; Seel & Plows 2000: 112 ), although it soon re-emerged from these. Compared with EF!US, less emphasis is made on EF!UK as a specific identity: activists can, if they so choose, give that identity to their activism, but the information and co-ordination activities of Earth First! provide just one among several available networks.<sup>97</sup> Individuals identify with EF!UK because they share its vision of action "rather than a wish to perpetuate EF! as an organisation" ( Seel & Plows 2000: 112 ). EF!ers spent much ( too much ) time musing over their role within the environmental movement, and they recognised that they were just one network within the wider movement: "not the environment movement, but a part of it ... not even the 'direct action environment movement'" ( *Do or Die* 1993b: 50; Seel & Plows 2000: 113 ). This organisational humility can be rooted in the anarchist tradition ( Ward 1973: 387 ).

Other EDA networks tend to be issue-specific, such as Roads Alert! & Alarm UK for roads protests, the Genetic Engineering Network ( GEN ) for genetics ( see 6.4.2 ), Peat Alert! for stopping peat extraction ( see 6.5.4 ) and Rising Tide for climate issues. These may be viewed as the 'biodegradable' networks that appear when they are needed and disappear when their usefulness is ended. EF! is not issue-specific and is perhaps less biodegradable, but the two types are fundamentally akin in their radicality and action-focus ( Plows 1998: 153 ): all four of these other networks made regular appearances in the *EF!AU*. Earth First!'s difference lies in its attempt to encompass many different campaigns and merge all the 'single issues' into a broader community pushing for radical change. EF! is thus one step removed from particular campaigns its activists pursue, and one step towards being an ideologically-bound anarchist organisation. Both EF! and the issue-specific networks contrast with the mainstream ENGOs whose concerns they share and with whom they sometimes co-operate.

A story in the 51st issue of the *EF!AU* tells of two EF!ers hitching a lift to the Summer Gathering with a Greenpeace worker who could not quite comprehend what exactly Earth First! was. In trying to explain, the EF! hitchers found themselves stating that "Earth First! doesn't actually exist" ( 1998: 3 ). If we push our organisational analysis too far then we must encounter this rebuff. "Welcome! Toxic Mutants Earth First! does not exist. It is a figment of the imagination of its members. To join, all you need to do is imagine that you have joined, and go out and shut down a chemical plant" ( TMEF! 1998 ). One consequence of this is that EF!'s relative decline need not in itself concern the longevity of EDA: if the organisation disappears, the underlying milieu and movement remain.

As I write this section, I am conscious how false and formal all this description sounds; the Earth First! network is far too fluid, diverse and context-specific to sum up in the abstract. I must, however, use rather abstract language, and this abstraction remains even if we accept that EF! cannot be adequately described by conventional organisational terms. To seek to remedy this, I would like to emphasise that Earth First! is a real-world phenomenon with actual people in it who form close friendships and community feelings as well as 'political' factions and co-ordinated campaigns. Involvement within Earth First! means meeting people and working with them, and it is the very absence of political programmes that makes this inter-personal aspect all the stronger. In 5.3.11, we shall note that some perceived this as a problem.

To conclude, EF! organisation is "designed for doing radical activities as opposed to lobbying" ( Manchester EF!er quoted in Purkis 2001: 161; cf Seel & Plows 2000: 116 ), but in 5.3.11 and 5.3.12, we shall see how the tension between action and organisation ( and between individualism and community ) flowered into an elaborate anarchist debate. "Beyond being a banner, Earth First! exists as a network" with "geographic groupings", "publications and events", and the "constituent parts and trappings of a non-hierarchical network" ( Eldrum 1993: 15 ). But a discussion document warns that "There is a danger in these trappings when they do not remain consistent with the essential philosophy of non-hierarchy and direct action"; for example if they become "afflicted by informal hierarchy and non-action" ( EFWP 1998 ). It is to these "trappings" that I shall now turn.

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<sup>97</sup> NSM organisation allows that "Individuals often take part in several of these groups while being tied to none" ( Seel 1997 ), and Purkis emphasises that groups are embedded in local 'radical milieus' ( 2001: 65 ). With the case of TAPP, individuals were also active in the Green Party, Anarchist Federation, Trident Ploughshares and People & Planet; were connected to networks like TLIO, GEN, Peat Alert!, CND, PGA, Tyneside Stop the War Coalition; and received newsletters and information from innumerable others, including the anarchist press and the mailshots of other activist groups like Faslane Peace Camp, London RTS and SHAC.



### The Action Update

“you can’t join [ Earth First! ], you just get on with it. But it has its manifestations - the Gathering, *Do or Die*, numerous actions - and the Action Update” ( *EF!AU* No.51 1998: 3; cf *MEF!* 2001: 1 ).

The Earth First! Action Update ( *EF!AU* ) was begun in 1991, and became a regular publication in 1993, produced quarterly and then monthly.<sup>98</sup> It is designed to provide an outlet for EF! and other activists, to let people know of their actions and to provide inspiration and some sense of common identity for the EF! network ( *EF!AU* No.51 1998: 3 ). In Figure F5.7, the Norwich editorial group provide a useful summary of the roles performed by the *EF!AU* and its importance to the network. Other consistent roles emphasised in discussions, and in the guidance notes passed on from previous editorial groups, include prisoner support, with a list of prisoners to write to ( No.35 1997: 7 ); technical information provided in the ‘inserts’, on every imaginable topic from email encryption to Compulsory Purchase law ( No.32 1998: 3 ); and the contacts list of EF! groups and other organisations or campaigns. Some people consider the contacts list to be the most important part of the *EF!AU* ( a way in to the network ), while others consider it a waste of paper.

**THE ROLE OF THE EF!AU AND ITS RELATION TO THE EF! NETWORK**  
 The EF!AU is not the only publication to come from the Earth First! network, however it is the only one which can be said to be the mouthpiece of EF! as much as of the collective producing it. The role of the AU is widely seen as being a networking tool for activists as well as being a point of contact and an introduction to the network for those wishing to get involved. When I became involved in EF! style direct action it was the AU from which I got the details of where and when action was happening, I'm sure this was the same for many of us.  
 The AU is ultimately under the control of its editorial collective. However, every EF! gathering sees a discussion on the role of the AU and we have acted on the recommendations and criticisms arising from these discussions almost without exception. We also held a ‘AU goes to the network’ weekend, when discussion was held and acted upon. The suggestion of one editor that the gathering should mandate the editorial collective and make decisions by which they would be bound, was decisively rejected. It is clear that the majority of people want the AU editorial collective to maintain its near total autonomy. There is some contradiction between the editors’ role as autonomous collective, and their role as representatives of the network. If the AU is the project of our collective then we are free to put our own spin on things and to exclude articles about actions/groups that we’re not into. If however it is the project of the network then it is our duty to not do this. On balance we have tried to act as the latter, writing reports of any British, ecological direct action we are sent, which means that the content is decided by what happens, not what we like. Since the AU discussion weekend we have edited only for length, clarity and factual accuracy, upon the wishes of all those present.

**Figure F5.7 The Role of the *EF!AU* and its Relation to the EF! Network ( *EF!AU* No.73 2001: 5 ).**

The role of editing the *EF!AU* is rotated between different EF! groups each year, although this has rarely been a smooth process: “It’s meant to change editorial group each year, thus sharing responsibility and avoiding institutionalising power and skills in one place. This helps avoid centralisation, and of course puts a huge strain on the poor activists who take it on” ( *EF!AU* No.51 1998: 3; cf Wall 1999a: 153 ). Wall and Doherty both emphasise that it is the larger, well-resourced groups that produce the *EF!AU* ( Wall 1999a: 153; Doherty 1998: 377 ). I was part of the Newcastle editorial group that produced the *EF!AU* between October 1999 and February 2001, however, and we did not fit this profile. We should have handed it on in October 2000 but no one came forward to take it on until January. The Action Update represents a responsibility and potential source of debt that not all are eager to embrace<sup>99</sup>, and it is my experience that it struggles to find a sense of relevance to the wider movement. The number of individual subscribers has never reached 200, and stories are rarely sent in by either groups or individuals unless specifically requested, and re-requested. It is for this reason that a group with close ties and friendships within the EF! network is better placed to produce the AU effectively.

The Action Update is currently on issue 95 ( seemingly stalled since Summer 2005 ), which is an impressive life-span for a radical newsletter. It has been recognised, furthermore, that the *EF!AU* is the only publication of its type that actually tries to be accountable to a wider movement ( No.73 2001: 5;

<sup>98</sup> From 2003 the *EF!AU* has reverted to quarterly. *TGAL* has shown similar aspirations to being monthly, but is more commonly quarterly.

<sup>99</sup> We were warned that at least two EF! groups were effectively destroyed by their experience of editing the Action Update. One re-formed after a lull, while the other never re-appeared. Other groups reported that editing the *EF!AU* made it harder to do direct action ( *EF!AU* No.10 1994: 7 ), although this was not our own experience.



cf No.62 1999: 5 ).<sup>100</sup> Wall emphasises the influence that the editorial collective can exercise ( Wall; cf *EF!AU* No.62 1999: 5 ), and of course this is true, but my subjective experience was one where the constraints and pressures on what we could include were most strongly felt. Editors are discouraged from including personal opinions or critical articles in what is, after all, the 'Action Update'. A narrow role is prescribed for the *EF!AU*, which means that the areas for free creative expression on the part of the editors are limited to peripheral ( yet traditional ) items such as the choice of cartoon on the backpage or the quote on the front cover. Of course, there are many ways that the editors can emphasise or downplay stories ( by placing some on the front page, for example ), and even groups ( we were twice accused of deliberately excluding Green Anarchist from the contacts list<sup>101</sup> ). What is perhaps more revealing are the mechanisms by which the wider network can bring pressure to bear on the Action Update<sup>102</sup>. When we included inappropriate humour or played around with the format of the *EF!AU*, then individuals from several EF! groups were quick to complain, and this has been the case with other editorial collectives also. On more than one occasion, local groups have refused to distribute particular editions of the *EF!AU* because of what has been expressed therein. This is a sanction, available to the decentralised network, that highlights the unique position of the *EF!AU*.<sup>103</sup>

A few further points may be made about the *EF!AU*. To the extent that its producers, and the EF! network, consider the *EF!AU* to be a form of propaganda, then only positive, inspiring reports are to be included ( My notes, 2001 Summer Gathering *EF!AU* workshop ). What is reported in the pages of the *EF!AU* cannot, therefore, be assumed to tell the truth, even while its editors must seek to relate the simplest, least subjective account. As one EF!er noted, "some stories have been blatantly not true, as we all know – we've reported lots of 'great actions' that have been shite" ( My notes, 2001 Summer Gathering *EF!AU* workshop ). On these same grounds ( of propaganda, public consumption and potential recruitment ), it is maintained that criticism and disagreements should be made within the movement, with discussion documents, and not displayed to the outside world. We did once receive correspondence from an individual who claimed to have found the *EF!AU* by chance, on the seat of a train, but in general I believe the existence of the Action Update is more significant for providing support to already-existing activists, than in recruiting new ones ( which tends to happen on the local level, or regarding a particular issue ). The limitations and tensions in the *EF!AU* reflect those of the wider network, as we shall discuss in 5.3.12.

### 5.3.10

#### The Summer Gathering

"the Earth First! Summer Gathering is when people involved in radical ecological direct action – and those who want to be involved – get together for five days to talk, share skills,

<sup>100</sup> These points were made in a small group discussion about the action update at the 2001 Summer Gathering. *Do or Die*, "EF! Action Update's big sister publication" ( *EF!AU* No.19 1995: 2 ), exercised much more editorial independence and as of 1999 ( No.8 ), became independent of EF!UK ( Seel & Plows 2000: 131 ). We found it quite hard that what was billed as open to new collectives, and which we had been encouraged – even begged – to take on, turned out to have a lot of baggage from EF! history and expectations behind it. Not being pre-stamped with the EF! identity, our Newcastle collective tended to offend the sacred cows, miss the requisite tone and, now I read through our editions with hindsight, failed to stamp an effective, inspiring or distinctive identity on our reports. Atton conducted a survey of anarchist newsletters and analysed them according to how participatory and non-elitist they were ( Atton 1999; 2002 ). According to his criteria, the *EF!AU* ( and *TGAL* even more so ) would come out very high: partly this is due to their lack of professionalism, which facilitates a rotating and accessible editorship. A letter of support we received stated that "the move in recent years towards more and more 'professionalism' is not necessarily a good thing. Our network should be based on a DIY ethos" and presenting publications that appear professionally produced "doesn't exactly inspire others to do it themselves" ( letter, March 2000 ).

<sup>101</sup> GA in typically paranoid vein accused us of bowing to ( non-existent ) patronage and funding, when it was a case of technical incompetence rather than political malevolence. They made the useful remark that "the *EF!AU* is a forum for EF! as a whole, not a vehicle for the prejudices of its current editorial group" ( GA, letter, 6.4.2000 ).

<sup>102</sup> The term 'wider network' here is thought of in terms of the potential mass of people that could, should they so choose, respond to the Action Update. Thus the *EF!AU* workshop at the Summer Gathering was billed "The hour and a quarter where the Action Update is accountable to the network" ( Summer Gathering Programme (2) 1999: 7 ). In actual experience, it is only a few individuals – "the more mouthy elements" as one letter of support phrased it ( letter, March 2000 ) - who reacted to the Action Update.

<sup>103</sup> Comparison with other anarchist publications might be fruitful. For the class-struggle anarchist networks, the group and the 'official line' tends to revolve around their newsletter, while many of the non-mainstream anarchist papers are one-man affairs. An EF!er commented that, on attending a Northern Anarchist Network gathering in the late 1990s, it seemed most of the men there had their own paper in tow ( *Total liberty*, *Green Anarchist*, *Cunningham Amendment*, *Northern Voices* ).



learn, play, rant, find out what's going on and plan what's next, live outside, strategise, hang out, incite, laugh and conspire" ( Summer Gathering Flyer 2001: 1 ).

EF! Summer Gatherings are organised by a collective which is set up ( usually at the previous gathering ), exclusively for that purpose, and which draws on the resources of the stronger EF! groups and other useful collectives ( for catering, tents, vehicles etc ). They occur annually in various rural locations and are places of discussion, communication and training. I participated in the Gatherings in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003 and 2005, and was part of the work camps that prepared the site for the 2003 gathering. My involvement means that to me, gatherings are as much about learning how to build compost toilets, reading in the library tent and exploring the countryside as they are about the 'politics' of a network. Earth First! has organised other get-togethers, like the Winter Moot and regional meetings, but it is the Summer Gatherings that draw in most people under the 'Earth First!' banner.

EF! UK's national gatherings and local meetings provide arenas of consensus decision-making expressive of the communitarian, collective impulse in EF! ( Wall 1999: 152; cf Purkis 1995: 5; Purkis 2001: 318-319; IE 2005: 16 ). Although consensus techniques ( such as facilitation and go-rounds ) are used, critical voices are raised whenever actual attempts at large-scale collective consensus have been attempted ( these would have the gathered group make decisions that are - not *binding* as such, for that would be an impossibility - but *definitive* of EF! nationally ). A contributor to *Do or Die* argues that such an attempt "totally goes against the whole principle of decentralisation and local group independence" ( *Do or Die* 1993b: 53 ), and in 5.3.12 we shall note the concerted hostility of *Green Anarchist*, for example, to any national decision-making. This is an expression of the tension between national co-ordination and the autonomy of local groups that, I argue, is integral to the Earth First! network ( Daktari 2000: 68; cf FR 2000; Purkis 2001: 265; Heller 2000: 49-51; Seel 1999: 315 ).

In a reversal of the EF!US case, where it is the *Journal* that became the focus for disagreements and power struggles, in the UK the *EF!AU* is relatively marginalised and it is the Summer Gatherings that constitute the most important institutional space of EF! UK. One participant opines that "the EF! Gathering happens just once a year ... and is a unique and valuable time ... the best opportunity that we have for getting our shit together and moving forward" ( B 1999 ). *Green Anarchist* respond by suggesting "discussion at Gatherings is just a lot of studenty yatter that can happen anytime, whereas popular direct action is what distinguishes EF! from other eco currents" ( GA 1999: 1; cf Anti-mass 1988: 4; Letter, *Do or Die* 1993b: 53 ). They denigrate the significance of the gathering and collective discussion in favour of the method of direct action, as that which comprises EF!'s identity. We shall address this further in 5.3.12: suffice it to note now that it is the Summer Gathering that draws out these conflicts most clearly.

After the first Summer Gathering I went to in 1998, when I had little idea of what to expect and before I became too familiar with EF!, I wrote down my initial impressions:

there were certain set rules given in advance, such as the banning of alcohol until the evening, of offensive behaviour and, more controversially, of dogs. "If approved by the Gathering they will then be enforced and anybody that breaks them may be asked to leave." Although there is a tone of normative morality here that some participants disliked, the organisers did their best to explain their decisions as necessary, made themselves accountable and challengeable, and policed their decisions through dialogue which was dependent on the majority backing of participants. A decision which enough people disagreed with would be unenforceable. The style of regulating behaviour embodied, to some degree, the anarchist answer to the question 'How do you deal with troublemakers or dissenters in a non-authoritarian way?': Education, dialogue, social pressure and, if all this fails, exclusion from the community. All decisions and rules were justified with reference to freedom: for example, "please try to balance your freedom to drink against the freedom of others to an alcohol and aggression-free area" ( My notes, September 1998, quotes from Summer Gathering Programme 1998: 2 ).

The tensions and negotiations I recorded in 1998 relate to the libertarian and communitarian aspects of EF! anarchism identified by Daktari ( 2000 ). My discussion of repertoires and local group autonomy in section 5.3.8 focussed on the libertarian and autonomous aspects of EF!UK. In order to balance this, I



chose to participate in the 2001 Summer Gathering with an eye to the communitarian elements,<sup>104</sup> and also to note how the ideology of EF! is expressed through the organisation of such a gathering.

As our starting point for this I would like to consider the salient points made in the Programme for the Gathering in 2001: see Figure F5.8

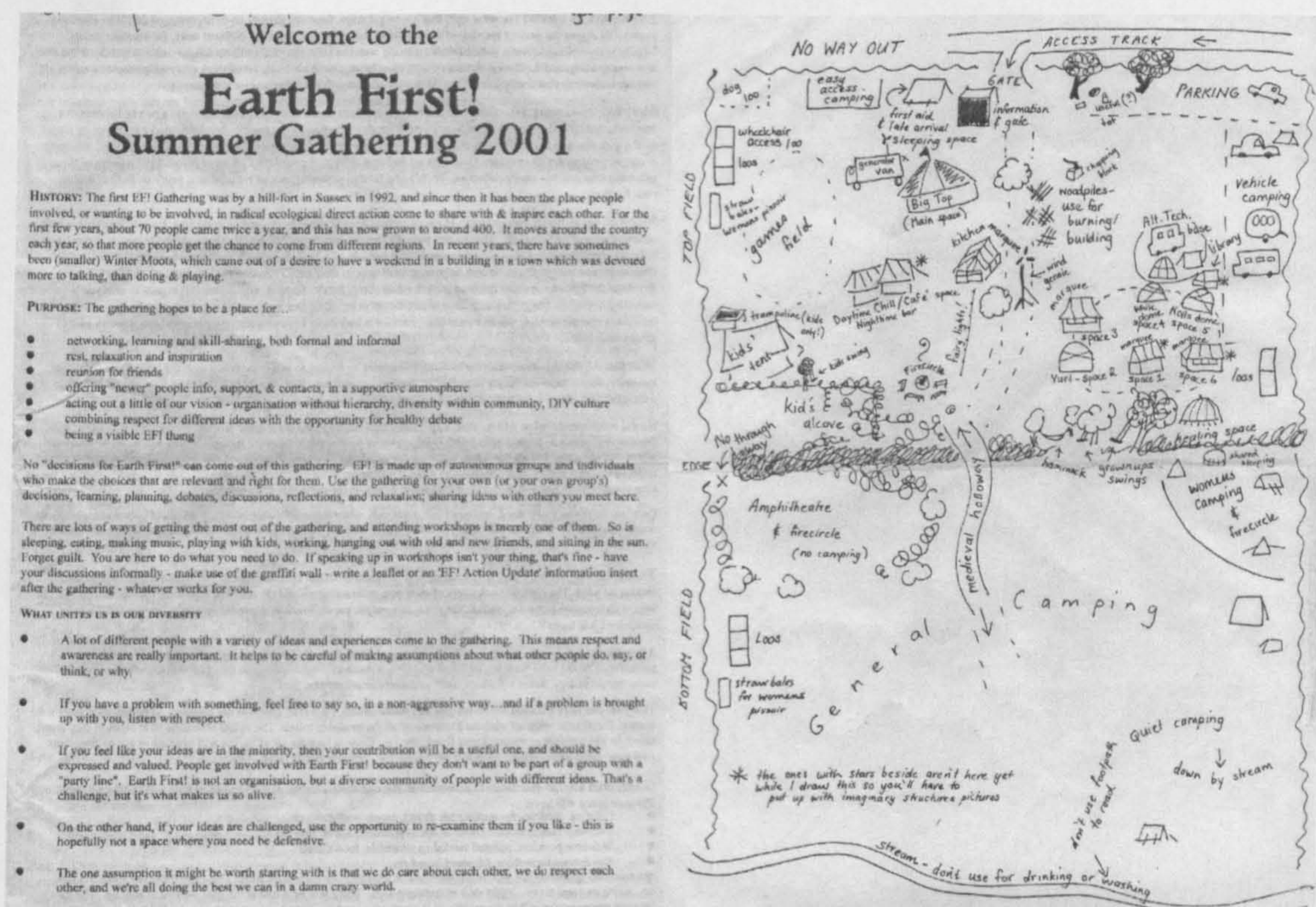


Figure F5.8 Summer Gathering 2001 Map and Programme.

The programme consisted of eight A4 pages ( more than other years ), in addition to the map and the lists of workshops; it therefore represented a strong attempt to impose a character on the gathering. Particular themes that we can take from the front page include the diversity of means of discussion ( ‘What unites us is our diversity’ ); the requirement of respect as a basis for honest discussion; and the avowed intent of providing challenges to participants’ ideas ( cf B, sg2003 list 2003 ). I wish to associate this characterisation with the form of anarchist discourse whose existence I am arguing for in this thesis. We should especially note the imperative that “No ‘decisions for Earth First!’ can come out of this gathering. EF! is made up of autonomous groups and individuals who make choices that are relevant and right for them” ( Summer Gathering Programme 2001: 1 ). This comment is a legacy of past worries and disputes ( it was also asserted for the Moot which I assess in 5.3.12 ( Winter Gathering Flyer 1998: 1; cf Winter Moot Programme 2000: 3 ) ), assuring participants that the communitarian anarchism of the gathering cannot be translated into any form of legislative power.

I would like to focus in particular on the proposed ‘Purpose’ of the gathering:

- ( 1 ) Networking, learning and skill-sharing, both formal and informal
- ( 2 ) rest, relaxation and inspiration
- ( 3 ) reunion for friends
- ( 4 ) offering ‘newer’ people info, support, and contacts, in a supportive atmosphere
- ( 5 ) acting out a little of our vision – organisation without hierarchy, diversity within community, DIY culture
- ( 6 ) combining respect for different ideas with the opportunity for healthy debate
- ( 7 ) being a visible EF! thang ( Summer Gathering Programme 2001: 1 ).

<sup>104</sup> Gatherings also bring up collective/communal needs, such as childcare and kitchen work ( Winter Moot Flyer 2000: 2; Tsolkas 2004: 27-8 ), in a way that affinity groups of like-minded agile twenty-somethings do not.



Of these points, we have already mentioned ( 6 ) the emphasis on respect and healthy debate; ( 2 ) the importance of the informal side ( cf sg2003 email list 16.12.2002 ), also demonstrated by scheduled workshops on reflexology and reiki, hot tubs and games of football, but tempered by the annual insistence that “this is not a festival”; and I shall consider ( 7 ) in 5.3.12. The rest I will now address in turn.

( 1 ) We can note the diversity of both formal and informal types of meeting and discussion. Other networks riddled the Gathering site ( including TLIO, regional networks, Green Party members, co-ops and ex-road protesters etc<sup>105</sup> ), and many issue-specific or unannounced meetings took place in addition to the open programme. The programmed meetings may be divided into the following types<sup>106</sup>:

- practical workshops, from tool care to earth education,
- international workshops, including Peoples Global Action, Narmada dam and international conferences/days of action,
- workshops centred on particular environmental or social issues,
- testimonials and videos,
- strategic discussions and planning,
- discussion of more abstract ideology, such as perspectives on violence, on red-green links and divergences, on spirituality and on academia,
- consideration of new and old tactics, such as ‘tactical frivolity’ ( see section 6.3.2 ).

Certain meetings had a more ‘structural’ importance, such as the daily morning meeting, at which announcements ranging from lost property to new workshops were announced. This, following close on from breakfast, was the first event to be shouted across the site. Amongst its other roles, “the various roles ( toilet cleaners, people for the front gate, etc.. ) are announced and recruited for” ( My notes, 2001 ). There were also networking sessions, both international, national and for the regions. In 2001 it was in the international round-up that the anarchist identity of Earth First! was made most clear, in that participants appeared to make no distinction, in their own countries, between anarchist activity and that of Earth First! in the UK.

( 3 ) The third ‘purpose’, of reunion for friends, provides us with a connection to the clique issue of 5.3.11. A TAPPER new to the festival in 2001 commented to me that it was easy to see who the key Earth First! people are and I agree that being an apparent member of the ‘clique’, or the inner network of Earth First!, was indicated in many ways: “Certain people will consistently stand up and talk, know everyone by name, be louder and more confident in their pronouncements, show themselves familiar with all the jargon and the latest debates. Everyone seems to know them, and they talk to each other in workshops, which can mean that they exclude others by their over-participation” ( My notes 2001 ). The 2001 programme recognises this apparent cliquey-ness for the first time. It states “Please have patience with the ‘old friends catching up’ thing, which is an important part of the gathering for many, and also with people assuming you know things” ( Summer Gathering Programme 2001 ).<sup>107</sup>

The programme’s recognition of these social groups represented an attempt to overcome their exclusive ( cliquey ) aspects to them, and was linked with the fourth expressed purpose; ( 4 ) the welcome and support of new people. The programme offered the possibility of ‘shadowing’ members of the site crew or experienced hands, and also announced the existence of ‘welfare monitors’, to act as peace-makers or as emotional support, should they be needed. There was also a so-called ‘Black Route’ marked on the workshop timetable: “workshops on the timetable that are or will try to be particularly accessible to

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<sup>105</sup> A list of 35 networks with websites was listed on the 2003 Summer Gathering website, alongside 7 groups who contributed kitchen equipment, structures ( tents ), and other resources ( accessed 27.8.2003 ).

<sup>106</sup> At the 1998 Summer Gathering, I distinguished formal campaign meetings from practical skill-sharing and experience-based workshops, noting “These workshops included how to: plan actions, deal with arrest, handle prison, facilitate meetings well, save lives with first aid, squat buildings, do co-counselling, build a bender, practice self-defence ( some workshops women-only ), learn to climb, practice a more ecological lifestyle, use lock ons, use radio scanners, put newsletters together, develop affinity groups, deal with problem-people, stay healthy on site, combine activism with children and/or jobs, set up pirate radio stations etc..” ( My notes September 1998 ). Each Summer Gathering programme divides the sessions up in a slightly different way: these divisions are somewhat arbitrary and should serve only to indicate the range of workshop styles and issues.

<sup>107</sup> An EFler from 2003 makes the valid point that “Sometimes it is very hard for individuals to express viewpoints, let alone have them taken on-board, when there are years of entrenched dogma and attitude amongst a core group” ( Fred in Steve 2003: 5 ). Yet I also side with the respondent who stated that this was not truly due to dogma and core groups, but more because of *perceptions* of these ( ‘the guru’ in Steve 2003: 6 ). I will consider these issues further in the next section.



new folks, are marked in black. Can people attending them be aware of this, and be extra aware of avoiding jargon, slang, obscure references, and the phrase ‘well I’ve been doing this for ten years and...’ or the sentence beginning with ‘Obviously!’” ( Summer Gathering Programme 2001 ). This relates to the tendency, criticised in a workshop on ‘EF! Culture’ at the 2001 gathering, that “Taking the position that ‘we have dealt with this and now it is resolved’ forgets that ‘WE’ changes all the time” ( *EF!AU* No.81 2002: 4 ).

My feeling was that such attempts at aiding newcomers run the risk of patronising their intended recipients: the very fact of being branded a ‘newcomer’ may be perceived negatively ( as unequal, as labelled ‘outside’ or ‘naïve’ ). I perceived a tendency in some Earth First! circles to assume that people not inside those circles are somehow missing out, or need support, when in actual fact they may be happily embedded in other networks. What does come clearly across in this concern to integrate newcomers into the fold, however, is the extent of the communitarian ethos in Earth First!’s anarchism.

This brings us to ( 5 ), ‘acting out a little of our vision’, noted earlier in this section in terms of dealing with dissent ( My notes, 1998 ), and the terms of debate, and most clearly demonstrated by the genuine sense of collective responsibility ( *EF!AU* No.89 2003: 5 ). As the programme puts it, “Everyone is Crew: ... To ensure the smooth running of the site, work teams need to form for different tasks; for example, toilets, helping with cooking, driving, general welfare, being with the kids, etc... If everyone does a wee bit of work everything should be sorted. If you see something that needs doing, then do it” ( Summer Gathering Programme 2001; cf Summer Gathering Flyer 2001 ). This mirrors the general philosophy of Earth First!: if you see a planet that needs saving, then do it!

Other aspects of Earth First! ideology manifested at the 2001 Summer Gathering included an awareness of gender issues, through a women-only camping space, and women-only workshops ( for example on “Women’s fertility awareness for natural birth control” ). There was a well-attended men-only workshop on ‘men and masculinity’ which was then converted into one including women’s points of view. Lots of men walked round the site wearing dresses, and there was an ‘Eco-faeries!’ Workshop. There was also a strong emphasis made on adopting the ‘social model of disability’, expressed through a concern for site accessibility that, through the participation of disabled individuals, was improved upon at the next gathering.<sup>108</sup>

There was an antifascist workshop, and one on the history of black radicalism. There are also annual workshops for “Working people – for those trying to balance jobs and activism”, and for parents balancing activism and children. There was a marked concern about the insularity of ‘EF! Culture’, expressed in this and the previous year through an emphasis on community activism ( Summer Gathering Programme 2001; cf Summer Gathering Programme 1998: 8; *EF!ROR* 2001: 1; Seel 1997b: 176 ). Very cheap vegan food was laid on for everyone by not-for-profit collectives, and there was alternative technology powering some of the tents. I was pleasantly surprised by the many links between EF! protest activities and more long-term, sustainable projects and lifestyles. This was also evidenced by, for example, the number of children at the site ( and the provision laid on for them ), with both young babies and groups of middle-school age children running around, stealing footballs off the grown ups and putting on puppet shows. There were also displays for Permaculture, participants from organic smallholdings, community allotments and low impact communities. In 2001, environmental awareness was most clearly evidenced by an emphasis on water conservation: “Only use what you really need, and use fresh water only when there is no alternative. Think about your water use, could waste water be used instead? Think seriously about whether you can go without water using activities, for instance, showering twice a day will not be a option. Unless it rains” ( Summer Gathering Programme 2001 ). In other years, site-specific issues varied from the design of compost toilets to the protection of ecologically sensitive areas. I consider it a strength of Earth First! that the truly

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<sup>108</sup> The programme stated that “This year’s collective has been looking at the issue of accessibility. The model of disability generally accepted in our society is known as the Medical Model – that a person is disabled because of their impairments ( i.e. it’s their problem ). However, disabled people have challenged that with the Social Model – a person is disabled by society ( i.e. it’s our problem ). If society met their needs, they would not be disabled. Accepting the Social Model, we have begun looking into how we can improve physical access at the Gathering, and make a start on some practical things.” A lengthy email preceded the 2001 gathering announcing this attempt to construct the site according to the social model, and the onus was put on future gatherings to greatly increase accessibility. Some TAPPers felt Earth First! over-played its left-libertarian ideology, and can verge on arrogance, self-importance and being ‘up its own arse’. It is interesting that it is this sense of self-importance that provides much of the explicit and textual evidence that facilitates an analysis of EF! ideology. TAPP, for example was aware and utilised the social model since its involvement with disabled activists on the human genetics theme ( *Gene-No!* 1998b; *Do or Die* No.8 1999: 10 ), but had not written a manifesto to the movement about it.



environmental and sustainable is integrated with the political edge of the movement, as my arguments of 5.3.6 and 5.3.7 indicate.

### 5.3.11

#### Cliques

Informal hierarchies are commonly identified in informal activism ( *CW* 1997: 8; Roseneil 2000: 175 ). Purkis refers to a hierarchy ( or tyranny ) of the most committed in EF! ( 2001: 168; cf Jonathan X 2000: 163; Dolly quoted in Heller 2000: 129 ), and an EF! document states that “Power exists. It’s held by the loudest people, or the most informed, or the funniest, or the most confident, or the men, or given to those perceived as having important views, or whoever” ( EREE 1999; cf RA! 1996: 6 ). Freeman warned that friendship groups can create power inequalities when there are no formal structures to bypass them ( 1984: 8; Polletta 2002: 164 ). My experience of the Earth First! network includes many examples of such friendship groups. One EF!er said that she rarely read the *Action Update* but was kept in touch by gossiping on the phone with friends elsewhere in the country. Tellingly, that method of communication was often more accurate, more speedy and more direct than the ‘official’ EF! organ. The implications of this informal communication through friends are many. Inviting everyone to come to an action in the *EF!AU*, for example, would be a very unreliable way of gaining numbers. If well-connected, well-liked activists were involved in organising it, however, then bodies would be far more likely to turn up. The method by which they would hear of the action, and be spurred to join, would be informal, word-of-mouth, and mainly reliant on the good reputation of the activist/s concerned.

Freeman argued that “‘Structurelessness’ is organisationally impossible” and “a way of masking power” ( 1984: 6; cf Bookchin 1995b: 58 ), and that the only way to avoid hidden cliques, is to adopt a formal structure ( 1984: 14; cf Epstein 1991: 272 ). The Land is Ours landrights group did just this, adopting a constitution “in order to prevent the emergence of hierarchy” ( Monbiot 1998: 176 ). In contrast to Freeman’s thesis, however, the cliques of EF!UK came to be most vociferously criticised and identified precisely when EF! organisation was taken onto an institutional, democratic, open and participatory form, at the summer gathering. GA also claim that “Those who don’t attend [the gathering] tend to be the most militant EF!ers or those with the strongest local connections” ( 1999: 1 ). I would dispute this assertion to some degree, as it is often ‘big talkers’ that state the most radical views, be that in textual form ( such as GA ), or at large gatherings. Yet, as I noted in 5.3.10, certain types of activist do dominate at gatherings, are more confident speaking in front of many others, and more comfortable with the idea of collective decision-making. It is also true that many EDA types ( including those of a practical bent who are more interested in constructing camp defences than discussing other people ) are not represented at gatherings.

It is claimed that those who are willing and able to organise such Gatherings “usually end up being the same people each year” ( FR 2000 ), so that a situation arises where “we have a small number of highly motivated activists doing the main organising ... working in small friendship groups” ( EFH 1998 ). It is these ( inadvertent ) cliques that are identified as one of the biggest problems in informal, structureless organisation<sup>109</sup>. But as in EF!US, the *Journal* became the focus, so in EF!UK the national gatherings served to bring out the debate. It was alleged that the same circles chose the topics each year for the ‘gathering wide discussions’ ( My notes, Summer Gathering 2003 ), and while it is a fair response to point out that the programme of the gathering is ‘chosen’ by anyone saying to the organising collective ‘I want to do a workshop on...’ ( J in Steve 2003: 4 ), the social dynamics involved make the situation less simple than that.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Elites are not evil conspiracies out to grab power, but rather “nothing more and nothing less than a group of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities” ( Freeman 1984: 8; cf Roseneil 2000: 167-169 ). That the EF! network is riddled with these networks is certain: indeed a case could be made for the ‘EF!’ network identity being held together primarily by these friendship ties ( Purkis 2001: 265-268; *EF!AU* No.25 : 6 ). It was beneficial to me that our own group did not feel part of the ‘inner circles’ and had not shared the same bonding experiences at Twyford Down, for example, as certain other activists: it is partly for this reason that I have focussed on the *EF!AU* and the Gathering to explore these dynamics, rather than on our own local group.

<sup>110</sup> It was partly in response to this relative isolation of the gathering-organisers that I joined in the organisation in 2003, preparing the site, organising logistics, and participating in the creation of the programme. I found it very easy to get involved,



One discussion document ( DD ) argues that

“People outside the friendship cliques, firstly, can’t see how the organisation is being done so don’t know how to join in organising. Secondly, it appears that someone else is doing it so people don’t bother doing it themselves. The pattern becomes self-perpetuating” ( EFH 1998 ).<sup>111</sup>

There is thus the danger of “a bureaucracy about to be born” ( EFH 1998 ), even though ‘bad’ bureaucrats are not initiating it. Invisible hierarchies or cliques develop through sustained participation. These, if they lose their receptiveness to new members, can act to the detriment of a camp or activist group ( Freeman 1984: 14 ).

Another DD reports that “The damage caused by our very real informal hierarchy is disturbing ... holding us back from being more inclusive and effective, and we are wasting a lot of good energy and good people by not sorting it” ( FR 2000 ). The perception of this led to the ‘clique discussions’ at 1997’s EF! Gathering ( AOH 1998 ), and the situation is framed by Notts EF!:

“There is an unofficial hierarchy forming in Earth First! due to its structurelessness. Because of this lack of structure people are following action trends directed by a relatively small group of highly motivated activists. People are not educating and involving each other. This is not deliberate but it must be addressed. Direct Democracy does not just happen, it must be nurtured and guarded as a precious thing...Most of us in the U.K. come from an industrial society which does not encourage participation or taking control of your own life. It encourages domination, such as that of women by men or amateurs by experts. It also encourages the passivity of those not in the controlling elite. We need to be vigilant to avoid falling into these patterns. How many shy individuals’ participation do we lose, by not having a clear way they can join in without feeling that they are questioning the dominant clique” ( Notts EF! 1998 ).

However, in Purkis’ study of a local EF! group, he notes that the ‘core group’ was “More of an accidental clique than an executive body, not as closed as a cell or a cadre, it often seemed to want to dissolve itself through extending the number of people responsible for particular tasks” ( 2001: 167 ). He notes that “there is a strong commitment to processes of self and group monitoring” ( 1996: 207 ), and MEF! proved “as reflexive about themselves as a group as they are as individuals”, taking non-hierarchy very seriously ( 1996: 208; 2001: 347-8 ). Purkis also notes that “The level of accountability of these people was quite high given the extremely long and participatory nature of the ‘EF! Gathering’s’” ( 2001: 168 ).

It is my view, therefore, that the discussions which follow in 5.3.12 should be seen in a similar light to that which Roseneil claimed for the Greenham campers, where “Conflict and tension ... arose in situations where hierarchy and inequality were minimal in comparison with conventional political organisations and living arrangements” ( 2000: 164 ). It is EF!ers’ ( anarchist ) hyper-sensitivity to issues of hierarchy, elitism and inequality ( Purkis 2001: 348-351 ) that provoked so much discussion, accusation and hand-wringing in the movement: issues of informal hierarchies and friendship cliques that had long existed on road camps, and indeed in all radical activism, were thrown into the spotlight. The results of this controversy, which I chart in 5.3.12, are useful to both our understanding of EDA and our understanding of anarchism, by displaying the variety of conflicting positions available within a broadly shared basis of activist anarchism. This variety exemplifies the spirit of exploratory dialogue that I identified in Chapter 2, and adds a critical bite to the characterisation of mutually respectful open debate which I applied to EF! in 5.3.10.

### 5.3.12

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simply by joining an email list and then turning up when it was advertised to do so. The organising group was fluid, geographically dispersed, and showed no hallmarks of elitism or cliqueness.

<sup>111</sup> Purkis emphasises the effort EF!ers make to avoid hierarchy and empower people ( 2001: 347 ), but he also recognises there can be a “self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the older members became frustrated with the fact that nobody was actually volunteering to do these tasks, thus causing themselves to maintain ‘control’ of these activities” ( 2001: 333 ).



## The 1999 Winter Moot

It was at the 1999 Winter Moot that discussions over the nature of EF! organisation were made most clear and explicit. EF! participants had long been raising criticisms and suggestions, highlighting the gulf between *Earth First!*'s ideal and its actual organisation. Here this debate became crystallised into formal proposals for network-wide debate. Through the articulation of these positions, we may view the EF!ers as both utilising arguments and themes from the anarchist tradition, and also utilising their experience in practical activism, its successes, needs and limitations. Theory was drawn upon to ( guide and ) judge practice, and practice drawn upon to ( reformulate and ) judge theory. I have simplified the range of positions expressed at the Moot into four proposals, and drawn out what I consider the most valuable criticisms of these. The discussion at the Moot was, as usual, more wide-ranging than I can restate here.<sup>112</sup> My experience of the spoken debates indicated that the arguments put on to paper were generally taken less seriously in practice. Some EF!ers did have strong views about what EF! should do, but a widespread sentiment was that the textual arguments I draw on here were 'over the top'. The Moot did not, therefore, conclusively adopt one or other of the proposals ( and not only for the 'informalist' reasons of proposal 4 ), but carried on in much the same format as EF! had before the Moot. Nevertheless, the value of the Moot lies in revealing the tensions and possibilities residing in the recognition of EF! as an activist anarchist network.

The issues that prompted the Moot were identified long before. Thus a *Do or Die* article reported in 1996 that

"Two basic problems have to be addressed; firstly to define the major changes to society that we seek and secondly, do we want to build a mass movement or are we content to remain a small band of young, noisy, white, middle-class, unemployed, physically able 'extremists'?" ( *Do or Die* 1996:18 ).

Worry about becoming a closed, activist ghetto was one of EF!'s most consistent topics ( *EF!AU* No.29 1996: 6 ), with repeated calls for "more inclusive forms of direct action ... to prevent exclusion of less physically able, more elderly or less radicalised people" ( Seel 1997b: 176; cf *EF!AU* No.52 1998: 4-5; Summer Gathering Programme 1998: 8 ).<sup>113</sup>

One Discussion Document at the Moot suggested that "EF! is full of well-meaning people who are scared to admit they've lost their way, who psychologically huddle together, hanging onto familiar old banners...People who forged important friendships in intense moments, and weeks and months of out-on-the-edge activism. And who don't know how to stay at such intensity, without burning out, but neither can walk away from it and move onto other things" ( EGOD 1999 ). Another DD noted that "There are splits and disagreements as we realise that perhaps we are not; after all; all moving in the same direction" ( BAT 1998 ).

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<sup>112</sup> At the third Winter Moot in 2002, I made my strongest attempt to use my academic analysis to inform movement debate. The notes I took indicate how unsuccessful ( and unnecessary ) I felt my contribution to the debate was, but they also record my experience of feeling 'put down' in debate: "Always more anarchist and more on the ball than I remember. I feel so less intelligent than them. Nothing new to say ... Lots of effort was put into making the debate a safe space for discussion ( this point especially urged on the points of racism and sexism, so that we could be honest and not feel scared to speak ), but in the small group ... and also in the big plenaries ( folk'd huff and laugh/make jokes ), there was an undertone ... that might scare off real honesty. I certainly felt when I phrased a few things wrong that people leapt to disagree when they detected things they've decided they're anti. This happened when I used the words 'democracy' and 'accountable' to consider how ef! related to each other ... those words have baggage and people leapt at the baggage ... So you have to mind your p's and q's, and if I didn't already share so much of their anarchist ideology I would feel very 'outside' I think" ( My notes, Winter Moot 2002 ).

<sup>113</sup> A recognition of the exclusivity of EDA, which I will criticise using formal anarchist arguments in 7.6, is also commonly recognised within EF! Some people are excluded by the "level of commitment" needed ( ATW 1998 ), others by the physical demands ( *EF!AU* No.25: 6; WPH 1998: 2 ). One DD notes that "a movement whose whole strategy is based on risk, danger, transience and illegality; attracts only those too young to have obtained anything to lose" ( WPH 1998: 2 ), and others raise the fear that, rather than being a true revolutionary movement, "Ecological direct action could be just an exciting holiday of autonomy between leaving school and entering the world of work and parenting" ( WPH 1998: 1; cf *Do or Die* 2003: 38 ). Ableist barriers are self-selecting ( Roseneil 2000: 49 ), and these factors mean that EF! is a "young persons movement, mostly white and well educated, but economically 'decommodified'" ( Purkis 1996: 200 ). EFH warn that "Actions can turn into another branch of the trend towards dangerous sports, privileged people looking for extreme experience in a dulled world, an outlet for angst driven rebellion, or a comforter to make you think you're doing something" ( EFH 1998 ).



The Winter Moot of 1999 thus arrived at a moment of identity crisis for Earth First! UK, and was designed as “a space to discuss ourselves” ( S1 1999 ). The organisers recognised that “All movements should change and evolve, and there’s currently a very strong general feeling that we all need to get together and discuss what we’re in it for” ( S6 1999 ). They therefore intended the Moot to provide “a chance to chat with people new & energetic, and old & cynical, at more length than usual, in an atmosphere of constructive criticism and mutual interest & support. I hope that we will be able to feel what binds us together, and be able to explore and respect our differences, without feeling the need to all agree” ( S8 1999 ). This is the positive sense of debate which I claimed for the Summer Gatherings in 5.3.10. One of the contributors thus emphasises that the Moot should be a “safe space for *everybody’s* ideas” ( FR 2000 ), and another valorises dialogue over agreement so that “new and old activist dynamics can cross-fertilise, instead of disappearing up our own arses” ( AOH 1998 ).

The ground rules of the Moot were laid out by the collective who organised it. It was an alcohol-free space and all discussion was to be based on “*Respect* - One of our challenges as a movement is working out how to work co-operatively together - in a sense policing ourselves. If you have a problem with someone’s behaviour but don’t want to discuss it with everyone please don’t hesitate to talk to one of the organising collective”. Discussion Documents ( DDs) were invited in advance from participants, and these were distributed at the Moot, with copies arranged in different orders to avoid one person’s argument being given priority.<sup>114</sup>

In activist anarchism, these problems are crucial because, lacking a fixed ideology, it is through this informal organisation that anarchism is expressed. As one contributor puts it, using the prefigurative language introduced in 4.3.4, “What you do is what you become. The way we organise will shape EF!’s future” ( EFH 1998 ). For clarity, I am structuring the arguments from the DDs into four proposals put to Earth First!: ( 1 ) to form an explicit anarchist federation, ( 2 ) to develop a recognised EF! power structure, ( 3 ) to form a tighter network of collectives and ( 4 ) to keep everything informal. I conclude with an assessment of the actual impact of these proposals on EF!, and consider the criticisms ( also from within EF! ) of the social dynamics revealed by this Moot process itself.

### **Proposal 1: An explicit anarchist federation**

Some suggested that, like the Anarchist Federation, “EF! should be explicitly anarchist and revolutionary” ( B 1999; cf S5 1999 ), and proposed “A national federation of local groups which ‘directly confront, and work towards the overthrow of the capitalist system, and its replacement with a free, egalitarian and ecologically sustainable alternative’” ( BAT 1998 ). Such a proposal is supported by the strand of anarchism that suggests that equal power can be instituted by the creation of a horizontal federation which would liaise through delegates ( AT 1999 ), and which seeks the ‘leadership’ of anarchist ideas through making them explicit rallying points.

This proposal characterises the formal and not the informal strand of anarchism, and it is therefore liable to the critiques of ideological organisations that we introduced in Chapter 2. Thus GA criticise formal anarchists for “petty sectarian sniping over their barricades of ideology” ( GA 1999: 3 ), arguing that *that* is the real ‘ghetto’, not the activist scene: “EF!’s ‘activist ghetto’ is mercifully free of such ideological retardation, activists have no inhibitions about taking action themselves and setting their own agendas” and EF!’s informal anarchism is “freer of patronising, elitist attitudes than the old class strugglists” ( GA 1999: 4 ).

Green Anarchist states its opposition to ideology because, instead of facilitating revolution, it “creates a barrier” to it ( “Organisational / ideological bullshit was just another layer of oppression” ( GA 1999: 2 ) ); and its opposition to ideological organisation on the basis that “politicos form mini-States around themselves functioning much as all others, teaching those within to think and act in a certain way to distinguish themselves from outsiders and enforcing this with the threat of expulsions” ( GA 1999: 2 ). Others, however, accuse GA of possessing, and pushing, a very strong ideology themselves, and I consider that they fail to apply all their critical points to their own external image and impact.

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<sup>114</sup> Although the effort to receive as many contributing DDs as possible was unprecedented, most DDs were nonetheless produced by long-term ‘clique’ members (and their GA snipers ), because they were the most attentive to the channels by which DDs were solicited, and most aware of the impetus behind the attempt. Most authors remained anonymous, and so I have utilised either the initials of their pen names or, where that is lacking, the initials of their title.



One DD makes the more valuable point that “If EF! were to label itself ‘anarchist’ ... it would not only be inaccurate ( I know many people who use the name [ Earth First! ] aren’t, don’t they count? ) but it would look like a piece of ideology you had to subscribe to in order to ‘belong’.” Instead, with informal organisation “those of us who are anarchists can discuss anarchist ideas as much as we want, push ‘em as our personal idea of the way to go, make loads of links with anarchist movements, etc etc, and maybe we will get to a point where EF! is not simply in name but in reality synonymous with anarchism, which would be much better than officially labelling it so because a few people like the idea” ( FR 2000 ). Introducing a stated ideology would also mean that EF!ers would have to constantly argue and battle over what brand of anarchism they possessed, and how it was defined. AOH instead wants to organise and settle issues “without the need for ideology or mission statements” ( 1999 ), and this is a position I tend toward myself, having as yet found no inspiration for my activism from ideological disputation.

## **Proposal 2: A Formal Structure**

We noted that the Moot was called because of “unhappiness about cliques and power struggles” ( BAT 1998 ), and the second proposal rests on the recognition of the problems within an informal, structureless organisation: “The current chaotic and individualistic nature of the EF! network” with its “unacknowledged and unaccountable hierarchies” ( BAT 1998 ).<sup>115</sup> To counter the tyranny of structurelessness, some advocated ( Zapatista-influenced ) “direct democracy ... instead of leaving decision making to individuals and cliques”. This would mean that “decisions concerning all groups would be made at national conferences ( collective assemblies )” ( 1998 ): the Summer Gathering would thus get decision-making power ( cited in FR 1999 ). BAT argued that “This is not a move away from anarchy ... [ but ] toward it, toward direct democracy instead of informal hierarchy” ( BAT 1998 ).

Advocates of a formal structure support their case with the argument that a revolution needs to involve the mass of people: “The task of creating such a change ... requires the active involvement of millions of people – people taking back control of their lives and their communities through direct action” ( ATW 1998 ). They perceive that elements at least of a national structure are necessary to make EF! accessible to such numbers ( *Do or Die* 1996: 20 ). EDA “was intended to be a mass movement. The movement’s there, but not the mass. How do you get more people involved?” ( Paul, ex-EF!er quoted in Berens 1995; cf *Schnews* 2001: 3 ). The strengths of wider movements were recognised from the anti-roads experience: “campaigns such as Newbury, and Live Exports can be seen as mass movements unified around ‘single issues’ ... they get the job done with a lower level of risk for individuals, and they plant the seeds of empowerment in many peoples minds” ( EFH 1998 ). EFH notes that the EF! network was itself “beginning to act as if we were a mass movement” ( EFH 1998 ), and that entailed the assumption that it needs to broaden its support base, or else implode.

This ‘mass movement logic’ is shared by traditional class-struggle anarchists, and also recalls the notion of ‘movement development’ assumed by most Marxist commentators. Hanisch, for example, states that without a structure, movements are “unable to speak with an organised, powerful voice” ( 2001: 88 ), and are unable to “deal with the very real power of the ruling classes” ( 2001: 92 ). Such commentators advocate “the development of groups into organisations” ( 2001: 92 ) in order “to assure the development of the organised strength needed to accumulate and eventually take power” ( 2001: 93; cf Freeman 1984: 14 ).<sup>116</sup> GA, by contrast, associate formal structures with compromise, reform ( 1999: 2 ) and hierarchy ( S 1998 ), and argue that they “alienate rather than build support and revolutionary consciousness” ( GA 1999: 1 ). This was the situation, in opposition to which, EF! originally formed.

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<sup>115</sup> The issue of informal hierarchies had already been discussed at the 1996, 1997 and 1998 gatherings ( Summer Gathering Flyer 1996: 2-3; Summer Gathering Flyer 1997: 2; Summer Gathering Programme 1998: 8 ), and would continue to make an appearance at future gatherings ( Summer Gathering Programme (2) 1999: 8; ‘Earth First! Culture’ notes from the Summer Gathering 2001 discussion’: 1; ESI 2001: 1 ).

<sup>116</sup> Others, within the anarchist camp, claim that though Freeman won the immediate debate, her adversary Levine’s “arguments against massification were borne out by history”, in that “the articulate middle-class Freemanoids used their precious mass movement structures ... to make careers for themselves within patriarchy, selling out all the women they claimed to represent in the name of ‘reform’” ( GA 1999: 1 ).



Most advocates of the second proposal did not want a formal, socialist-style organisation along Freeman's lines, but rather a softer and more limited development of certain limited aspects of structure, such as:

“a national contact point that's easily accessible, to sort stuff out that's not getting sorted out, like new people, and media. Then we could efficiently have a national campaign. We want more people to know what EF! is, and how to become part of the movement. We want to have a voice and have people identifiable and accountable as speakers for us. Then we can get bigger and stronger” ( FR 1999 ).

While some EF!ers agreed with GA that “Facilities, offices, fax machines, media spokesmen/spokeswomen, are all hostages to compromise” ( S 1998<sup>117</sup> ), many others persistently felt that EF! was suffering from its loss of a national, unifying campaign ( earlier provided by the anti-roads movement ) ( *EF!AU* No.43 1997: 6 ).

The idea of a national campaign on the format developed by HLS represented a less 'structural' but equally 'co-ordinating' proposal for EF! ( WWB 1999 ). Like the successful animal rights campaigns against Hillgrove cat-breeders and Consort dog-breeders, such a campaign would consist of a monthly action, undertaken by different ( regional ) groups, with momentum for the campaign building with each action: “the difference from other campaigns is that it's not a continual thing, i.e. sitting trees/camps every day, but is a regular action, probably, but not necessarily, at the same place” ( WWB 1999; cf *GA* 1997b: 13 ). The risk of burn-out and the burden of trying to get more people involved would be much lessened. In 6.4.3 we shall see that the campaign against Bayer took on some of these qualities.

Here we have entered into a polarisation within activist anarchism between mass movement logic and the 'anti-mass' positions that underlay the final two proposals ( Levine 1984: 4-21; Anti-Mass 1988: 3; Notts EF! 1998: 4; GA 1999:1; IE 2005: 11 ). I see merits in both positions, but on this occasion I agreed with those who argued it was “not realistic to expect to build a mass movement” ( S 1998 ), that “By putting our energies into becoming a mass movement we are becoming ineffective” ( EFH 1998 ), and I was also persuaded that, at the time, “building a large mass movement ... [is] a flawed aim ... [ and ] impossible in this country” ( EFH 1998 ). GA and EFH agree that “the principle under discussion is *organisation* not numbers” ( GA 1999: 1 ).<sup>118</sup>

“Mass is not about numbers ... it's about structure. A mass movement mirrors the structure of mass society, a superficially unified mass of alienated individuals. ... mass movements are controlled by cliques, committees, and ideologies. Opposed to this is face to face full participation and communication of self managed small groups, or collectives” ( EFH 1998; Levine 1984: 19 ).

GA argue that “mass movements are all about manipulation – a small minority controlling the mass as its 'representatives' – it's unsurprising they've achieved so very little in revolutionary terms” ( GA 1999: 2; cf Anti-Mass 1988: 3 ). Thus EFH restate the institutionalisation thesis: “in all large organisations democracy starts to warp when it moves above the level of the face to face conversation” ( EFH 1998 ). This was the criticism of FoE and Greenpeace in 5.2.1.

The argument against the 'mass' in 'mass movement' is connected to the anarchist critique of power and is also deployed against mass actions. GA state that “Massification has been sold” to *Earth First!* on the basis that “more people means more power” ( for example with the masses who turned up to the Birmingham RTS in 1998 ) and thus ultimately to revolution. “The trouble is that these mass events exemplify the cliquey manipulation at work, with a small, sussed group secretively laying on the event and a mass of 'bodies' then turning up to it with little control and even little idea why they're there” ( GA 1999: 2 ). EFH joins in the critique of 'mass' actions: “For a lot of people in mass action the realisation of what's going on isn't complete. Only a small proportion of the people involved continue to act in a sustained way, others don't because their involvement was only on certain levels” ( EFH 1998; cf *GA* 1997b: 13 ). I will return to this critique with the study of RTS in 7.2.

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<sup>117</sup> Two years later at the third Moot, I noted that the idea of a “central office/web/point of contact was thoroughly rubbished in the small groups” ( My notes, Winter Moot 2002 ).

<sup>118</sup> “proposals about structure are about aping main-stream politics” ( GA 1999: 1 ). “A mass movement tends to have managers, directors, co-ordinators, whatever polite euphemism you use, people in control” ( EFH 1998 ).



A final objection to the proposal for a 'national structure' reintroduces the bottom-up, ground-level theme of anarchism: in contrast to the attempts at 'changing' the structure of EF! at a national gathering, many participants urged instead that the real decisions and activity take place at the *bottom*, out of the limelight. Thus one contributor urged EF!ers to "build working and communication relationships ... at a *local* level where those relationships really mean something." That way, "change may happen from the grass roots" as opposed to by a 'politburo' decision ( FR 2000 ). "Whatever this 'new thing' is, it must be created by everyone at a grass roots level" ( BAT 1998 ).

### Proposal 3: A Network of Collectives

A third proposal preferred the model of a network of small collectives to the idea of a mass movement ( EFH 1998 ): "people want a network of collectives with representatives meeting together every few months" and are "pushing it onto everyone else" ( AOH 1998 ). There are two elements to this proposal. First, that EF!ers form themselves into small collective groups - "a small self-defined group of individuals that have a common analysis and agreement on a strategy" ( EFH 1998 ): this was even encouraged within pre-existing but 'unwieldy' EF! groups. Second ( and in common with Proposal 1 ), that these operate as a network with other such groups using delegates ( EFH 1998; cf AT 1999).

I had previously attended a workshop on collectives at the 1998 EF! Summer Gathering, in which we discussed the *Notts EF! DD* which proclaimed the strengths of collectives and advocated the "case for a network within the Earth First! family" ( Notts EF! 1998: 3 ). Different forms of collectives suggested included workers co-ops, housing co-ops, and collectives bound by common identity, locality or ideology.<sup>119</sup> Collectives, it was argued, form along natural lines and cannot be imposed from above, but rather form out of natural ties or 'affinity', from below. The aim is not to gain a 'mass' of people as in Proposal 2. Instead, "As the group grows it should look for natural lines along which it can divide into new 'crews'" ( Notts EF! 1998 ). When I suggested in the 1998 workshop that this kind of group was divisive and exclusive, the advocates replied that activists are elitist anyway, and to structure a clique into an affinity group actually made it less divisive.<sup>120</sup> I considered this an inadequate response.

Practical strengths claimed for affinity groups ( as I shall here term this model of a fixed, closed collective ) were that they make activism sustainable, supporting "campaigners in the long-run ... as well as for just effectively getting things done." It is for these ( social, psychological ) reasons that some within EF! argue they should be actively trying to build them: "Affinity groups recognise the importance of community as a foundation for our resistance and offer us a chance to enact a vision now - that of supportive, non-hierarchical, participatory, flexible and friendly groups of people taking action" ( *EF!AU* No.42 1997: 3, redistributed with Notts EF! 1998 ). Some within Earth First! therefore pushed the idea of affinity groups beyond loose units to 'get things done', and into the ideal social unit for activists:

"Whilst affinity groups take forward some elements of Earth First! attempts already ( avoidance of hierarchies; participation in decision-making ), adopting affinity groups recognises that 'structure' is different to 'authoritarianism' and enables us to challenge the confusion between the two" ( *EF!AU* No.42 1997: 3 ).<sup>121</sup>

Affinity groups avoid the problems of mass 'representation' in proposal 2: "Being part of an affinity group strengthens our ability to take direct action - to act directly on a situation without recourse to a

<sup>119</sup> Essentially the same arguments for small, affinity-based groups are made in all fields of anarchist activity, from the anarcho-syndicalists of thirties Spain to the punk collectives of the present day: this represents another example of how the same anarchist discourse can settle upon many different contexts.

<sup>120</sup> Anti-Mass, an influential pamphlet referenced by Notts EF!, anticipate that their proposals would be criticised as exclusive and elitist ( as they argue that the collective should only communicate with other collectives, not the 'mass' ), but state that "The collective has a right to exclude individuals because it offers them the alternative of starting a new collective, i.e. sharing the responsibility for organisation" ( 1988: 3 ). I find this equally inadequate, because it avoids addressing the power disparity created between the gang and the outside individuals.

<sup>121</sup> The argument is that you don't fight mass society with mass movements but form a collective to escape the powerlessness of atomisation and take a step towards change: "If a collective is organised in a way opposed to hierarchy and domination and if it balances individual autonomy with accountability ( within and outside the collective ), then its goals and tasks will almost inevitably work towards the creation of a free society" ( *Profane Existence* reprinted in Notts EF! 1998: 4 ).



representative” ( *EF!AU* No.421997: 3 ). It is also claimed that they act as a positive force in the individuality – collectivity relationship:

“By working in consensus-based small groups, all members are able to participate in planning, decision-making and carrying out decisions, avoiding relying on strong, charismatic leaders and making people less prone to being manipulated by self-styled leaders” ( *EF!AU* No.42 1997: 3 ).

For reasons such as these, some anarchists claim that “the affinity group does well at providing a revolutionary context” ( Ruins 2003: 16 ).

However, others within EF! responded with alarm to the notion of tightly-bound, closed affinity groups for abandoning the principles of participation, accessibility and openness to change ( Seel & Plows 2000: 130 ). They characterised affinity groups as “a permanent structure that functions as a fixed community ... a small institution of sorts” with “no specific function outside of its own existence” ( EREE 1999 ). Barriers are created to new individuals and it is suggested that affinity groups “can isolate activists from the wider society” ( EFH 1998 ). Group loyalty can blunt their receptiveness to critique and change ( EREE 1999 ), and their sense of accountability to other members of their group does not extend to ‘outsiders’, which could cause problems on mass actions, for example ( Seel & Plows 2000: 129 ).

At the same time as ‘outsiders’ are excluded, the ‘insiders’ may also suffer to the degree that they “use the Affinity Group as a shortcut to having needs met, or a way round personal growth. Close supportive relationships have to be developed - but if you have access to a structure that offers something like them to you, ‘ready-made’ upon joining, might you skip the developing?” ( EREE 1999 ). This critic compares affinity groups to a traditional family, in which “the roles and the relationships of the members inevitably become fixed, and your own role becomes a familiar and comfortable one - but it is not the place where most of your personal growth, let alone your impact on society, occurs.” The author argues that “We don’t need to create artificial ‘families’. Real communities are all around us - home, EF! ... neighbours or friends ... These are alive, constantly changing, and constantly challenging, and all the goals that we have can be worked on in these contexts, without building walls for ourselves which we then only have to knock down” ( EREE 1999 ).

Further drawbacks are cited, such as an imbalance in the individual-collective relationship: “the group holds all the power and the individual holds very little.” An intimate, small-scale form of bureaucracy also represents a danger: “Affinity Groups make their own work -create their own problems which then clearly require time and effort to solve ... all that internal work drains away time and effort from the real work”. Finally, it is argued that affinity groups, while introducing the additional negative dangers of factionalism, separation and elitism, have also not succeeded in escaping the negative dynamics of power-over and informal hierarchies: “In a fixed group, power relationships and roles tend to form, and be repeatedly reinforced, as the same individuals work to communicate or pursue projects together” ( EREE 1999; cf IE 2005: 13 ). A small, fixed affinity group would thus create a pintsize version of the negative power structures its advocates sought to avoid.

The alternative to this model was conceived as “a task-oriented, temporary structure” ( EREE 1999 ) more in keeping with the principles of anarchism and the needs of activism. Thus one DD proposed its alternative notion of a collective as a loose, permeable and non-exclusive grouping:

“the collective is a time-honoured structure that allows people to come together freely when needed for a temporary period for a specific focus, task, or action ... With various levels of investment, you can be part of several different ones, and have access to the variety and freedom of ideas, the ebb and flow of energy, and the endless permutations and combinations of relationships with different people at different intensity in different contexts, that goes with the diversity of a live community” ( EREE 1999 ).

In my experience, this is what does happen with the better ( and more open ) aspects of EF! and EDA, such as the Gathering collective, local groups and networks that form on specific campaigns or actions.

Before leaving this proposal for a network of collectives, we should note that the ‘network’ part was also attacked. For example, the call for delegates signifies “an acceptance of anti-democratic,



representational principles” for Green Anarchist ( GA 1999: 1 ). Others condemned the notion of a ‘network’ itself: “Hitherto, the in-word was ‘movement’ – looser, less exclusive, and importantly, a fluid rather than fixed ‘community’.” AOH noted, furthermore, that “A network or federate structure is something wide open to be defined, and thus controlled, however supposedly democratic the means are” ( AOH 1998 ). Yet note that the notion of an identified and labelled ‘movement’ has itself been criticised as a limiting idea that places the phenomenon into the realm of media and state categorisation: a construct that appears ‘other’ and off-putting to those not yet involved ( and, indeed, even to those who already are ) ( Adilkno 1994: 10-25 ). I personally dislike the oft-heard talk of ‘movement’ for its connotations of ‘mass’; for the sense that the ‘movement’ must be going ‘somewhere’ in particular; and for the tendency of ‘movement’ talkers to impose their own definitions of ‘what the movement is’ and thus ‘where the movement *should* go’. In the final part of this section we shall note that this charge was made against the Moot proposals themselves.

#### **Proposal 4: Keep EF! Informal**

“There are ( at least ) two different models for building a movement...: a mass organisation with strong, centralised control, such as a Party. The other model, which consolidates mass support only as a coup de grace necessity, is based on small groups in voluntary association” ( Levine 1984: 17 ).

The proposal to ‘keep EF! informal’ has already been introduced through the hostility and criticism directed against the first three proposals. Advocates are in the privileged position of being able to marshal anti-ideological and anti-sectarian arguments against proposal one; anti-mass arguments against proposal two; and anti-rigid or anti-closure arguments against proposal three. Arguments against bureaucracy, for personal autonomy and for ‘revolutionary’ openness can be launched against all three. The arsenal can be applied to any defined organisational method, and to tendencies in any social movement.

Green Anarchist argue that “EF! should be as free-form and accessible as possible” ( GA 1999: 2 ), and urge EF! to “Keep it informal” ( S 1998; cf GA 1997c: 14; IE 2005: 14 ). They suggest that “We can network between separate groups and campaigns as we have been doing already, on an ad-hoc basis” ( S 1998 ). Yet there is a danger that this proposal would leave EF! in exactly the same position as had earlier been recognised as a problem: stagnating, inaccessible and riddled with informal hierarchies.

The informalists present an alternative approach to combat these problems: to “demystify what is happening ... empower others to form and use their own collectives and participate in the organisation of the movement” ( EFH 1998 ).<sup>122</sup> Thus one DD states “There are many problems with an apparent lack of structure, but they can and must be faced up to, if there’s the will” ( AOH 1998 ). The terms of debate are thus shifted away from making a grand collective decision, towards long-term small-scale effort ( IE 2005: 16 ). This fits the characterisation, which I have supported, of EF!UK as “a fluid community” ( AOH 1998 ), and “a dynamic non-hierarchical organic thing not an organisation” ( EFWP 1998 ). It is my belief that this approach is more in keeping with the ethos of EF!’s activist anarchism, and when it is displayed it would clearly have my support. However, there is also the danger that such sentiments could be merely spoken, and then not acted upon, and that the informal cliques, exclusive behaviour and domineering behaviour would continue unchecked.

Some viewed the 1999 Moot itself as a very microcosm of the clique problem: “Different organisational concepts are being bandied about by a small number of activists in the movement, and they *seem* to have a disproportionately loud voice, which can dominate if allowed to” ( AOH 1998 ). This author relates it to the individuals who grew up with EF! ( such ‘old hacks’ were not in existence in the early years ), who “got emotionally battered ... ask of themselves many questions” and, having come to “depend on the movement”, were “looking for a more stable or secure structure within which they can continue their campaigning lives” ( AOH 1998; cf EGOD 1998; *EF!AU* No.25: 6 ). AOH records that “With this come two major problems, that of making structures more permanent, and of

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<sup>122</sup> A discussion document from a later gathering advises activists to “acknowledge the existence of, and learn to recognise, invisible hierarchies ... [stop] accepting them, either by taking more power, or accepting less power ... confront power inequalities when I see them” ( ESI 2001: 3; cf RA! 1996: 6 ).



pushing a model of organising or campaigning on the many” ( AOH 1998 ). The first of these issues related to proposal 2, the second is a case of unequal social dynamics and organisational processes, which I will look at now.

AOH states that he previously became involved *defensively* in ‘national EF! politics’, when one person “had a strong idea of how EF! groups could be networked and organised, and wanted to stamp this idea nationally”, and the same process was taking place at the Moot ( AOH 1998 ). GA added that “Good though it was to see the quantity and quality of opposition to EF!UK’s massification in discussion papers circulated before the 1999 Winter Moot, it was disappointing that none noted that the discussion papers themselves are part of the massification process ... potential policy papers”, and they argue that the whole debate “smells of representation” ( GA 1999: 1-3 ).

The Moot proposals were thus seen as an attempt at defining, and thereby controlling the Earth First! network/movement/community. The informalists present ‘diversity’ as the preferred alternative to this: “If people don’t understand EF! supports a diversity of opinions – even the odd ideology – then that’s their problem” ( GA 1999: 2 ). AOH proclaims diversity a strength: “We do not need to all move in the same ( defined ) direction” ( AOH 1998 ). The EF! network / movement / milieu is too diverse for decisions to be made: “there’s no way a group of delegates could be truly representative of the full diversity of the EF! community” ( FR 2000 ).

EFH notes that “our natural tendencies towards autonomy always gets in the way of mass direct democracy within our movement” ( EFH 1998 ). The Moot ‘putsch attempt’ was framed as an expression of the tension between autonomy and democracy:

“people who want to make network-wide changes to EF! as it now exists are expressing frustration at the lack of means for democratically doing so. I would suggest this is still in fact a positive rather than a negative about the network ... none of us can be told what to do by any of the rest of us” ( FR 2000 ).

AOH celebrates this opposition to the control paradigm:

When “people complained ... that Earth First! hardly existed ... I said to myself, that’s the whole point, it’s not an organisation, and that makes our task difficult, but more worthwhile. It’s great that I don’t properly know about individuals or groups somewhere in the country doing fantastic stuff, but that means too that I can’t tell them or anyone else how it is or should be. It’s a radical message that says you are part of something which you can’t define beyond your own locality, that links you up with people you’ve never met who share a similar spirit, and that you can’t speak on behalf of, or represent the views or ideology – a strange kind of belonging without possessing” ( AOH 1998 ).

This theme was most clearly played out, before and after the Moot, at successive EF! gatherings, through discussion of the *naming* of EF!<sup>123</sup>

AOH records that EF! has a tradition of not pushing the name ( “as it would be corporate behaviour etc etc” ( AOH 1998 ) ), and it has never been central to EF! activity or strategy. He suggests it should be “a hat that we put on ... rather than a barrier” ( AOH 1998 ), not laden with content like ideological groups such as the Anarchist Federation. GA state that “we might as well use whatever labels we feel happiest with. Just as long as it’s done without consistency or the sombre reverence you’d expect from boring Lefties” ( GA 1999: 3 ). FR proposes that “people who don’t feel comfortable about using the name Earth First! simply exercise their autonomy and stop using it. Its only a handy way to identify a loose community. Campaigns have their own identity and so do ideas” ( FR 2000 ). They suggest it may even be good having an inadequate, disliked name, because then participants do not get hung up on how cool their identity is. GA link this namelessness to radicality and EF!’s ‘no compromise’ identity: “the principle that no one in EF! can speak for anyone else” means that “negotiation is precluded” ( GA 1999: 4 ).

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<sup>123</sup> This perennial theme, gloom-inducing to many EF!ers who have faced it before, is encapsulated by FR: “We can’t continue to be EF! anymore. We want to work with other people and other struggles, and they can’t take us seriously as Earth First! It doesn’t represent what we want to be anymore, or the wide range of issues we recognise as important. We need to disband ourselves, and become something different - with a groovier more inclusive name and a different description - and then we can work with others and they will want to work with us” ( FR 1999 ).



Although Green Anarchist state that they don't "give a damn what EF! calls itself" ( 1999: 3 ), their extensive contributions to the debate presented a very strong notion of what constituted the identity of EF!. GA state that "EF! is the sum total of the activity of those involved" ( GA 1993 ). It is thus action which defines EF!, and this fits the definition on the *Action Update*, quoted in 5.3.9. One DD thus argues that "the most fundamental incidence of what Earth First! is ... is expressed through peaceful ecological direct action", and "without these actions there would be no Earth First!" ( EFWP 1998; cf GA 1999: 1 ).

As I argued in 5.3.3, furthermore, this EDA is seen as only one part of a wider strategy of radical social change, and EF! is viewed as only a *part* of the environmental movement, not the whole of it:

"there exists a peaceful ecological movement for radical social change; it is a dynamic, organic entity with many elements, many ways of operating and no clear boundaries. However, while Earth First! can be said to represent some of the parts of this movement, most importantly that part of the movement that organises itself non-hierarchically to take direct action ... Earth First! is not this movement, nor can it be, nor should it be" ( EFWP 1998 ).<sup>124</sup>

The Moot debates are therefore presented as somewhat misguided, because EF! only "represents a grouping that has come together around a particular method of effecting a particular type of change" ( EFWP 1998 ). To try to solidify EF! into something more definite, would mean attempting to somehow separate it from the wider movement, and weaken it through isolation.

In the years following the 1999 Winter Moot, there is a sense in which all of the four proposals were adopted by EF!UK – presumably in large part due to the efforts of those who advocated them. First, EF!UK became a much more explicitly and identifiable anarchist organisation, and has been reported as such with, for example, coverage of the Mayday events of 2000 and 2001: I consider this more in 7.5. No strong national structure was created ( indeed the name EF! is even less commonly used ), yet the national 'outreach project' BLINC ( Blatant Incitement Collective ) made itself available to any 'new people' who want it, and conducted training days ( *EF!AU* Nos. 57, 59, 77, 87 ). The Summer Gathering continued under the EF! name and continues to annually discuss EF!'s direction and identity. Also national actions ( *EF!AU* No.87 2002: 8 ) and a national campaign ( against Bayer, see 6.4 ) have been launched along the lines suggested in Proposal 2. Reflecting their allegiance to Proposal 3, several EF! groups have developed into what are effectively closed affinity groups ( Purkis 2001: 339 ). At least one of these requested to be removed from the *EF!AU* contacts list, but advised us they would be continuing their activism as an affinity group. In addition to this, various sub-groups, issue-specific campaigns and new projects have continued to pod off from EF!, including *Solidarity South Pacific*, CAGE, Social Centres and the *Dissent!* network: a practical attempt to create a libertarian anti-capitalist network unburdened by EF! baggage while carrying forward its strengths of tactics and organising. These alternative projects and networks may be seen as practical attempts to create the alternative EF!'s that some participants desire. At the same time, many remain committed to EF!, at least as *one* of the networks they are affiliated to. This diversity exemplifies activist anarchism.

## 5.4

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter I examined the nature of activist anarchism, and I detailed the concrete expressions of anarchist ideology in direct action communities. I examined the nature of revolutionary and anarchist action in practical, non-purist forms, and I used the Moot debates to identify the diversity inherent in the organisational nature of the EF! network. In this case study, therefore, I have presented EF!UK as a paradigmatic activist anarchist network. I have grounded it in the radical reaction to ENGO institutionalisation, and identified the existence of two parallel streams of anarchism, individualist and communitarian, that are expressed through its action, organisation and debates. The tension between these two streams has added to the conflict between EDA's different political traditions, such as animal

<sup>124</sup> One implication of this is that EF! members "may each of us be part of wider groupings ... may also use other networks, banners and methods to carry out complementary work" ( EFWP 1998 ).



rights and peace movement repertoires, to constitute a major exemplar of both EDA vitality and to the problems in activist anarchism. It is this diverse, complex and ultimately quite hard-to-define milieu of action, intuition and experience that I have found so fascinating in my research.

In an effort to provide some glimpse of its reality – as opposed to resting content with a purely formal or abstract recognition of the diversity and fluidity of activist, deeds-based anarchism – I have brought a spotlight to rest on the debates between activists concerning their organisation, aims and identity. The Earth First! Winter Moot provided the most accessible place to demonstrate this, as a location where many long-term, passionate activists drew on their experience and inspirations to articulate their views in hard, lasting, textual form, and were forced to precisely frame their positions in opposition to each other. This stands as a contrast to the usual robust, fragmented and often-confused arguments of a live discussion round campfire, pub table or living room. As such, the Moot debates were not inconsistent with the sentiments expressed ‘in action’, but they do represent a more crafted, static, and one might even say ‘academic’, crystallisation of such debates. I do not claim that they encapsulate for all time the debates of EDA in the 1990s, but they are perhaps the most direct, accurate and thorough record available. The various negotiations of practical necessity and anarchist ethics contained in the Moot debates demonstrate that anarchism is alive and well and living in the real-life needs of EDA activists. Similar demonstrations could be found through examination of the direct action elements of the anti-war, anti-nuclear or anti-globalisation movements.

By focussing on these debates, and demonstrating that they reveal the possibility for a whole *range* of positions consistent with an overarching framework of activist eco-anarchism, I hope to have developed a clearer recognition of the anarchism that exists within activism: an anarchism that is expressed through passionate unincorporated activism ( as a response to institutionalisation ); that engenders anarchist beliefs ( through processes of radicalisation ); and that is demonstrated through action ( such as the expression of freedom and resistance in DIY, or the coherent forms of practical, non-compromising direct action in Earth First! ). Anarchism, I insist, is not a dry or static theory. It is a set of ideals, ethics and critiques that, in the settings of DIY Culture, Earth First! and other scenes of grassroots direct action, is demonstrated, is tested and explored, and is constantly recreated in new patterns and new applications through practical action. Amongst the strengths of this activist direct action which I identified in this chapter, are the capacity for great flexibility in repertoires; the fluid creative crossovers between tactics and targets; the compatibility between political demands and lifestyle practices; the incorporation of multiple belief systems into a shared anarchist ethic of deeds-not-words; and the expression of revolution through everyday, situated struggle.

If, as I argued in 4.2.3 and 5.2.1, the strength of the environmental challenge is one that lies at the heart of our society’s anxieties and fault-lines, then the place where this challenge is being articulated and activated ( as opposed to being smothered over or fudged ), is precisely in the milieus of counter-institutional eco-activism exemplified by Earth First! The fact that anarchist ideas and anarchist arguments have resonated with the ecologically-motivated activists of this field is no accident, furthermore, for the lessons of anarchist history, its strategic arguments, and most importantly the ethical content of anarchism, have provided the best guide and support for those activists engaged in full-scale social change. EDA activists have voiced this anarchism through their debates, they have enacted this anarchism through their organisation and practical actions, and they have validated this anarchism by translating it, not into a dogmatic or unreal abstraction, but into an ethical, effective and impassioned collective life.

Having established the diversity, the roundedness and the articulate expression of ecological activist anarchism in this chapter, I shall turn in the next to the tensions that run through it. Indeed, I argue, these tensions and the conflict of strategic intentions and assumptions, is as much a defining part of activist anarchism as is its celebratory, consensual or holistic, lifestyle-matching practice. The ethics and arguments of anarchism, furthermore, may be articulated just as clearly in the form of critique and strategic intention, as they may be in the living-out of activist ecologism.



## 6.1

### Chapter Introduction

I have already introduced the ethics and critical content of anarchist direct action in section 4.3.4, and I considered the power it can bring through processes of radicalisation and empowerment in 5.2.2. In the sections of 5.3, furthermore, I detailed the complex and constantly changing uses to which direct action can be put, and the different strategic aims it can be used for ( from economic pressure to triggering a public debate ). I looked at the diversity of EF!'s strategy, repertoires and criteria of success, and argued that, in true anarchist fashion, the use of direct action confounds all the usual distinctions made between lifestyle and social change; micro and macro effects; single issues versus systemic analysis; and so on. In the first section of this chapter, 6.2.1 Defining Anarchist Direct Action, I will cement this understanding of what *anarchist* direct action is, by contrasting it to 'pseudo-forms' which I title 'liberal' direct action, and in 6.2.2, Syndicalist Direct Action, through a comparison with syndicalist direct action in which I uncover the underlying similarities and shared ethos that cut across the widely differing contexts but still provide a recognisable ethos to be found in *all* anarchist direct action. These comparisons provide us with a guide with which we may assess the many and varied forms of diverse EDA: how we may judge them as anarchist, despite their manifold diversity. They also add to the critical toolkit of ways in which anarchist ethics, principles and understandings can be applied to any form of activism.

Once the sections of 6.2 have established the shared anarchist basis of direct action ( direct not indirect action; resistance not mere protest; 'effective opposition' not formulaic demonstrations; and anarchist not 'liberal direct action' ), then we are in a position to nuance our understanding by identifying the different and competing strategic reasonings that are buried within the activist anarchist tradition. The bulk of this chapter will therefore be dedicated to the tensions, contentions and disputations that range between proponents of a non-violent civil disobedience discourse of accountability; proponents of traditional insurrectionary anarchism; and proponents of other strategic repertoires including those acquired via the animal rights movement. These different sources of guidances, strategic frameworks, tactical reasoning and ethical justification, may be viewed as resources in competition – but all within the broadly shared anarchist ethos that the first section will clarify.

In the sections of 6.3 I use the topic of violence as a prism through which we may identify the competing and conversing ideological and strategic frameworks. In 6.3.2 I first present the opposition between principled non-violence and its critics as it came to be defined within EDA. In 6.3.3 I then turn to the anarchist tradition to glean a more nuanced approach amongst those who accept the potential need for violence, but regret it and warn against its effects. I consider the principle of self-defence by which violence can be judged, and consider the relationship of freedom to force. In 6.3.4 I then look at the tradition of principled non-violence in the terms of CD theory and practice, and I consider the influence and interaction of this with EDA. Having identified sabotage as the most closely contested area for these divergent discourses, I look at this specifically in 6.3.5, considering its political defences, its strategic rationales, its flavours, and its flexibility.

The latter part of the chapter is dedicated to practical activist debate centred upon the above themes, and voiced in terms of the 'covert-overt' debate, within the issue field of anti-GM activism; and in terms of elitist or participatory sabotage, focussed upon the ELF and the UK peat campaign. Themes that will arise in the various sections of this chapter, which have a bearing on our understanding of activist anarchism, include representation and elitism; participation; violence and non-violence; sabotage; and terrorism.

### 6.2 Defining Anarchist Direct Action



## 6.2.1

### Anarchist Direct Action

In this first section I will reinforce and clarify our understanding of anarchist direct action through a contrast with non-anarchist, indirect or 'liberal' forms of action. In doing so I will be presenting the understanding of 'direct action' that I consider to be the legitimate and coherent anarchist understanding. Later in this chapter I will be distinguishing DA from Civil Disobedience ( CD ) and Propaganda of the Deed, although all these forms may coincide and collide. Anarchist direct action is therefore not an exclusive doctrine or possession of a special 'church', but a tendency, an ideal and an approach that can be identified in many different contexts, and expressed in many different styles.

There are two initial confusions in relation to the term 'direct action'. First, Franks reports that "the term is so widely applied by certain groups, such as journalists, that it appears to exclude nothing". Second, it is commonly used as "a pejorative phrase expressing little but disapproval" and thus mistaken, particularly within a courtroom, "for criminal activity" ( 2003: 14-15 ).<sup>125</sup> This second confusion is related to the unfortunate equation of anarchism with criminality ( Nomad 1968: 20-28; Woodcock 1980: 24 ), and of direct action with bombs ( Suskind 1971 ). These are two misconceptions that I cheerfully ignore in favour of more fruitful investigation.

Originally, anarcho-syndicalists defined the phrase 'direct action' in contrast to Propaganda of the Deed, meaning the dull but effective work amongst trade unions. "But as the syndicalist movement grew and came into conflict with the system ... the high points of direct action began to take on the same function as acts of propaganda of the deed" ( Walter 1980: 169 ). As well as being confused with Propaganda of the Deed, direct action also came to be applied to Gandhi's Non-Violent Civil Disobedience, and nineties EDA activists often equated the two: NVDA is the preferred term for Genetix Snowball, for example. Walter notes that "all three phrases were confused and came to mean much the same" ( 1980: 169 ). In this thesis I am using the term 'civil disobedience' when speaking of a particular approach, discourse and strategy, defined in 6.3.4. On syndicalist terms, furthermore ( as we shall see in 6.2.2 ), activities do not count as direct action if they do not involve class solidarity and practical aspirations to free collective organisation. I will modify and soften this perspective, abstracting it from the industrial context and seeking to identify the key anarchist facets that 'carry over' into EDA.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of direct action is the sheer variety of forms it can take ( Carter 1973: 3 ). Forms of NVDA or civil disobedience, for example, may include blockades, occupations, camps, conscientious objection and sabotage ( Hengren 1993: 52-85 ). Sharp provides a list of 198 forms ( 1973; cf Ackerman & Kruegler 1994: 6 ), to which may be added the treehouses, tunnels, tripods and other innovations of EDA. Yet the inclusion of sabotage and such economic disincentives as 'consumer boycott' ( Dowie 1995: 114 ) within some of these lists may lead us to consider the range of repertoires as more harmonious than they actually are. In this section I am interested in the tensions between different strategic rationales. In later sections I will present the arguments advanced for civil disobedience and 'physically effective' rationales, including economic strategies, to demonstrate the tension between them. First, I will establish basic definitional points for anarchist direct action and contrast it to non-anarchist versions, in a manner similar to that in which I distinguished radical environmentalism from its pale imitators in section 4.2.1.

Carter argues that essential ingredients of direct action include "organisation and a conscious will to resist or to affect policy", and that it "implies group, if not mass, action" ( Carter 1973; cf DeCleyre 1912: 1 ). Distinctions can be made between direct action and *non-violent* direct action ( NVDA ); between legal and illegal forms; and between protest and non-protest action.<sup>126</sup> Forms of non-violent

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<sup>125</sup> In February 2003, I attended the court case of a friend who had been involved in protesting against a local pro-war MP. In this case, the prosecutor attempted to get my friend to agree with him that he 'believed in direct action', in order to make the standard link with violence and criminality. My friend, stating he was unsure how the prosecutor meant the term, did not allow himself to be led in that direction, but it brought home to me how politically ( and legally ) loaded such terms are. Although I deem the anarchist conception of direct action to be positive and liberating, it may be used by those in authority to associate protestors with all the worst imagery of extremism, violence and criminality.

<sup>126</sup> Non-protest forms of direct action in my own case include conservation work, food growing, and participation in mutual aid, gift-giving and non-hierarchical modes of organisation.



protest direct action are the focus of my study. Amongst the most common prefixes for direct action used in the DIY and eco-activist literature of the 1990s were 'non-violent', 'creative' and 'ecological'. Forms of ecological direct action that I have been involved in include street parties, anti-road camps, crop-trashing, blockades of roads and supermarkets, noise protests, sabotage of equipment, return of waste to the companies responsible, and occupations of offices and factory floors. More detail on certain of these repertoires is provided in this chapter.

We can establish a clearer understanding of direct action by contrasting it to its opposite: indirect action. Wieck defines direct action as that "which, in respect to a situation, realises the end desired, so far as this lies within one's power or the power of one's group" ( 1996: 375 ). Indirect action, by contrast, is that action which achieves an irrelevant or even contradictory end ( as the means to a good end, of course ), such as voting for somebody else to do the job for you, or paying an ENGO to prevent environmental destruction on your behalf ( Ward 1988: 23; Franks 2003: 19; Guillaume 1990: 7; *GA* 1999: 4 ). This is what Greenpeace direct action was criticised as in section 5.3.3 ( letter, *Do or Die* 2000: 215 ).

I would like to add to this clarification a distinction that is commonly made in the field of peace and environmental activism, between resistance and protest ( *Gay* 15 2004: 9 ). Hart provides one elaboration of this distinction:

"Protest is mostly a specific act of dissent directed at a specific issue and contains an implicit acknowledgement of an external authority to which the protest is made. Resistance, however, is a more inclusive concept that entails a broad-based opposition to established authority" ( 1997: 51-2; cf Burns 1992 ).

*The Evading Standards*, a free newspaper produced for the 1997 March for Social Justice ( see 7.4 ), provides an example from my subjects which illustrates these points. It provides us with one of the many instances in which movement discourse provides analytic tools equal to, if not sharper than, academic tools.

"Defining what protest is, is less important than discussing its content and direction... Its value comes from the issues it tackles and the methods and tactics it uses. Protest if it is not to merely recreate prevalent forms of power, must have means equal to its ends... You might want to stop your local hospital being closed down. Do you contact your M.P. and write to the minister of state for health or, do you organise a mass public meeting, link up with staff at the hospital and occupy the wards? One method legitimises the status quo and even if successful leaves power unchanged. The second involves a community in shaping its own destiny, it prioritises morality and action above the law" ( *The Evading Standards* 1997 ).

Anarchists are in favour of the latter, autonomous approach, whether or not the methods involved appear 'revolutionary' or 'reformist' in the stereotypical terms I dismissed in section 4.3.4. Here it is important to distinguish between ( what anarchists, at least, view as ) genuine resistance and mere public displays of such, performed for an audience.

Waddington argues that demonstrations by such 'professional protesters' as CND, NUS and trade unions are not feared but welcomed by police. The reason for this, is that "These are organisations that play within the 'rules of the game'" ( 1995: 9 ). In contrast to these are those "who show scant respect for the 'rules of the game' and, thereby, threaten trouble" ( 1995: 9 ). Jordan suggests that we may use this "refusal to stay within known rules of the political game" to identify movements which are transgressive from those which are not ( 2002: 34; cf Roseneil 2000: 253-4 ).

"For example, it has become commonplace for groups planning public demonstrations to agree a route and timing with the police. Marches can then be carried off peacefully and within police definitions of public order. However, some groups have little interest in allowing the police to define what public order might or might not be. Such groups define demonstrations that are, as much as possible, kept secret from the police and around which police have to improvise" ( Jordan 2002: 37 ).

RTS street parties count as an exemplar of the refusal to cooperate with the authorities' policing of a protest. In both of Newcastle's street parties, police officers insistently ( and unsuccessfully ) tried to



find individuals amongst the crowd to identify themselves as 'leaders' with whom to make agreements. In 2000, this became comedic with a certain TAPPer in a rickshaw ( who had been singled out as the most likely ringleader ) calling out on behalf of the police 'whose in charge? Is anyone in charge here?': see section 7.3.

It is the contrast to this anti-authoritarian approach that I wish to assess, in order to clarify the anarchist critique. Franks uses his conceptualisation of direct action to argue that "the highly structured and passive marches through indifferent streets symbolise less resistance to oppressive power than the passivity of the crowd. The demonstration does not resolve the problem it sought to highlight, but accents the political power of those who manage the march, and the liberality of the state which allows opposition ( albeit toothless ) onto the streets" ( 2003: 17 ). Law argues that "Far from damaging the system". such manifestations of protest "legitimise it" ( 1991: 20 ). The argument of the ineffectiveness of rule-obeying methods of demonstration is best displayed by movement satire, as displayed by the examples in Figure F6.1:

( a )

"Let us march to show our governments how cross we are about the state of the world.

But for this demonstration to be effective, we must march with dignity and unity. Comrades, a disciplined march is essential, if we are to avoid losing the support of the media, the international press and the police. So please remember to follow the rules of the demonstration ... And please obey all commands given by the stewards and police, who will be working together throughout the afternoon to ensure peace.

At the end of the march, there will be a long rally, with speeches by several very important people. After the rally, please disperse as quickly as possible and make your way home peacefully...

With your co-operation, we can make today a massive success, and start building for a repeat performance next year"

( 'March Against Anything' *Attack International*, reproduced in Franks 2003: 16-17 ).

( b )

"Don't go on this action  
You never know when the GENERAL ELECTION might be.  
Best stay at home in case you miss your lovely VOTE and watching it on TV."

( 'Maysquat' flyer 2001 ).

( c )

Following an explanation of sabotage:

"Obviously, don't do this. You might enjoy it, plus you would be doing something worthwhile, so best not to – maybe organise a walk from a to b instead, perhaps with a placard, the government will shit themselves"

( *Faslane Focus* 2002: 12 ).

**Figure F6.1 Critiques of Demonstrations**



Thus it is that subversive activists, from animal rights, anti-nuclear, anarchist and EDA movements, extend the “anarchist saying – ‘If voting changed anything they’d make it illegal’” to formulaic demonstrations held on the authorities’ terms ( Curtin c2001: 9; cf ‘Mayday Greetings’ Flyer 2003; Welsh 2000: 166-7; *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 69). In contrast to this model of “ineffective opposition ( voting for ‘left-wing’ MPs, marching from A to B, listening passively to public speakers at rallies, signing petitions... )” ( *Faslane Focus* 2002: 16 ), anarchists urge “more revolutionary alternatives of resistance” ( Editorial *GAY* 7 2001: 2 ). I must emphasise, however, that these need not all be dramatic or confrontational, indeed often the most subversive activities are informal and not intended as protests ( Heller 2000: 20 ).

For the purposes of this thesis I would like to synthesise these distinctions between protest and resistance, and between indirect and direct action, into an opposition between anarchist and liberal forms of direct action ( Crouch 1970: 52 ). Monbiot expresses the liberal view: “Direct action is not the whole answer, nor is it an end in itself” ( 1998: 185 ), and his EDA critics state the anarchist alternative when they argue that “Monbiot fails to appreciate that our direct actions are not intended to pressure politicians like Blair to change things for us. To act directly is to address the actual problem. ... Direct action is also a model for how people will run the future society” ( Witcop 2000: 31 ). Three elements mark the difference here in that liberal direct action is perceived as: ( 1 ) a last resort; ( 2 ) a form of lobbying only; and ( 3 ) requiring infusion of ‘democratic’ ethics from wider society.

( 1 ) The first aspect of liberal direct action - direct action as last resort - is commonly expressed in SM approaches. It matches the many cases where direct action is taken because media and authorities are ignoring the cause ( Margery Lewis in Roseneil 2000: 46-7 ), and where “Direct Action Grows from Frustrated Legal Challenge” ( Corr 1999: 79; cf Burgmann 2000: 187 ). Anarchist direct action may sometimes share the same methods and have reform as a subsidiary aim, but it is not apologetically explained away as solely due to a blockage in the official channels: it is considered legitimate, and prefigurative, in its own right.

( 2 ) Liberal direct action is often viewed and reported as a form of lobbying: “gaining influence over the political process that is not mediated by parliament, pressure groups or the mass media” ( Wall 1999: 154; *Do or Die* 1998: 143 ). Elements of this pressure politics include “drawing attention to issues” ( Monbiot 1998: 185; cf Melchett 1999; Thilo Bode in Greenpeace c1996: 3; Manes 1990: 170 ), and increasing the voice of a marginalised group ( Corr 1999: 172 ). Greenpeace, for example, state “We lobby and cajole those who can take the decisions to change things for the better. And when the most effective course is intervening with non-violent, direct action, we take it” ( “How far should we go to protect the planet?” Greenpeace leaflet c1999; cf Richards & Heard 2005: 34; Wilson 1984: 23 ). Many if not most of TAPP’s direct action stunts counted as liberal in this sense- publicity stunts evaluated by the amount of attention gained from the media, city council, passing public or opponents. This was a source of self-criticism for the group. This approach worked especially well when the issue was new ( notably with GM crops and human genetics ), and when they were embarrassing to the company or council’s public image. Even radical economic strategies including sabotage, when they are conceived as a form of militant lobbying, can be viewed in this frame.

( 3 ) Actors such as the Green Party wish direct action to operate in tandem with ‘democratic’ processes<sup>127</sup>: “Change happens when you’ve got a parliamentary process but also an extra-parliamentary process... the whole principle of direct action is a key part of democracy” ( Lucas c2001; cf Corr 1999: 195-6; Lamb 1996: 196 ). ENGOs like FoE wish to set ‘democratic’ limits on when the use of direct action is legitimate: “Direct action ‘should only be used when ... the authorities are acting irresponsibly” ( Welsh 2000: 162; McLaren 2001: 19; cf Garner 1996: 149). Direct Action is thus framed according to the ‘democratic system’ in which it takes place ( Hoad 1998; Carter 1973: 146-147; *Do or Die* 1998: 135; Doherty, Plows & Wall 2003: 685 ), its value is understood within the terms of that system, and it is defined according to its contribution to that system. From an anarchist point of view, this is regarded as ‘indirect’ because it is

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<sup>127</sup> Certainly in Newcastle, direct action has often been supported ( and initiated ) by Green Party activists. Examples include Gene-Nol’s first attempted GM crop decontamination in May 1998, for which the North East Green Party arranged a bus, and the call to ‘blockade the blockaders’ during the Fuel protests of 2000. Certain North East green party members also regularly participated in direct action with TAPP without wearing their ‘official’ hat.



reliant on, and supportive of, 'representative' structures that remove power from the people directly concerned. This is particularly true when the direct action aims for legal successes. It is best demonstrated to be the case with non-anarchist revolutionary groups like the SWP: "although the SWP is one of the leading advocates of rank and file action, it does not call for rank and file workers to control their own struggles. For the SWP, rank and file action has the limited aim of 'forcing the officials to act'" ( Wildcat 1985: 7 ). Yet to judge direct action only in terms of whether there are 'democratic' ways to have their voices heard is a liberal-democratic assumption rejected by anarchists.

The contrasting anarchist view advocates political activism that "goes beyond the instrumentalism of the State". Hart claims that "An anarchist perspective of civil disobedience goes further than one which merely calls for the powers that be to respond to direct action in a positive way, so that direct action can ultimately cease" ( 1997: 52 ). Roseneil reports that at Greenham Common, for example, actions had 'integrity' for the actors, and were not just performed for the media ( 2000: 189 ). Frequently, commentators on social movements report that "the central satisfactions of protest" ( Jasper 1999: 15 ) are not the instrumental or declared aims but the expression and experience of collective action. The same was the case in EDA, as I argues in 5.2.2. Walter states that "Anarchists are in favour of direct action at all times; they see it as normal action, as action which can be used to create and also sustain a free society" ( 1980: 169; cf Welsh & Purkis 2003: 8; Martin 2001: 34 ). Bookchin states that direct action is "a sensibility" which "should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook" ( 1980: 48 ). For anarchists, therefore, direct action is not just a last resort, as sympathetic liberal commentators often assume, but the correct way of behaving at all times: taking responsibility for your actions, obeying only your own authority, and co-operating on an egalitarian, free and voluntary basis to work for positive change ( Baugh 1990: 100; Beynon 1999: 305 ). In the context of a world of domination and exploitation, anarchists and activists find that obeying only their own authority leads them into direct confrontation with the state and other powerful bodies: this returns us to the principle of anarchism as rebellion which I established in section 2.2.3. Before looking at these issues, however, I wish to look at the topic of violence which often pervades media and government considerations of direct action.

## 6.2.2

### Syndicalism and EDA

In this section, I bring anarchist arguments from one context to another, and in so doing I address the specific question of whether syndicalist direct action is essentially the same as ecological direct action. In 6.3.5 I develop this comparison of anarchist tactics between contexts with the case of sabotage. Here, I utilise three key hallmarks of syndicalist direct action: ( 1 ) organisation as the revolutionary project, and the seed of the future; ( 2 ) conceptions of ( economic ) direct action; and ( 3 ) the notion of educative empowerment. This builds on the negative distancing *from* liberal direct action, with a recognition of the *positive* content of anarchist direct action. In so doing, I reaffirm the points advanced for anarchist direct action in the previous chapter.

In Chapter 2, I emphasised the central place of organisation in anarchism, but several of its less-sympathetic commentators have argued that anarchists are baffled both by "the problem of how to organise internally and how, united with the masses, to proceed from old to new" ( Miller 1980: 110 ). There is a perceived tension between high utopian aims on the one hand, and being effective in the here-and-now, on the other ( Breines quoted in Della Porta & Diani 1999: 161 ). As we saw in 4.3.4, the proposed solution in direct action and anarchism, "was the congruence of means and ends. But it was still necessary to find a form of organisation and a strategy for revolution that was both consistent with these principles and practically effective" ( Miller 1984: 94 ). As Begg explains: "The task is to find organisational means that retain the values of autonomy and participation within the most effective and empowering structures" ( 1991: 7; cf *Organise!* 27 1992: 12; Della Porta & Diani 1999: 161 ). Historically, Anarcho-syndicalism is the form of organisation which gave anarchism its greatest success in this regard, building a revolutionary movement and society which, at its peak in Spain, operated efficiently at a close-to national level ( De



Santillan 1996; *Do or Die* 2000 44-45; Brenan 1950; Woodcock 1980: 375; Andres Oltmares quoted in Rucker 1986: 25 ).

The anarcho-syndicalist project centred on the notion of solidarity as an active project. Tom Brown, for example, a British agitator and organiser, noted that “each industrial union is dependent on the others, as a man is dependent on his fellows” ( 1994: 6 ). At a time when craft unions pitted skilled workers against the semi- or unskilled, and there existed hundreds of unions within a single industry, the syndicalists sought to amalgamate all the petty unions into one big one, based on solidarity amongst the workers: “to make unionism ... into a movement that will take in every worker” ( Mann quoted in Pataud & Pouget 1990: x; cf SolFed 1998; DA 32 2004: 2; IWW 2001 ). It was hoped that a peaceful path to revolution might thus be found through workers’ control. Active organisation became the method of revolution ( Brown 1994: 6 ).

Yet even at their peak, anarcho-syndicalists recognised that their own conceptions of anarchism were nowhere near complete, but merely “the germ” of an anarchist organisation ( Goldman 1969: 37; cf Woodcock 1992: 85; Rucker c1938: 21 ).<sup>128</sup> This is one of the ways that make anarcho-syndicalist conceptions of organisation relevant to contemporary EDA. Although the context is no longer that of industrial struggle, Jordan echoes the traditional argument that EDA’s “Dis/organisation is a hidden future inside the present” ( 2002: 74 ), and Beynon suggests that direct action harbours the seeds of the alternative future within its protest form ( 1999: 304 ). NVDA’s “prefigurative, utopian approach to politics” ( Epstein 1991: 16 ) may therefore be seen in connection to the desired, although unwritten future ( Bonanno 1998: 8-10; Jordan 2002: 138; Franks 2003: 28-9; Pepper 1993: 305; Heller [C] 1999: 156 ). I note some EDA examples of this in 6.4.3.

From their earliest history, anarchists rejected conventional ‘political’ struggle ( through parliament or other ‘representatives’ ) in favour of a direct struggle by the workers themselves, on their own terms, against the state ( Voline quoted in Carter 1973: 4 ). While this ‘direct action’ could refer to terrorism, riots or other agitation, it normally meant struggle in the workplace ( Walter 1980: 168; *Voice of Labour* quoted in Quail 1989: 241 ). This was economic struggle instead of political struggle, with ‘the strike of the folded arms’ as the key weapon.

The context for the success of syndicalism included a growing ‘class consciousness’ amongst workers, and a recognition that the urban proletariat stood, more than ever, at the centre of industrial society ( Rucker c1938: 51-2 ). The economic arena was viewed as the real, economic site of battle between workers and bosses ( in contrast to reformist or ‘political’ terrain ). The trump card which the workers could play was the strike, which demonstrated their power in solidarity, hit their bosses where it hurt and, particularly with ‘sympathetic strikes’, drew the lines of battle in the class struggle. Much of this framework has now been lost with the withering of the working class and the unions, but Rucker provides a direct line in to the contemporary forms of environmental direct action when he extends the definition of ‘strike’ beyond the economic field and into the idea of the ‘social strike’ ( 1973: 151; cf Everett in Rucker c1938: 10; Shantz 2002 ). The occupations, blockades, street parties and other EDA of this thesis may be included within Rucker’s definition, as contemporary anarcho-syndicalists have made clear by supporting and celebrating DIY and EDA ( *Direct Action* 2002: 9 ).

I wish to emphasise that direct action is still direct action even when utilised by very different traditions ( Woodcock 1980: 165 ). As Carter noted:

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<sup>128</sup> It is claimed that “The influence of the Syndicalists has always been immensely greater than their numbers” ( Brown 1994: 7 ). The same point has been made of the C.N.T. in Spain, the I.W.W. in the USA ( Russell 1918: 86 ), the C.G.T. in France ( Woodcock 1980: 278; Russell 1918: 76 ), and also more recent populist anarchist organisations like Class War ( *CW* 1997: 2 ). The power of influence beyond their numbers is put down to anarchists’ ability to channel the sentiments of the working class, at least during times of crisis. Anarchist influence is demonstrated through practical mobilisation on the streets more than it is through formal membership. I suggest that the influence of the committed eco-activists has at times possessed a similar dynamic, albeit with a different constituency and a different mobilising chord. Earth First! and Reclaim the Streets only ever had a small number of individuals who identified closely with them, but on occasions they both proved able to mobilise thousands, and to inspire many, often unexpected sections of society.



“The ethos of Gandhian non-violence is far removed from the class struggle of syndicalism, but when translated into more secularised and militant modes ‘non-violent action’ is not necessarily very different from the syndicalist concept of direct action” ( 1973: 4 ).

Bookchin identifies the four key themes of anarcho-syndicalist direct action discourse as ( 1 ) empowerment; ( 2 ) opting out of negative power structures; ( 3 ) increasing political consciousness; and ( 4 ) demonstrating the economic strength of the workers ( 1977: 135 ). Although ( 4 ) only fully comes into its own in the workplace arena ( Ward 1988: 24; *Anarchist Faq*: 1 ), the other three themes are still claimed as strengths by EDA groups, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. *Schnews* provide a contemporary DIY articulation of direct action as empowering, educative, flexible, authentic, and anarchist:

“DIRECT ACTION enables people to develop a new sense of self-confidence and an awareness of their individual and collective power

DIRECT ACTION is founded on the idea that people can develop the ability for self-rule only through practice, and proposes that all persons directly decide the important issues facing them  
DIRECT ACTION is not just a tactic, it is individuals, asserting their ability to control their own lives, and to participate in social life without the need for mediation or control by bureaucrats or professional politicians

DIRECT ACTION encompasses a whole range of activities, from organising co-ops to engaging in resistance to authority.

DIRECT ACTION places moral commitment above blindly obeying laws

DIRECT ACTION is not a last resort when other methods have failed, but the preferred way of doing things” ( *Justice?* flyer for ‘direct action’ conference reproduced in *Schnews* 1996; cf RTS c1995 ).

The ethos contained here remains in keeping with the syndicalist project, even once the industrial context is absent. There are other principles, arguments and aspirations from the syndicalist project that can be transferred into the context of EDA. Perhaps the most useful part of the anarcho-syndicalist project for our study, for example, is the manner in which it defined its dual aspect:

“( 1 ). As the fighting organisation of the workers against the employers to enforce the demands of the workers for the safeguarding and raising of their standard of living. ( 2 ). As the school for the intellectual training of the workers to make them acquainted with the technical management of production and economic life in general so that when a revolutionary situation arises they will be capable of taking the socio-economic organism into their own hands and remaking it according to Socialist principle” ( Rocker 1948: 252; cf Rocker c1938: 54 ).

Syndicalism was viewed as eminently practical - achieving immediate victories - while simultaneously working with the long term plan of revolution ( Pouget 2003: 12-14 ). It was both defensive and preparatory, immediate and long-term, and it provided a training for the future both through the development of technical know-how, and through the development of revolutionary solidarity ( Rocker c1938: 52-3; Clark 1981: 13; Quail 1989: 87 ). Examples of radicalisation from EDA evoked a similar hope, and we saw how they combined revolutionary aims with secondary, reformist impacts.

For the anarcho-syndicalists, notions of ( and practices of ) free association and direct control by the workers ( Rocker c1938: 53 ) were conceptualised and justified in terms of the anarchist emphasis on diversity, independent thought and practical experience: the expression of freedom, of self-organisation and direct action, was intended to nurture yet sophisticated and confident practices of freedom, self-organisation and direct action. In sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.3 I noted that, from an anarchist perspective, the educative or empowering aspect of organisation and activity remains of central importance. It is recognised by Nottingham EF! as “The most important part of a revolutionary/ evolutionary movement, apart from its actions” ( 1998; cf Barker 2001: 4; Clark 1981: 13; Pouget 2003: 5 ).

While Rocker emphasised the liberating aspect of the syndicates ( as a contrast to alienating, oppressive and inefficient *centralised* organisations ( c1938: 53 ), others use this conception of formative, educative experience and pit it *against* the industrial logic of unions and syndicalism ( Bonanno c2000; Jordan 2002:



35 ): hence the informalist critique identified in 5.3.12. This opposition to unions is particularly the case for critics enunciating anti-civilisation views, who argue that not only capitalism, but mass, industrial society must be destroyed ( GA 1999: 4 ). Syndicalists seek to remedy the institutionalisation thesis with radical decentralisation of power, but the history of syndicalist organisation itself provides examples to support the institutionalisation thesis ( Woodcock 1980: 369 ). We must, therefore, ask if decentralised federation does necessarily have the effect of educative empowerment that the syndicalists claim for it. One of the traditional splits between anarchist schools is articulated by anarcho-communists arguing that the organisational project of anarcho-syndicalism ( solidarity ) was not enough – and that explicit anarchist ideas and ideology need to be placed at the forefront to actively combat authoritarian, reformist and parochial tendencies ( Malatesta in Nomad 1968: 28; Makhno et al 1989: 5; ACF 1990 ). In sections 5.2.3 to 5.3.12 I looked at the views on organisation held by activists in Earth First! and other DIY ‘disorganisations’, and I wish to emphasise that these are distinct again from both syndicalist and explicit anarchist ( here, anarcho-communist ) frameworks. Whereas syndicalists prioritise workplace organisation and anarcho-communists emphasise the need for a mass organisation tied to an anarchist programme ( such as I critiqued in 2.3.6 ), informality, fluidity and temporary, specific, task-focussed organisations are emphasised in EDA ( Ward 1973: 387 ).

## **6.3 Violence and Direct Action**

### **6.3.1**

#### **Introduction**

Amongst the strategic frameworks and traditions that I have utilised so far, are syndicalism, peace movement direct action, feminism, ideological anarchism, wilderness defence and DIY activism. There are many differences and tensions between these different fields and traditions, even while they may all inhabit a broader anarchist universe. I will now turn my attention to the tensions and differences between such influences, and I will look at how different emphases on principles may translate into significant practical disagreements. Even when all direct action is undertaken in the non-liberal manner characterised as anarchist in 6.2.1 and 6.2.2, yet these strategic tensions may still arise.

In particular, the next few sections will examine the place of violence in direct action, and the divergent strategic assessments of direct action made by those informed by civil disobedience discourse, and by the revolutionary anarchist tradition. I begin in 6.3.2 by presenting the ‘fluffy-spiky’ debate of 1990s EDA as an expression of this difference: but a crude and inadequate expression that is unhelpful to a rounded understanding of EDA positions.<sup>129</sup> I therefore turn to the anarchist tradition in 6.3.3 to draw out a more sophisticated and critical view of violence, and in 6.3.4 I present the areas of significant disagreement to this that activists draw from CD discourse. In 6.3.5 I then focus on sabotage as the area in which the critical assessments of anarchist and CD discourses are most clearly demonstrated, in ways that inform the practices and debates of contemporary EDA. Presentation of these dialogues between different strategic frameworks and theorisations will then lead into an examination of specific practical examples from EDA where these tensions and strategic articulations were played out in practice, in the contexts of anti-GM direct action and peatland defence.

### **6.3.2**

#### **Spikies versus Fluffies**

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<sup>129</sup> I came ‘late’ to this debate, and so I may have been influenced in my opinion of it by an air of staleness and stereotyping then surrounding it, and by missing out on the contexts in which the first, and perhaps most relevant arguments, took place.



“The spirit of the direct action protest movement is ... half ‘spiky’, half ‘fluffy’ – half politically hard, half warmly, humanly soft” ( Jay Griffiths in Evans 1998: 9 ).

Empirically, we may note that most radical green activists espouse a strategic non-violence in which non-violence is justified on grounds of context: “In this country, at this time, there is NO NEED FOR VIOLENCE” ( EEV 1997: 1; cf Road Alert 1996: 2; Roseneil 2000: 129 ). Yet this contextual justification allows Greens to “support armed struggles of revolutionary people” in other contexts ( Bari 1997a; Manes 1990: 121;). Within the UK EDA network, this support has practical application, as demonstrated through exchanges and links of solidarity with such armed groups as the EZLN in Chiapas and the OPM in West Papua ( BFM n.d.; *Schnews & Squall* 2001: 199-200 ).

In the mid nineties, however, the debate around non-violence in EDA became stereotyped into a ‘spikies’ versus ‘fluffies’ opposition. ‘Fluffies’ were those against the use of violence, usually for reasons of principle, while ‘Spikies’ were those willing to use or advocate violence<sup>130</sup>. Zoe Elford represents the ‘fluffy’ viewpoint when she urges a more binding allegiance to non-violence: “During actions, the differing definitions of non-violence often lead to confusions which endanger ourselves and others. The uncertainty about how far we are meant to go causes feelings of frustration, anger and runaway excitability. It is vital that we come to a consensus and stick to it” ( quoted in Bellos 1997 ).<sup>131</sup> This introduces us to the ‘fluffy’ hallmarks of guidelines and formal NVDA training which I identify with CD discourse and evaluate in 6.3.4. Such CD groundrules sometimes exclude the use of sabotage ( AF 1996b: 7-8 ), and as the area of most relevance for our study of EDA repertoires, I examine this particular area in 6.3.5.

The contrast to such positions comes from individuals and groups who were generally more influenced by anarchist history, including both class-strugglists and primitivists ( Snorky 1995 ). In the case of the anti-M11 protests, anarchist commentators argued that “The tactics of non-violent Direct Action employed, the use of rooftops and towers, etc.,” are inadequate. Although they “proved successful in delaying the eviction, and piling up the costs for the state ... such tactics are incapable of actually preventing the state from recapturing the autonomous zones we create...We should learn the lessons from successful resistance on the continent and criticise the liberal dogma of non-violence which prevents us from making those connections” ( Anonymous quote in *Schnews* 1996 No.3 ). I dislike such statements for the way they may prevent activists and anarchists from countenancing any criticism of violence ( or sabotage ). My own position lies somewhere between the CD viewpoint of principled non-violence and that which refuses to condemn any use of violence by protesters. Yet I am not willing to thereby abandon the anarchist moniker ( to do so would be to accept the scurrilous equation of anarchism with violence ). In 6.3.3 I will therefore examine the range of perspectives within anarchist discourse and draw out the elements which are most appropriate for ethically informing and strategically assessing EDA practice.

Often the ‘spiky’ arguments came from the class-struggle form of anarchism ( *CW* 1997: 4-5; Goaman 2002: 38 ). One class warrior, for example, writes that “One problem was the fluffies, who demand that we fight with one arm behind our backs and hinder those getting stuck in. By their actions they risk getting us arrested and through isolating us they pinpoint us to the police. They are the enemy of our class” ( *AF Resistance* 5, August 1999: 1 ). One TAPP member suggested that views on violence were linked to a class basis ( Thornton 1999: 8 ) and *Class War* even suggest the criteria of violence as the distinction between class-struggle and liberal forms of anarchism ( *CW* 1997: 2 ). This is a simplification I do not accept, as my comments on standpoint epistemology in Chapter 3 should make clear.

I consider the way the fluffy-spiky disagreements are framed to be a dead-end and it was often recognised within EDA as an “artificial dualism” ( EEV 1997: 1; ‘Jo’ 2003 ). The simplification of differences into the spiky-fluffy antinomy encouraged divisiveness and name-calling, and tended to lower the level of real debate. Arguments against violence, for example, were quickly branded as ‘fluffy’, whatever the merit of

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<sup>130</sup> The original “Keep it Spiky” leaflet was produced by Class War for the 1996 CJA Hyde Park demo, outlining what to do if the event turned into a riot. It was afterwards reproduced in the media, much to CW’s delight ( *CW* 1997: 9 ).

<sup>131</sup> There is a contingent link in anarchist groups between the use of consensus methods and non-violence, and between class analysis and acceptance of violence.



their reasoning. The recognition that activist discussion constitutes a location of anarchism must be balanced, therefore, with the recognition that on-the-ground anarchist debate is not always of the highest quality.

I would like to illustrate these points with a text that was circulated in EF! and other EDA circuits in 1997, 'Egowarriors and Energy vamps' (EEV 1997). This was an edited record of discussions amongst several different EDA activists (and therefore included a range of sometimes conflicting points). Some of the document's arguments against violence draw upon civil disobedience discourse, or are made on grounds suitable for anarchist critique, such as media impact or of common humanity (a position which class-strugglists condemn as liberal). Yet other arguments for tactical non-violence were made on grounds of consequences: for the safety of protesters or for the sake of the success of the campaign (EEV 1997: 3).<sup>132</sup> It was stated, for example, that violence had negative impacts on activism: that it was other protesters who suffered most from 'intimidation' by "Violent protesters", who "wreck the energy and often the goals of the group" (EEV 1997: 1). It is unfortunate that these latter arguments should be dismissed so easily: in 4.3.4 and 6.3.3 I argue for their relevance to anarchist practice.

Most active anarchists avoided both 'never-violent' and 'always violent' positions (Wombles 2004a: 18). An insert in the *EF!AU* in 1996 warned against getting side-tracked by the issue, or being divided into opposing camps:

"a long line of articles ... are trying to push green/direct action and animal liberation activities into the category of terrorism. One purpose of these articles is to try and disrupt our increasingly effective and popular movement by trying to split us into factions along lines that the state sets...and between activists that have differing views on violence as a tactic of resistance" (*EF!AU* No.26 1996: 3).<sup>133</sup>

The emphasis of this feature, and an argument repeated elsewhere, was that diversity in approaches should be encouraged, and not condemned: "there is room in this movement for all responses to ecological devastation and we must not divide ourselves on small issues when we agree on nearly everything else" (*EF!AU* 26 1996: 3; cf discussions at Bradford *Dissent!* Gathering, June 2004).<sup>134</sup> Unfortunately, while I agree with the sentiment of this argument and believe it expresses a truth about attitudes in the EDA movement, I also consider it to be a chiefly *rhetorical* solution that does not automatically translate into an enabling, inclusive practice. Activists (particularly those self-identified as anarchist) have also on occasion used the notion of 'allowing diversity' to effectively intimidate and silence those wishing to criticise tactics they perceive as 'violent'. When EF!ers hosted a meeting in advance of the anti-summit protests in Prague, for example, one participant felt that "There was no attempt in that meeting to rule out violence, and it created a very exclusive sort of environment. I ... felt alienated" (TTS/SW 2001: 8.40-8.57).

While the different approaches to violence were never resolved in a conclusive way, activists on the ground, in small-scale arenas, nonetheless found many different ways of circumventing the issue (Roseneil 2000: 177). Road camps established their own temporary agreements on what tactics were considered suitable, in relation to their own vulnerability to repercussions (*Do or Die* 1992: 7). Temporary ground-rules or limits, meanwhile, were formulated for office occupations or covert actions. On one occupation I participated in, we all agreed in advance that no-one would seriously damage computers, but that moving around the paperwork was fine and a bit of graffiti acceptable (Tarmac occupation, Nottinghamshire,

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<sup>132</sup> Griffin argues that "When considering whether any [method of direct action] is justified, it is important to ask what effect an action has on all those involved, whether the outcome justifies the means, the reaction it creates, the outcome and its longer term implications" (1997: 20). Franks disagrees, arguing that "It is [the] rejection of consequentialism that particularly marks direct action out as especially anarchic" (2003: 15), but while I would readily defer to Frank's clear theoretical definition of 'coherent' anarchist direct action, I feel his definition is too rigid when it comes to actual application.

<sup>133</sup> *Road Alert!* provide a warning about the role of the State and the media, repeating the anarchist emphasis on the State's double standards when it comes to violence: "The State has always depended absolutely on threatening and using violence, and will dig deeper into its huge arsenal given any excuses. It will nonetheless be quick to condemn any violence on your side - often including such actions as damage to property. The media will follow this line. It is important to expect this sort of thing and be ready to deal with it" (1996: 2); see 7.5.

<sup>134</sup> The experience of being condemned by the mainstream environmental organisations (see 3.2.4 and 5.3.3) influenced such appeals.



1.2.1999 ). For another occupation, people who did not want to risk arrest for such activities assigned themselves other roles ( in other locations ), and so removed themselves from the sphere of risk<sup>135</sup> ( Nestlé occupation, Halifax, 30.11.1999 ). Such negotiated compromises are only necessary, besides, when the individuals involved do not already know each other well. A small group planning an action, that is unencumbered by a 'respectable' campaign ( or a camp that might suffer the repercussion ) will naturally form the plan most suited to their perspective. The sheer range and diversity of these negotiations of the issue are impossible to summarise in a thesis format; and I decline to attempt a neat resolution of the spiky-fluffy divide. Instead, I wish to emphasise the superiority of 'real-world' dialogue, agreement, and context-specific resolutions. Any abstract textual conclusion would become dogmatic if imposed on those real-world situations. I will instead use the next three sections to inform our understanding of the debates, by explaining the historical background behind some of the thinking. These will enable us to understand the political differences and varied strategic theories behind a shared anarchist view of direct action.

I will conclude this section with one of the ways that TAPP dealt with the issue. It arose because the image which was standardly used on the newsletter 'Think Globally Act Locally' ( *TGAL* ) featured a crowd throwing rocks. Some TAPPers felt uneasy using this image, although others did not see a problem and many claimed the image did not show such a thing at all.<sup>136</sup> But as *TGAL* was a participatory newsletter, with a different person editing and printing it each time, these individuals were able to express their particular viewpoint by amending the image. Some tippexed out the rocks, some completely changed the title to change the activities of the people, and others deliberately kept with the original logo. Six examples featured in Figure F6.2 indicate the original logo; non-violent alternatives; and a feminist adaptation of the motif.

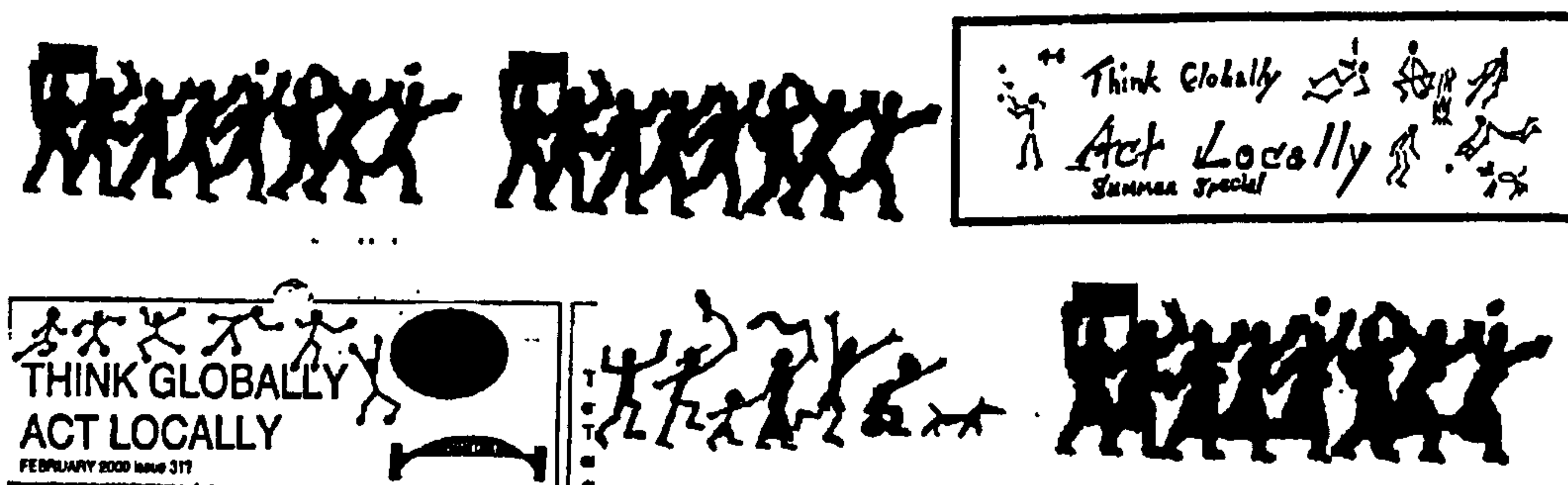


Figure F6.2 *TGAL* images ( *TGAL* No. 7 ( and most later issues ); 62; 46; 31; 41; & 40 ).

### 6.3.3

#### Anarchist Perspectives on Violence

Here I will present a reading of anarchism that draws out the salient views on violence: this will be built on with the next section, and then followed by a discussion of sabotage: violence and sabotage are crucial strategic and ethical issues for us to understand from an anarchist perspective before we look at practical examples. We begin by noting that class-struggle anarchists consider all major achievements for the working class to have been achieved through struggle, and their reading of history indicates that violent struggle has been amongst the most effective means of doing so ( Berkman quoted in Ruins 2003: 9; Most 1890; *CW* 1997: 4; Churchill 1999; *Do or Die* 1999: 305 ). On strategic grounds, therefore, anarchists can

<sup>135</sup> At the same time they removed themselves from the planning discussion for that part of the action, so they did not learn the things they did not need to know.

<sup>136</sup> The image was originally adapted from an anti- Jobseekers Allowance campaign, where the crowd emerged from the official Jobseekers Allowance logo, and were pictured escaping from the Jobcentre. In this context, the black dots could better be read as scrunched up benefit forms.



justify the use of violence, but there are some anarchists who turn that justification into a more general celebration ( Joll 1971: 215; *Do or Die* 2000: 15 ). Some anarchists glory in the imagery and rhetoric of violence, and many consider the pinnacle of revolutionary activity to be street-fighting with the police ( a mistake, in my view ). *Class War* provide the clearest example of this position, which they repeatedly displayed in their populist newspaper:

“Class War never apologised for our violence, Class War celebrated it. Class War said that we should be fighting back as that is the way to win. Class War in its entire existence never had a single photo of a copper bashing up someone on a demonstration ( unlike the rest of the left ) - its photos always showed the other side, a copper getting bashed” ( Norman 1998; cf Atton 2002: 119 ).

*Class War* justified the violence they supported in terms of “returning the aggression of the immediate enemy, the police” ( *CW* 1997: 4 ), but when the organisation split up in 1997, they admitted that “The glorification of violence ended up attracting people who were more interested in talking about violence than changing the world ... Class War’s macho approach has in turn alienated many people” ( 1997: 5 ).

The form of violence most consistently supported by ( particularly class struggle and insurrectionary ) anarchists is the popular, spontaneous street-fight or riot ( AF 1996a: 21; Bookchin 1968: 3 ).<sup>137</sup> Riots are a starkly different form of revolt to NVDA, which is consciously chosen and considered before being pursued, “with careful limits self-imposed” ( Cohen 1971: 49; cf Adilkno 1994; Doherty, Plows & Wall 2003: 685). Cohen considers riots revolutionary in intent, but partial and “doomed to accomplish little but destruction” ( 1971: 49 ). While I would not dismiss the occasionally change-bringing power of mass, militant confrontation, I consider the way some anarchists view and speak of riots as an unbalanced ‘fetishisation’, in which a particular tool is mistaken for the revolutionary process ( AEAG 2001: 51 ). A self-knowing irony in this regard is indicated by videos of violent street confrontations ( shown at EF! and Dissent! gatherings, and the Anarchist Bookfair ), being commonly termed ‘riot porn’. In this fetishisation of a tool there is a parallel with the case of propaganda of the deed, which I shall now review.

‘Propaganda of the deed’ originally signified such action as strikes, demonstrations and local uprisings ( Walter 2002: 85; Nomad 1968: 14; Kropotkin 1970: 35-43 ). Individual acts of assassination and other violence quickly came to take place under the anarchist banner, however, and by the 1890s the terms ‘direct action’ and ‘propaganda by the deed’ had become synonymous with individual acts of terrorism and murderous revenge ( Joll 1971: 218 ). While the meaning of ‘direct action’ quickly moved on, I am using ‘Propaganda of the Deed’ in this same colloquial sense. When the 1881 London Congress of anarchists urged all those “affiliated to the Internationale to give first priority to the study of the chemical and technological sciences ... as means of defence and attack” ( quoted in Longoni 1970: 15 ), it signified the ‘fetishisation’ of bombs, tools of conflict, into the act of liberation itself. Anarchist historian Alexandre Skirda considers the idea that explosives could “trace out a path for social revolution!” as “mind-boggling” ( 2002: 47 ), and even at the time, many anarchists saw the limitations of individual acts of violence ( Russell 1918: 67; Octave Mirbeau in Woodcock 1980: 293 ). The ‘Sheffield Anarchist’ of 1894 stated

**“DYNAMITE IS NOT ANARCHY.**

It is the weapon of men driven to desperation by intolerable suffering and oppression. Our ideal can be realised without it, if the rich will let us. Our work for the present lies in spreading our ideas among the workers in their clubs and organisations as well as in the open street. So long as we can express our ideas freely we shall be content with advocating  
**PASSIVE RESISTANCE”**

( Nicoll illustrated in Quail 1989: 195 ). This demonstrates the long heritage behind the anarchist link to NVDA, introduced in 4.3.4.

<sup>137</sup> In the view of the Anarchist Federation’s newsletter, for example, the violence that took place on June 18<sup>th</sup> was an achievement to be celebrated on the grounds that “While world leaders were plotting our fates they lost control of the city and some of London’s coppers got the kicking they deserve. Damage to the city was put at over 5,000,000 pounds – a good days work... It was class anger versus riot armour... This anti-capitalist demonstration showed us setting the agenda on their turf” ( AF 1999c: 1 ). J18 is an interesting case, in that it may be seen as an event where the two modes – riot and NVDA – temporarily joined, but in 7.5 I argue for their incompatibility.



The anarchist movement at large came to realise that propaganda of the deed had failed as a strategy ( 1996a: 12; Skirda 2002: 53-75; Walter 2002: 90; Kropotkin 1910: 916 ). Its practical results were the alienation of the public from anarchist ideals, and an invitation for governments to introduce further oppressive laws ( Griffin 1997: 20; Davis & Wiener 2003: McElroy 2003: 7 ). When a more productive outlet for building the revolution presented itself in the syndicalist movement, terrorism quickly became eclipsed by the achievements of the latter: see 6.2.2.

Terrorism as an avowed method for bringing the anarchist revolution does not sit well with the anarchist conception of revolution. As Tolstoy put it, “Kings and Emperors have long ago arranged for themselves a system like that of a magazine-rifle; as soon as one bullet has been discharged, another takes its place. Le roi est mort, vive le roi! So what is the use of killing them?” ( 1990: 73 ). To assassinate a head of state is to reveal a misunderstanding of the nature of the state which, as we noted in 4.3.2, is not a neutral machine with some bad people in control, but possesses a force and logic of its own that is not decisively affected when its figure-heads are removed.

This evaluation is the positive legacy that the experience of ‘Propaganda of the Deed’ has left the anarchist movement. Since the terrorist ‘interlude’ ( Woodcock 1980: 43 ), anarchists have demonstrated much more involvement in pacifist and nonviolent activity than in violent campaigns. We should note, however, that ‘antimilitarism’ rather than pacifism was the dominant ideal of anarchism ( *AF Organise!* 38 1995: 20; Walter 2002: 47; Martin 1965: 145 ).<sup>138</sup> The replacement of the state’s monopoly of violence with a popular militia was considered the only effective way of ridding the world of war and aggression, and so antimilitarism had as its emblem not the ‘broken rifle’ but ‘the people armed’ ( Bookchin 1998c; cf Ruins 2003: 24 ). Both these motifs are still in circulation in EDA, as Figure F6.3 illustrates:



**Figure F6.3 ( a ) The Broken Rifle on a flag I made for protests against the arms fair DSEI, September 2001. ( b ) ‘Veggies’ anniversary tour T-shirt, worn by an ex-TAPPER, March 2005.**

We should not, therefore, associate anarchism too closely with non-violence: even though many activists have adopted both sets of principles and professed a non-violent anarchism ( Clark 1981; Chan 2004: 109-110 ).<sup>139</sup> In my view, the anarchist perspective retains a critical distance from absolute pacifism ( Richards 1993: 42 ). Camus noted that if one maintains a position of absolute non-violence, even when limited

<sup>138</sup> “Anarchists have always opposed war, but not all have opposed violence” ( Walter 2002: 43 ). This position is clarified by the resolution passed at the anarchist congress in Amsterdam in 1907, stating “The anarchists urge their comrades and all men aspiring to liberty, to struggle according to circumstances and their own temperaments, and by all means – individual revolt, isolated or collective refusal of service, passive and active disobedience and the military strike – for the radical destruction of the instruments of domination. They express the hope that all the peoples concerned will reply to any declaration of war by insurrection and consider that anarchists should give the example” ( quoted in Woodcock 1980: 250 ). However, although anarchist internationalism implied opposition to war, Kropotkin and twelve other prominent anarchists broke ranks with the more common revolutionary abstentionist anti-war position in World War I, and supported the Allies ( *AF* 1996a: 13 ).

<sup>139</sup> George Woodcock is one of these, and his pacifism was amongst the reasons that, I noted in Chapter 2 ( some ) class struggle anarchists dismissed his anarchism as ‘liberal’.



violence could prevent greater violence occurring, then one is complicit in enabling greater violence to occur ( 1951: 255 ). As the pacifist A.J. Muste recognised, “the alternative of submission is by far the greater evil” ( 1998: 13 ). Malatesta argues that

“There can be cases where passive resistance is an effective weapon, and it would then obviously be the best of weapons, since it would be the most economic in human suffering. But more often than not, to profess passive resistance only serves to reassure the oppressors against their fear of rebellion, and thus it betrays the cause of the oppressed” ( 1993: 81 ).

To realistically prevent the state continuing to visit the world with its violence, therefore, Malatesta argues that a measure of violence on the part of the oppressed must be allowed ( 1993: 78 ). The limitation placed on the use of violence is already contained in the injunction that allows for it. As Malatesta writes, “it is necessary to defend oneself and others from violence. It is where necessity ceases that crime begins” ( 1993: 75; cf Christie & Meltzer quoted in Chan 2004: 119 ). From this theoretical basis, anarchists are able to mount a strong critique of violent methods, ‘revolutionary’ or otherwise, and also to critique the rigid pacifist position.

Self-defence is equated with the defence of freedom, and Malatesta extends this principle from the level of individuals to the struggle against the state: “The only limit to the oppression of government is the power with which the people show themselves capable of opposing it” ( 1993: 76 ). Eco-activists have since extended this conception from the defence of the workers to the defence of nature ( Abbey in Foreman & Hayward 1993: 2; Rage 2002: 1 ), which illustrates a problem with the principle that it seems capable of indefinite extension ( Chan 2004: 115 ): to the 1992 Poll tax riot ( Participant in Pickerill & Duckett, eds, 1999: 82; cf ‘The Battle of Hyde Park’ *Schnews* 1996 ), to CEOs of environmentally destructive companies ( a friend 2002: 3; RCAL 2003: 21; Manes 1990: 177 ), to all ‘counter-revolutionaries’?<sup>140</sup>

Ethical limits to the notion are provided by Malatesta’s statement that violence becomes “evil and ‘immoral’ if it serves to violate the freedom of others” ( 1993: 79 ), and Goldman emphasises that “It is quite one thing to employ violence in combat, as a means of defence. It is quite another thing to make a principle of terrorism, to institutionalise it, to assign it the most vital place in the social struggle. Such terrorism begets counter-revolution and in turn itself becomes counter-revolutionary” ( quoted in Carter 1971: 106 ). It is the scale, and the coldly calculated disdain in state violence that anarchists find most objectionable ( DeGrandpre 2004 ).

In my view, the anarchist arguments *against* violence are given insufficient salience in the magazines and public arguments of the main ‘ideological’ anarchist groups ( such as AF and CW ), and are tragically downplayed in those anti-civilisation and insurrectionary currents articulated by *GA*, *GAy*, and the pamphlets of Bonanno, Ruins, Churchill. A corrective is required to the over-emphasis on the violent moments of popular struggle, which in themselves show no sign of bringing a freer, more just world. The manifest examples of ‘manufactured vulnerability’ used by anti-roads protesters in the last decade may hold some promise for this reason ( Doherty 1999a; Szerszynski 1999 ): I consider this in the next section.

The most important anarchist argument against violent means is indicated in the title of the pamphlet ‘You Can’t Blow Up a Social Relationship’. It argues against a ‘guerrillaist’ strategy ( distinct from the strategy of individualist terrorism critiqued above ( Law 1991: 50 ) ), in terms which I shall apply to the ELF in 6.5. For now, we may summarise the injunctions against violence that are most central to the anarchist tradition ( before introducing the distinct arguments from civil disobedience ) by recognising Malatesta’s statement that “violence contains within itself the danger of transforming the revolution into a brutal struggle without

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<sup>140</sup> By extending a simple model from one context to another, significantly more complex one, we add complications unforeseen in the original context, so that it is no longer self-evident, for example, on which occasion self-defence begins. Other complications occur with the logic of provocation intended to “force authority to tear off its mask” and create “A crisis of provoked authority” ( Provo manifesto in Woodcock 1992: 48-49 ), which also destabilises the assumption that all anti-establishment violence is self-defence: El Paso, for example, state that “the responsibility is that of the State and its protectors, independent of provocateurs. Their very existence is a provocation” ( quoted in AEAG 2001: 48; Pouget 2003: 16 ). Similarly, several movement theorists critique false and limiting assumptions such as that the police always provoke violence on demonstrations ( a view that Merrick expresses ( 1997: 5 ) ), on the basis that we should allow the possibility that people are justified and able to use ( class ) violence – and police response – for their own purposes ( Adilkno 1994: 107; Mueller 2004; AF 1996a: 21 ).



the light of an ideal and without possibilities of a beneficial outcome” ( 1993: 79; cf Muste 1998; Bakunin in Woodcock 1992: 93 ). Richards thus warns that “fighting tyranny by tyranny’s weapons will always lead one to becoming very like the thing one is fighting against” ( 1993: 48; cf Woodcock 1992: 98-102; Hill 1973: 39-40 ). Such aphorisms against violence are common in anarchist discourse, and Chan ties them to a not-quite-absolute pacifist position ( Chan 2004: 111 ). Even when anarchists see violence as necessary, such aphorisms as “violence breeds violence” and “violence is the enemy of freedom” indicate that they should also see it as regrettable, dangerous, and to be avoided if possible ( Cgan 2004: 103 ).

#### 6.3.4

### Civil Disobedience Discourse

For the purpose of this thesis, I am designating civil disobedience ( CD ) as the method and justificatory discourse utilised by the contemporary peace movement ( at least its most radical and active parts ). For this understanding, I am drawing on both the ‘traditional view’ of CD developed in the 1960s and 1970s ( Welchman 2001: 99 ), and the guidelines and strategic viewpoints from the ploughshares movement, as that is the wing committed to sabotage ( see 6.3.5 ), and closest to anarchism and EDA. Both CD and revolutionary anarchism inform EDA, and often they merge and mingle when on the ground ( nothing in life is as simple as political theory seeks to draw it ). Here, however, I am contrasting the theoretical model of CD to positions established as distinctive of revolutionary anarchism, in order to throw a spotlight on the points of disagreement between the two approaches. These disagreements often percolate through to the ground, leading to tension and strategic disagreement between activists: I will demonstrate this with the case of Genetix Snowball in the sections of 6.4.

Cohen’s oft-quoted definition states that “Civil disobedience is an act of protest, deliberately unlawful, conscientiously and publicly performed” ( 1971: 4 ). We will be looking at this definition’s various parts ( unlawful, conscientious, public ) in this section. We should also note what is absent here: ‘non-violence’ is not an essential part. Yet in practice, CD is typically characterised by its emphasis on non-violence ( Hengren 1993: 8; Franks 2003: 15; Carter 1973: 65; Welsh 2000: 175-6 ) and, as we shall see in this section, also by the themes of dialogue, accountability and democracy.

The most contentious part of CD discourse, from the anarchist point of view, is the *prima facie* duty of obedience for law ( Cohen 1971: 6; Gandhi in Bondurant 1965: 166 ). Martin Luther King is typical in insisting that civil disobedients’ willingness to break unjust laws does not equate to a disrespect for law:<sup>141</sup>

“I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and willingly accepts the penalty by staying in jail to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the very highest respect for law” ( 1963: 21 ).

Hengren argues that “Civil disobedience is not putting oneself above the law... Civil disobedience is a political act that confronts the law and claims a higher perception and performance of justice” ( 1993: 15 ). CD willingness, indeed keenness, to engage with the law and public notions of justice is thus significantly different from the anarchist conceptual break from the universe of laws and general, ‘neutral’, punitive justice ( Van den Haag 1972: 15; cf Walter 2002: 33 ). Cohen spells out this difference in revolutionary-reformist terms:

“the civil disobedient does, while the revolutionary does not, accept the general legitimacy of the established authorities. While the civil disobedient may vigorously condemn some law or policy

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<sup>141</sup> King uses the religious perspective to distinguish between just and unjust laws: “An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law” ( 1963: 19 ). Compare this theme to the ecoteurs who contrast ‘natural laws’ to human ones ( Hart 1997: 153; *Do or Die* 1995: 89 ). All such comparison of laws with a different hierarchy of authority would seem to stand at a distance from normal anarchist discourse in which law, *per se*, is illegitimate and violent. Yet they perform a rhetorical function, undermining the supposed legitimacy and normality of state law.



those authorities institute, and may even refuse to comply with it, he does not by any means intend to reject the larger system of laws of which that one is a very small part" ( 1971: 44; cf Welchman 2001: 105 ).

We should remind ourselves that, as I elaborated in sections 4.3.4 and 5.3.7, the anarchist revolutionary outlook here opposed to the reformist civil disobedient is not equivalent to purism, but is an outlook, a sensibility and a body of strategic injunctions that has profound practical application.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of civil disobedience theory is its conception of power and obedience. Thoreau makes the classic statement of this position: "When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has refused office, then the revolution is accomplished" ( 2003: 275; cf Hengren 1993: 133 ). This engagement with the revolutionary idea gives the lie to a characterisation of CD as non-revolutionary: it should instead be viewed as merely non-insurrectionary. The civil disobedients possess a view of revolution based not on a struggle between different blocs of power, but on a recognition of the power we already possess as individuals.

"It is surprising that whether we call ourselves pacifists, revolutionaries, reformists, socialists, syndicalists, anarchists, Marxists, liberals, environmentalists, feminists, or non-violent activists - obedience still seems to be self-evident. Choose any one of these groups. This group in itself would be enough to stop most environmental destruction or arms exports if its members used civil disobedience" ( Hengren 1993: 26; cf De Ligt 1937: 105 ).

Although such a view may appear over-optimistic in today's globalised society, Hengren points out that "Not many disobedient telephone workers, postal workers, transport workers, or bankers are needed to stop a certain activity. The more complex our society becomes, the greater the dependence on co-operation at all possible levels" ( 1993: 91 ). The CD perspectives have a good compatibility with the anarcho-syndicalist project of organisation: indeed the general strike was conceived as a possible alternative to violent revolution ( Chan 2004: 107; Pataud & Pouget 1990; De Ligt 1937 ).

CD theorists do recognise that a real attempt to challenge the system's power will result in a violent assertion of its power ( see 4.3.1 ), yet they emphasise that "if ordinary people – the lower levels of the pyramid – still refuse to obey orders, the disintegration of the power-system is inevitable" ( Vinthagen 1999 ). Anticipation of resistance to revolution thus leads to a quite different conclusion for CD practitioners than insurrectionary anarchists ( to passive resistance, empowerment and victory, not armed struggle ). The emphasis on organisation and the constructive element of revolution is, however, not strange to traditional anarchism, which has long held that the significant part of revolution is "not armed confrontation with the state but the ... relationships and ideas amongst people in the groups, community councils, workers councils, etc. that emerge in the social conflict" ( Bufe 1998: 8; cf Martin 2001: 34-5; Bookchin 1971: 246; AF 1996a: 28 ). There is therefore a two-fold strategy to anarchist revolution: dismantling the top-down structures; and being more disobedient, thereby denying their power ( Carter 1971: 107; Carter 1993: 51 ).<sup>142</sup>

The conception of 'the revolution', 'the enemy', and thus the meaning of revolutionary activism in civil disobedience discourse nonetheless remains distinct from that in insurrectionary anarchism. According to this view, obedience cannot be destroyed through power struggle, but only by a change in our own way of thinking and acting ( Hengren 1993: 206; TTTS c1999; Clark 1998 [H]; Clark 1981: 20 ).<sup>143</sup> The

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<sup>142</sup> "Our aim is not to overthrow the state but to undermine it to the point where it is irrelevant. We want to decrease people's dependence on it to the point where they don't need it" ( RTS activist quoted in Vidal 2000 ).

<sup>143</sup> Flaws have been identified with the CD theorisation of power as based on obedience ( Sharp 1973: 16 ). The strategy works best for specific issues of injustice within a democratic framework, but becomes harder to apply when the aim is full-scale revolutionary social change ( Bleiker 2000: 105 ). Most significantly, it loses something of its power when there is no clear 'ruler' from whom the 'subjects' can withdraw their consent, or "opponents with whom activists can engage in dialogue". Under capitalism, "These conditions no longer apply" ( Martin 2001: 14 ). The 'truth' demonstrated by satyagraha campaigns has no power to reach people in an age of information surfeit, and "Moral persuasion ... has little chance when cause and effect are separated. Bomber pilots show little remorse for the agony caused by their weapons detonating far below, while managers of large international banks have little inkling of the suffering caused by their lending policies in foreign countries" ( 2001: 35 ). Martin nonetheless notes that while consent theory has considerable theoretical shortcomings, it is remarkably well suited for activists. "It immediately implies that individuals can



possibility for the link between the worlds of anarchism and civil disobedience discourse was established when anarchists emphasised the two-fold nature of revolution, in the external and the internal worlds, and thus placed one's own thoughts and actions on an equal footing with the dynamics of mass struggle. The first anarchist periodical stated, in the tradition of Etienne de la Boetie: "Up to this very day, you thought that there were such things as tyrants! Well, you were mistaken; there are only slaves: where none obeys, none commands" (Bellegarrigue quoted in Skirda 2002: 8).

Anarchists might agree with CD discourse in so far as "Their greatest weapon is our Fear of Authority" (Merrick 1997: 5; cf Oli quoted in Evans 1998: 10; Carter 1971: 102), but class struggle anarchists (amongst others) would be appalled at the 'naïve' idea that "In civil disobedience, there are no enemies" (Herngren 1993: 104; cf *TCA* 7(1) 2005: 7). Early in the history of anarchism, the peaceful, gradualist strand of anarchism exemplified by Godwin (1984: 76; Ritter 1980: 94) was criticised by those like Bakunin who insisted on the recognition that insurrectionary force would be needed to combat the enemies of freedom (Bakunin 1990a: 214; Wildcat 1985: 9; Ritter 1980: 101). Class struggle groups like the AF prioritise the class enemies that oppress us, who can be identified as 'external' to ourselves (AF 1998a: 15; Churchill 1999: 4). They identify two aspects to oppression: they may accept "that the State is a social relation, and that it depends on all of us upholding it to continue", but emphasise that "at the same time it is a concrete thing that can be attacked and made not to work." Thus "Refusal is part of the strategy, but physically attacking it is the other part" (Ruins 2003: 15). Although I, like most anarchists, accept the ultimate need for "paralysing the machinery of the State when we are strong enough to do so" (*Freedom* quoted in Apter & Joll 1971: 98), I have not become convinced by the insurrectionist strategy of attacking police stations as a model of social change.<sup>144</sup>

Speaking from a standpoint miles removed from insurrectionary class struggle discourse, Martin Luther King announces to the oppressor that "We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force" (1957: 11; cf Bondurant 1965: 39; Ashe quoted in Chakrabarti 1995: 157). To a Gandhian, self-suffering tests the truth that lies at the heart of the campaign. Whereas anarchists put up barricades to protect their squats, or "put on protective gear" in demonstrations (Herngren 1993: 102; Wombles c2001: 1), CD theorists like Herngren state that "non-violence is based on the power that is created by making yourself vulnerable and by taking the consequences of your actions. These modern suits of armour do not have any role in civil disobedience" (1993: 102). Such is the gulf between the two discourses, although the practice is much more complex as was demonstrated by the many examples of defensive tunnelling, barricading, and physical obstructions that were used by roads protesters *in addition* to placing their bodies peacefully in the way. This has been termed 'manufactured vulnerability' (Doherty 1999a; Szerszynski 1999; Smith 2002: 24), and it was amongst the most celebrated and media-friendly aspect of nineties EDA. As Jordan pictures it,

"The Campaign is a non-stop performance... Non-Violent Direct Action is performance where the poetic and pragmatic join hands. The sight of a fragile figure silhouetted against a blue sky, perched dangerously high, on a crane that has stopped work for the day, is both beautiful and functional. NVDA is deeply theatrical and fundamentally political" (John Jordan quoted in McKay 1996: 139; cf Sam in Brass & Koziell 1997: 42; Griffiths 1997: 30).

Manufactured vulnerability fits best the CD paradigm insofar as the protesters offer up their bodies, non-violently, displaying trust that they will not be killed outright.

Recalling the anarchist incorporation of NVDA in 6.3.3, Clarence Marsh Chase provides a useful elaboration of why manufactured vulnerability, civil disobedience, or 'non-violent coercion' in his terms, stands as a positive contrast to terrorist methods:

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make a difference: all they need to do is withdraw consent and the power of rulers is undermined. This can actually be quite effective, because experienced and perceptive activists often have a remarkably good grasp of power structures, especially local ones. Through their own understanding of complexities of power, they essentially provide the structural analysis that is missing from consent theory. In turn, consent theory provides activists with an easy way to grasp that their own actions can have an impact" (2001: 37). It is the practical use to which the theory is put which is significant, and which reveals the complexity involved in effecting social change.

<sup>144</sup> A simplification.



“True non-violent coercion is, and ought to be, a two-edged sword. In other words, it causes, and it is well that it should cause, inconvenience and suffering to those who wield it, as well as to those against whom it is invoked. In this it is exactly contrary to violent methods; for a principal reason accounting for the appalling growth of terrorism in modern times, is the unfortunate fact that the development of fire-arms and high explosives carries no automatic check and penalty for all who use them. As for the methods of non-violent coercion, particularly the strike and the boycott, the public usually stands more or less in position to determine which way the blow shall fall, that is, which party to the controversy shall suffer the greater loss. It is well that it is so, for it is not in the interest of the general good that any group of men should exert irresponsible power” (quoted in Bondurant 1965: 10).

In contrast to the covert strategy of ‘physically effective action’ that I shall detail in 6.4 and 6.5, in this model of manufactured vulnerability ultimate decision-making power is given over to the public (the majority and the media), to determine the rightness of the cause and actions (Bondurant 1965: 16). Civil Disobedience is “a democratic means for minorities and other groups that are oppressed to obtain justice” (Herngren 1993: 6; cf Stafford 1971: 98). The civil disobedient appeals to society’s sense of justice, and demands consideration on those terms (Rawls 1971). Some anarchists argue that this is just a diluted ‘civil society’ version of letting the law/government decide what is right. Yet CD theorists insist that all profound positive changes must be made in the public sphere, and that principles of openness, dialogue and democracy are necessary for them to succeed (Welchman 2001: 100; Rawls 1971: 365-6; Cohen 1971: 40). I will look at this now.

*Turning the Tide*, a Quaker group that trains activists in non-violence before demonstrations, are typical of Civil Disobedience theorists when they argue that “The aim is both dialogue and resistance -dialogue with the people to persuade them, and resistance to the structures to compel change” (TTTS c1999). Martin Luther King argued that “the purpose of the direct action is to ... open the door to negotiation” by bringing the hidden tension and injustice out into the open where it can be seen and dealt with (1963: 17:). In a similar sense, the primary objective of Gandhian civil disobedience is, not just to win the issue, but to *create*: “not to assert propositions, but to create possibilities”. The question constantly to be asked of satyagraha actions is therefore “In what way is the force generated through non-violent action directed into creative channels?” (Bondurant 1965: pvii)<sup>145</sup>. It does not promote confrontation for confrontation’s sake, but instead uses civil disobedience in order to get a dialogue based on truth going with the opponent.

CD theorists distinguish their own methods which operationalise the ‘principle of dialogue’ (Herngren 1993: 99) from “methods that are directly effective, like boycott, strike, disobedience on a massive scale, or direct action” which “function above all as a means of creating political pressure” (1993: 7): these represent ‘*duragraha*’ in the Gandhian framework, where they are condemned for ‘prejudgement’, ‘symbolic violence’, ‘arrogance’ and ‘self-righteousness’ (Bondurant 1965: viii; cf Herngren 1993: 10-12). They are antithetical to the democratic basis of dialogue wherein CD theorists place their hopes for radical change (1965: ix; Martin 2001: 137; Editorial, *Peace News* No.2421 1998). Such forms of physically effective action may not only be dissimilar to civil disobedience, therefore, but also counter to its ethics.<sup>146</sup>

In contrast to our theorisation of direct action in 6.2.1, the CD principle of dialogue makes the symbolism – the common language - of the action all important (Herngren 1993: 90). People sitting in the road, for example, may be seeking to disrupt the normal functioning of a nuclear base, yet this disruption is primarily conceived as a means of amplifying their message. Herngren notes that

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<sup>145</sup> At the first *Dissent!* gathering in Nottingham 2003, a group of around 50 Activists used consensus methods to decide the name and descriptive statement of the new network they had created. Here, the suggestion of applying the prefix ‘creative’ to direct action was vociferously opposed, precisely because of the experience of peace movement activists using it in this sense (My Notes, 2003).

<sup>146</sup> Welchman seeks to reincorporate ecosabotage within the CD characterisation (2001: 105), but it is excluded by the conventional understanding of CD. She notes that “Environmental protesters turn out to be in good and numerous company, almost the norm rather than the exception in their departure from philosophically recognised forms of civil disobedience” (Welchman 2001: 99). It may be re-included through a renaming process, as “environmental disobedience” or “radical disobedience” (Carter 1998: 29-47), but overall, I consider direct action to be the most suitable conceptual term.



“The fact that Greenpeace often succeeds in stopping particular waste-dumpings and the Plowshares movement actually does disarm weapons does not make the actions less symbolic. Quite the opposite - the symbolic value increases when you show the possibility of stopping waste-dumping and that everybody can disarm weapons” ( 1993: 93; cf Roseneil 2000: 202; J.W. in AEAG 2001: 6 ).

We might note that the contrasting examples here are both framed as liberal and not anarchist direct action. The important distinction for an anarchist understanding, however, is between actions that are *only* symbolic and those which *also* work as ‘direct action’ ( Franks 2003: 15-16; cf Wombles 2004b: 4 ).<sup>147</sup>

These distinctions translate into practical differences. Most centrally, CD discourse, but not insurrectionary anarchism, also justifies the receipt of punishment ( debilitating for the activist involved ) on the basis that “The value of an action, together with the trial and the following punishment, is its message” ( 1993: 92 ). This is the focus of the disputations which we shall examine in the sections of 6.4.

Gandhi and MLK proposed particular strategic plans for their campaigns of mass civil disobedience which instituted the principles of openness, self-suffering and, perhaps most importantly, dialogue ( King 1963: 14-15; Ashe quoted in Chakrabati 1995: 157 ). The guidelines imposed on action by the anti-nuclear weapons network Trident Plowshares ( formerly Trident Plowshares 2000 ) highlight this theme: they are characteristic of the Plowshares movement as a whole. First, “Everyone in Trident Plowshares 2000 will have to take part in a formal two-day non-violence and safety workshop” ( TP2000 1998: 16 ), in order to become acquainted with, and accept, the ‘non-negotiable ground-rules’.

- 1) Every activist shall be a member of an affinity group, have signed the Pledges, be registered with the Core Group and have gone through the Non-violence and Safety Workshop.
- 2) Our actions are built upon being open and public.
- 3) Our attitude will be one of sincerity and respect toward the people we encounter.
- 4) We will not engage in physical violence or verbal abuse toward any individual.
- 5) We will carry no weapons.
- 6) We will not bring to any Trident Plowshares 2000 action or use, any alcohol or drugs other than for medical purposes.
- 7) We will respect all the various agreements concerning the actions” ( 1998: 18; cf TTTS c1999; Herngren 1993 ).

General and non-negotiable ground-rules are antithetical to anarchist recognition of fluidity that was articulated by the recognition in EF! ( considered in 5.3.10 ) that “we” changes all the time ( EF!AU No.81 2002: 4 ).

Different conceptualisations of affinity groups also illustrate the difference between the revolutionary anarchist and CD traditions. Affinity groups were used by both the Spanish anarchists of the 1930s, and the peace movement of the 1970s. In both contexts they were ( and are ) celebrated for expressing congruity between means and ends ( Bookchin 1977: 197 ); for being participatory, democratic and human-scale ( Herngren 1993: 28; Anti-mass 1988: 3; AAG 2003: 48 ); creative, diverse and adaptable ( Ruins 2003: 11; cf Herngren 1993: 29; EFH 1998; TP2000 1998: 20; Polletta 2002: 10 ); and for being harder to infiltrate and control ( TP2000 1998: 18; cf Bookchin 1977: 174; Herngren 1993; Anti-Mass 1988: 3; EFH 1998 ) with no single leadership that “can be singled out for assassination or corruption” ( *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 72 ). Yet there exist significant structural differences between the two models of affinity group. The peace movement, unlike the anarchist tradition, tends to make affinity groups compulsory, and to institute them into relatively rigid structures, complete with non-violent training, ground rules and pledges to swear ( Epstein 1991: 3 ). The justification for this is predicated on the themes of accountability and non-violence.

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<sup>147</sup> Against the argument that direct action too is symbolic, Franks dips into the terminology of semiotics to “provide a clearer basis for division”, terming anarchist direct action ‘synecdochic’, and solely symbolic action ‘metaphorical’: “A synecdoche is a symbol that contains a small part that represents a larger whole, For example, a half brick thrown during a riot is used to represent the whole insurrection. The term ‘symbolic action’ is used for those events that are not in themselves attempts to resolve the problem at hand directly but are *metaphorical*” ( Franks 2003: 15-16 ).



In the absence of fearless peace-warriors in the Gandhian style, affinity groups are viewed as providing a supportive unit 'breaking political isolation', making the stresses and fears of civil disobedience easier to bear and, as a result, acting as a force against violence ( Herngren 1993: 23; Clark 1981: 10 ) and "a brake on disruptive impulses" ( Epstein 1991: 3; cf EEV 1997: 3 ). I maintain that it is this theme that underlies the demand for participants in mass civil disobedience to be members of affinity groups. Herngren states that "This guideline provides a sense of security for everybody. If someone loses control, there is always a group that can help and provide support" ( 1993: 103 ). The role of affinity groups in the Ploughshares Movement may be viewed as ensuring that participants obey the organisers' rules: I consider them to be a decentralised mechanism of control. The argument from safety is also allied to the 'democratic demand' that "When you participate in an activity, you should be able to count on the fact that nothing is happening in secret" ( Herngren 1993: 103 ). Such arguments, and their themes of democracy, openness and accountability, make sense in the terms of Civil Disobedience discourse, but less so in the terms of the revolutionary anarchist tradition.

When I was invited to join a Trident Ploughshares affinity group, I chose not to, because of the guidelines to which I had to agree. It was not so much that I intended to take drugs and run riot at future actions; it was more the feeling of being bound by pre-set rules and somebody else's strategy. Other *Earth First!ers* declined participation in TP for similar reasons, although they ( and I ) have joined in with the mass actions. Heller notes that the perception of TP being "rule bound" "is perhaps the single greatest reason why the campaign has not grown to a larger size" ( 2000: 118 ). I would suggest that this rejection of pre-set rules reflects the anarchist critique of authority ( Carmel Cadden in Roseneil 2000: 191 ). Anarchists do not necessarily mind being bound by rules of their own choosing, or moderating their behaviour to the desires of their companions. But the democratic, accountable and open format of the Ploughshares movement represents a different type of regulation and "pacifist discipline" ( Polletta 2002: 51 ) from the self-imposed type most consistent with autonomy. The debaters in EF! whose views were aired in the previous chapter would never have accepted the kind of control and fixity of a ploughshares campaign. The examples of EDA I focus on in this thesis are all stamped with the self-imposed ethics of autonomy, bar the case of Genetix Snowball in 6.4.4, which I use to underline the difference and present a case of EDA dialogue on the issue.

### 6.3.5

#### Sabotage and Terrorism

Having considered the issue of violence, I will now bring our attention to bear on the issue of sabotage, as this is where the finest disagreement between CD and other anarchist strategic frameworks is expressed. In this section, I first argue for property destruction as the best point at which to draw a distinction between ENGOS and EDA. To illustrate this, I contrast the Sea Shepherd Society with Greenpeace. Note that this distinction is not equivalent to that between anarchist and liberal direct action ( see 6.2.1 ), although the consideration of institutionalisation in 5.2.1 will identify why there is a link. I then consider the origins of the term 'sabotage' in the context of industrial struggle, and assess its anarchist justification and its relationship to law in order to mark the difference from CD approaches. I then assess the relationship between sabotage and violence, before articulating the CD critique of sabotage implicit in the arguments of 6.3.4. I compare conceptualisation of terrorism to demonstrate the differences.

Garner cites groups such as *Sea Shepherd*, the ALF and ELF as "The more extreme end of environmental activism" ( 1996: 146 ). 'Extremism', however, is a very limited and subjective term with which to understand radical action or thought ( although there *is* something of a 'logic of escalation', similar to extremism, that I address in 6.5.4 ).<sup>148</sup> More accurately, it is the issue of property destruction, sometimes termed "violence against property" ( Martin 2001: 135 ), that demarcates Garner's 'extremists' from more

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<sup>148</sup> The notion of 'extremism' tends to be linked to increasing militancy and violence, irrationality and the over-riding of both left- and right-wing values. It is a label that tends to get used against people, rather than by people to identify themselves.



moderate green groups: Manes terms it the “litmus test” ( 1990: 170 ). This demarcation echoes the class-struggle opposition to non-violent principles cited in 6.3.2, by which they identify ‘reformist’ greens as non-radical. Again I maintain that the issue of property destruction provides us with a more accurate and fruitful demarcation line than subjective and often convoluted views on ‘violence’ ( considered in the previous sections ).

The EDA of my study contains support for and manifestations of property destruction in the form of ecological sabotage. We noted in 5.3.2 that monkeywrenching, or ecological sabotage ( ecotage ), quickly became the hallmark of Earth First! in the USA ( Foreman & Hayward 1993 ). In the UK, ‘pixieing’ quickly became the preferred term as we shall see in 6.5.2, with its own dedicated section in the newsletters *Do or Die* and *GA* ( Atton 2002: 86 ). ENGOs, less questioning of the overall politico-economic system, and legally constituted within it so that their own bank balances become subject to penalties should they damage others’ finances, must by their institutional nature condemn property destruction ( Hunter 1979: 384 ). It is this issue that most clearly divides groups like Earth First! from Friends of the Earth ( Lee 1997: 127 ), I will use the example of *Sea Shepherd* to mark the difference here: a constituted organisation more informed by CD theory than anarchism, but on the borderline of legality and sometimes termed ‘the Earth First! navy’ ( *Do or Die* 2003: 67; Scarce 1990: 105 ).

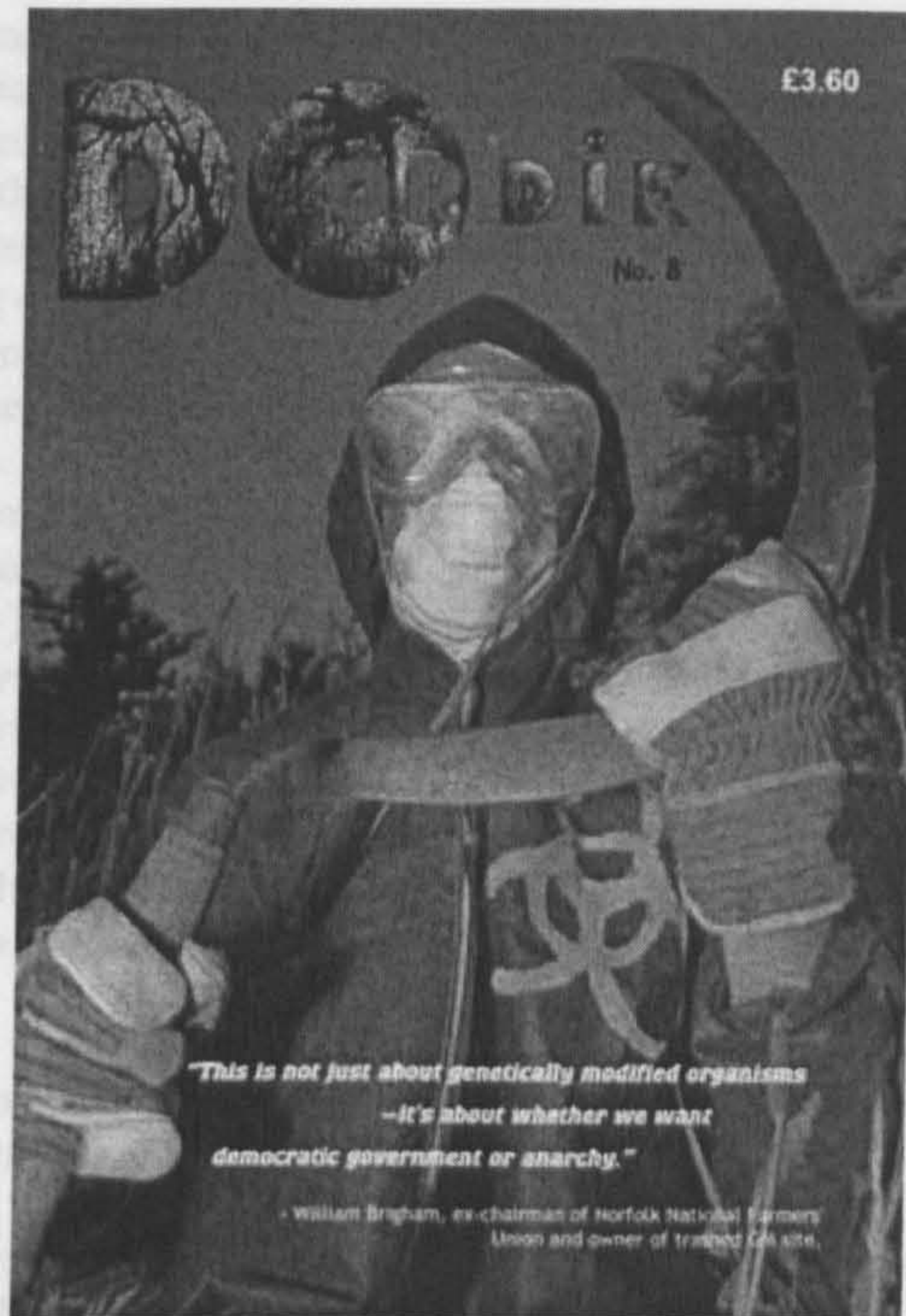
As we saw in 5.2.1, Greenpeace utilises ( liberal ) direct action to trigger dialogue with companies, and “rejects violence against either persons or property” ( c1996: 13; cf Manes 1990: 108 ). *Sea Shepherd* direct action, while resembling Greenpeace’s in many ways, differs in that *Sea Shepherd* places more emphasis on materially stopping ‘the enemy’, and they are enabled to do so more effectively by allowing the destruction of property. For example, in 1986 while Greenpeace led boycotts of Iceland’s fish products to protest its whaling policy, and some Greenpeace activists even stalled the off-loading of Icelandic fish from a freighter to publicise the issue, the *Sea Shepherds*’ approach was to sink half of the Icelandic whaling fleet ( Scarce 1990: 99 ).

The *Sea Shepherd Society* use their reputation for such acts of property destruction to intimidate whalers and other wildlife-decimating ships into stopping their activities. Watson’s own rules of non-violence allow for the destruction of property and also the use of fear: “Frighten the oppressors but do not harm them” ( Watson quoted in Morris 1995: 200; cf Watson 1993; DesJardins 1997: 200; Scarce 1990: 106 ).<sup>149</sup> We might mark the aspect of intimidation here by noting that the image of sabotage as both shadowy and threatening, is one that eco-saboteurs themselves have positively encouraged ( Hopkins 1998: 1 ), as illustrated in Figure F6.4.

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<sup>149</sup> *Sea Shepherd* occupies a mid-ground between the imperatives of efficacy and non-violence, and it serves as a boundary post between the deployment of civil disobedience and ‘economic sabotage’ discourses. Like EDA groupings such as EFl and Genetix Snowball, SS does not fit the narrow definition of CD ( Welchman 2001: 104 ). In sections 6.5.2 to 6.5.4 we shall see more anarchist versions of non-CD saboteurs with examples from UK EDA.





**Figure F6.4 Shadowy Self-Images** ( EF! Gathering Flyer; *Do or Die* Flyer ).

I consider the tense relationship between such threatening, covert strategies and the aim for positive change in 6.4, and critically assess the implications of this practice in 6.5 from the perspective of anarchist ethics. Now I look at the origins of sabotage in the context of industrial struggle, in order to examine the differences and similarities that have been carried from one context of anarchist struggle to another, very different one. This provides another, less public, side of anarchist industrial struggle to add to that of organisation-building in 6.2.2.

The term 'sabotage' comes from the French 'sabot' ( a wooden shoe ) and was originally used in the sense of "working clumsily, as if by sabot blows". It is "a method of economic warfare that is as old as the system of exploitation and political oppression itself" ( Rucker c1938: 71 ). The principle behind the original use of sabotage as a political tactic was "for bad wages, bad work" ( Flynn 1916: 5 ). E.G. Flynn, in her elaboration of sabotage for the IWW in 1916, terms it "an attempt on the part of the worker to limit his production in proportion to his remuneration" ( 1916: 5 ). Sabotage was thus conceptualised and justified within a framework of class struggle and economic direct action.

After the failure of a dock strike in 1889, a circular was sent round every docker in Scotland stating that "We will do the work just as clumsily, as slowly, as destructively, as the scabs did. And we will see how long our employers can stand that kind of work." Within a few months, "through this system of sabotage they had won everything they had fought for and not been able to win through the strike" ( Flynn 1916: 4 ). This episode stands as an emblematic example of the most important form of industrial sabotage. The context is all important: it took place after strike action had failed, and scabs had been used to bypass the solidarity and strength of the union. It thus serves to illustrate the supportive role sabotage could play within a framework of class struggle: "one weapon in the arsenal of labor to fight its side of the class struggle" ( 1916: 2 ).

The relationship of sabotage to the law is also interesting for our study of EDA. In 1920s USA, repressive new laws were brought in to reduce the chances of successful strikes. A member of the IWW presented sabotage as the obvious response:



"Now that the bosses have succeeded in dealing an almost fatal blow to the boycott; now that picket duty is practically outlawed ... free speech throttled, free assemblage prohibited and injunctions against labor are becoming epidemic - now sabotage, this dark, invincible terrible Damocles' sword that hangs over the head of the master class, will replace all the confiscated weapons and ammunition of the workers in their war for economic justice... In vain will they invoke old laws and make new ones against it - they will never discover sabotage, never track it to its lair, never run it down... There can be no injunction against sabotage. No policeman's club. No rifle diet. No prison bars" ( *Resistance* 6, September 1999: 4; cf Flynn 1916: 15 ).

The celebration of sabotage in this account is overblown, the tool 'fetishised' as a miracle-doer ( like the bomb in Propaganda of the Deed and the General Strike at the height of syndicalism ). Such eulogies may still occasionally be found ( The Havoc Mass 2004: 18 ) but I have already used the legacy of anarchist bombs to warn against such tendencies. The anarcho-syndicalist Pouget thus writes that window smashing "which brings joy to the hearts of the glaziers" is a "narrow view of this exercise of proletarian might" ( Pouget 2003: 15 ). The IWW account is accurate, however, in highlighting the characteristics of sabotage as by its nature covert and unaccountable. Being hard to call to account makes it impervious to the kind of state response used, above, against other strike tactics. It is for these reasons that the AF considered it relevant to the present day, as successive waves of state legislation have been employed to suppress more open forms of protest and make them ineffective.

In the context of anti-roads protests, just as in the context of industrial strikes, sabotage was employed from a position of weakness. A correspondent reports in *Do or Die* after the Twyford protests had subsided:

"there just aren't enough of us around at the moment ... And anyhow, the damage has been done. All that's left to do can be done by the fairy folk"<sup>150</sup> ( 1994: 4 ).

Sabotage becomes relevant, as the above passages make clear, during those phases of struggle when other tactics are unavailable. It is best understood as a weapon of war, which is

"not going to be necessary, once a free society has been established ... it will go out of existence with the war, just as the strike, the lockout, the policeman, the machine gun, the judge with his injunction, and all the various weapons in the arsenals of capital and labor will go out of existence with the advent of a free society" ( 1916: 15; cf Martin 2001: 137; Martell 1994: 191 ).

Unlike direct action, which is fundamentally *prefigurative*, sabotage is only a *defensive* tool ( Manes 1990: 186 ). This is not to forget that the same act may stand as both direct action and sabotage: pulling up GM crops, for example, both sabotages the crop and directly acts to create a GM-free world. Yet the two conceptions, of direct action and of sabotage, are distinct and have distinctive justificatory discourses. The justification of sabotage is distinct from CD, as I shall now review, first with the case of law, and then with violence.

Anarchism provides a defence and justification of sabotage framed according to the wider context of struggle in a fundamentally unjust world ( although syndicalists criticise the sole use of sabotage divorced from a wider struggle as "nothing more than a cry in the wind" DA 32 2004: 7 ). It makes no attempt to engage with the discourse of law on its own terms, as civil disobedience discourse does. The justification given by Flynn in 1916 retains a resonance for those who employ the tactic today in a different field:

"If sabotage is to be thrown aside because it is construed as against the law, how do we know that next year free speech may not be thrown aside? Or free assembly or free press? That a thing is against the law, does not necessarily mean that the thing is not good. Sometimes it means just the contrary: a mighty good thing for the working class to use against the capitalists... Everything is 'against the law' once it becomes large enough for the law to take cognisance that it is in the best interests of the working class" ( 1916: 14 ).

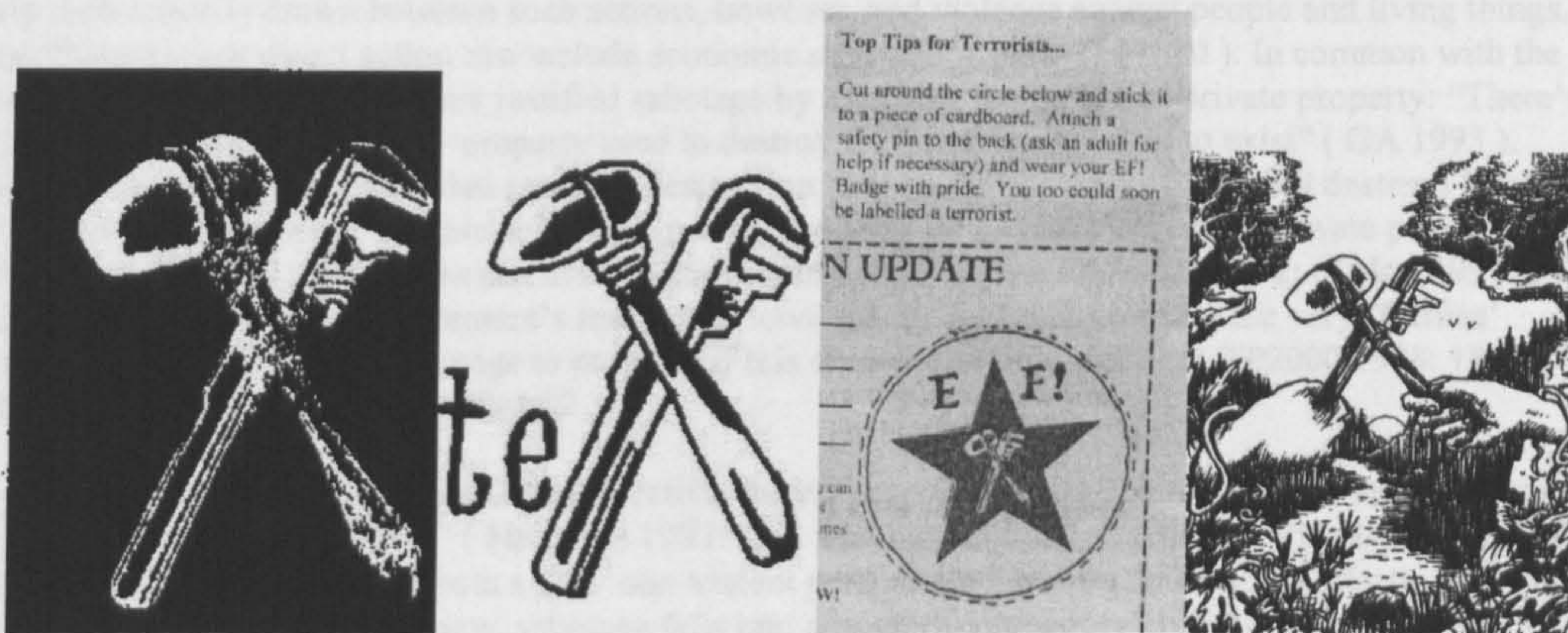
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<sup>150</sup> A reference to 'pixieing': see 6.5.2.



The same argument was made for the DIY alliances that I introduced in 5.2.3, which united diverse networks and subcultures in opposition to new legislation. One of the most widely used slogans stated “When freedom is outlawed, only outlaws will be free.” This was the postcard that I had on my bedroom wall as a teenager.

The final issue by which to assess sabotage is that of violence. In 6.3.2 we noted that some ‘fluffies’ condemned sabotage as a form of violence, while in this section I have articulated the anarchist support for using it as a means of struggle. As I have also identified property destruction as a key marker by which to define the EDA of my thesis, the relationship of sabotage to violence requires a closer investigation: in doing so, I will draw out further evidence of EDA’s affinity to anarchism.



**Figure F6.5** The EF! Monkeywrench and Tomahawk (*EF!AU* Nos. 27; 72; 66; & 1997 Summer Gathering Flyer)

One of the main Earth First! symbols is a tomahawk crossed with a monkeywrench ( see figure F6.5 ). Morris argues this symbol has

“a more complex meaning than, say, an anarchist’s bomb. Any fool can destroy things or kill people. The monkeywrench and tomahawk - handheld, low-tech instruments borrowed from two quite different traditions - suggest that we already possess what we need to oppose the continuing rape of the planet. All we need is a will to use the tools at hand” ( 1995: 108 ).

Some commentators argue that practitioners of ecological sabotage are equivalent to terrorists ( John Harlow quoted in Hart 1997: 47 ), but this is strongly denied. American Earth First!er Mike Roselle, for example, argues that “To use the word ‘terrorism’ for monkeywrenching is to totally cheapen the real meaning of what terrorism is all about and what people do when they are really desperate” ( quoted in Manes 1990: 177; cf Watson quoted in Scarce 1990: 112 ). Hart notes that “Any reasonable critical analysis of the concept of terrorism indicates its essential aspect is that it aims to engender fear through the intentional killing, maiming or serious injury of people. Such actions are therefore obviously distinct from the activities of eco-saboteurs who merely damage property” ( 1997: 44-45; cf Martin 2001: 143 ). Eco-activists standardly turn the charge of ‘eco-terrorism’ around ( Watson in Scarce 1998: 113 ) to state apparatuses ( ‘Why George Bush is an ecoterrorist’ *EF!J* 22(4) 2002: 6 ) and ecologically destructive companies ( ‘Most wanted Eco-Terrorists’ *EF!J* 22(3) 2002: 28 ). Gargan from ‘Genetic Concern’ thus states

“Monsanto has coined the term ‘eco-terrorist’ to describe the people who destroy trial sites. A terrorist is a person who puts somebody in fear of their lives, which patently is not the case here. The multinationals are not in a good position from which to throw stones, considering that they are foisting this technology and its potential dangers on people who clearly do not want it”( WRGO 1998 ).



The role of the state is here clearly identified, supporting the 'eco-terrorist' organisations by prosecuting protesters and eco-saboteurs who see themselves, in contrast, as eco-defenders ( Vaughan 2002: 21; Luers 2002 ). This bolsters the anarchist definition of the state as violence ( Tolstoy 1990: 90; Faslane Focus 2002: 2; Martin 2001: 8, 60; *Schnews* 1996 No.24 ), which is expressed in the much-repeated axiom that 'war is the health of the state' ( Bourne in Woodcock 1980: 98; cf *Do or Die* 1996: 141; *Hate Mail* 2002: 2 ).

The interpretation of non-violence varies amongst environmental protesters, but most consider damage to property as non-violent ( Participant in Pickerill & Duckett 1999: 81 ). On invasions of office firms, environmental activists have damaged computers, and in site invasions they have disabled machinery. A sharp distinction is drawn between such actions, however, and violence against people and living things. Thus "Non-violent direct action can include economic sabotage" ( Kate 1997: 20 ). In common with the anarchist view, EDA practitioners justified sabotage by attacking the notion of private property: "There's nothing sacred about property – property used to destroy the Earth has no right to exist" ( GA 1993 ). Faslane Peace Camp "contend that property destruction is not a violent activity unless it destroys lives or causes pain in the process. By this definition, private property – especially corporate private property – is itself infinitely more violent than any action taken against it" ( Faslane Focus 2002?: 2; cf Hart 1997: 54 ). Even those from the peace movement's tradition of civil disobedience discourse – the very 'fluffies' condemned in 6.3.2 - justify damage to property if it is done in the right manner ( TP2000 1998: 18; vf Martin Shaw in TT/SW 2001: 3.52-4.02 ).<sup>151</sup>

We will see in 6.4.3 that from the CD perspective, the economic rationale behind strategic sabotage "causes an essential flaw in the method" ( Herngren 1993: 85 ). The implications of sabotage and other 'physically effective' action are worrying from a CD / non-violent perspective ( Martin 2001: 138 ). Martin states that "From a nonviolence point of view, sabotage falls into a borderline category" ( 2001: 134; cf Carter 1973: 20 ), and Herngren maintains that "The principles of sabotage and civil disobedience are in opposition to each other" ( 1993: 83; cf Scarce 1990: 70 ). Martell warns that

"It can start a spiral of destruction and reaction on the borderlines of violence which once established is mutually reinforcing and difficult to break out of" ( 1994: 191; cf Herngren 1993: 13; Martin 2001: 138; Carol Harwood in Roseneil 2000: 213 ).

It is for this reason that those who justify sabotage pay so much attention to the context in which it is deployed: "The damage of equipment and machinery is part of our action but it must not be done in a way that could endanger anyone" ( TP2000 1998: 17; cf Peg Millett quoted in Manes 1990: 190 ), or indeed cause harm "to the Earth that you are trying to protect" ( Ozymandias c2002: 1 ). Particularly for those informed by CD discourse, "The way an action is done is as important as what is actually done; a fence can be cut violently if the people doing it are oppressing members of their group or dealing with the police aggressively" ( Kate 1997: 20 ). Helen Backzowska from EF! Norwich emphasises "it shouldn't be something that's random. It should be targeted and specific" ( in TT/SW 2001: 12.59-13.03; cf Foreman & Haywood 1985: 10-17 ).

Martin notes that, because the meaning of sabotage is contextual, there is no generalised justification for all cases ( 2001: 135-6 ). Rocker and Flynn recognised this, and it is for this reason that neither attempted a conclusive typology of sabotage, instead emphasising its adaptability: "Sabotage is as broad and changing as industry, as flexible as the imaginations and passions of humanity. Every day workingmen and women are discovering new forms" ( Flynn 1916: 14; cf Rocker c1938: 150 ). The responsibility and the

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<sup>151</sup> The peace movement hesitantly moved from symbolic protest to civil disobedience in the 1970s ( Welsh 2000: 153-161 ) and then, in the 1980s, sabotage in the form of fence-cutting at military establishments came to be included in the repertoire ( Roseneil 1995: 107; Roseneil 2000: 211 ). The hesitancy was due to concern that such extensions might lead to violence. Sabotage is notably used by the ploughshares wing of the peace movement, enacting the biblical injunction to 'convert swords into ploughshares' by sabotaging nuclear and other weapons of war, for example with the 'Seeds of Hope' ploughshares action ( Goodwin 1996: 20-21; Needham 1996: 34-5 ). The most serious actions, such as expensive theft and sabotage, that are reported in *TGAL*, were performed by the groups most committed to nonviolence, such as TP ( No.26 1999: 2 ).



justification of sabotage is handed back to the individual practitioner. In 6.4 we shall assess the debate between some of these practitioners.

In section 6.3.2 I introduced the contested use and disavowal of violence in EDA. Then I considered the divergent theoretical perspectives on violence from within the anarchist tradition ( section 6.3.3 ) and CD discourse ( section 6.3.4 ). There are activists within EDA who position themselves according to both revolutionary anarchist and CD ( particularly ploughshares ) traditions, and the difference between these two positions will therefore keep recurring each time a new context presents itself. An understanding of the conflictual dialogue between CD frameworks and those of insurrectionary and class struggle anarchists is therefore essential to a finer understanding of EDA anarchism. Temporary resolutions and contextual choices are made, but it would be inaccurate and wrong to extend any of these resolutions into a fixed general guideline. In this thesis I demonstrate instead how relevant issues were expressed, guidebooks produced and specific repertoires advanced, for the different fields of EDA.

Anarchist celebrations of violence considered in 6.3.3 should be rejected, whether on grounds of anarchist revolutionary ethics, or merely in terms of immediate strategic consequences. This is not the same as condemning all violence ( or taking a pacifist position, as I distinguished this from anarchism ), but in my view a greater receptiveness to non-violent tactics needs to be taken by the anarchist movement, even as EDA has demonstrated many fruitful examples. CD advocates would agree with this, but I would not join them in some of the techniques by which they seek to guarantee non-violence, such as codes of policy; bureaucratic rigidification of affinity group networking; or submission to law. In 6.4 I will provide more critical perspectives on such strategies. We may note that Ploughshares CD activists do support sabotage, however, and so I introduced other discursive justifications of sabotage in 6.3.5: these mark a distance from the liberal direct action considered in 6.2.1, and shall be considered further in 6.4 and 6.5.

## 6.4 Anti-GM Direct Action

### 6.4.1

#### Introduction

GM food rose from being a mere cloud on the horizon at the start of the nineties ( *Do or Die* 1992: 11 ), to being *the* “environmental issue of the late 1990s” ( Wall 2000: 82 ). It dominated discussion at EF! gatherings and triggered the biggest wave of ecological direct action seen in the latter part of the decade. In these sections I will briefly note the salient qualities of anti-GM activism for our understanding of activist anarchism, but I will quickly then move onto a specific debate that took place within EF!: I do not, therefore, offer this section as a comprehensive history. The anti-GM movement carried forward many of the characteristics and activist-anarchist qualities identified with the anti-roads movement, such as cross-class alliances, a distrust of official democracy and testimonies of the empowering effect of direct action. In 6.4.2, Anti-GM Networks, I recognise the similarities and practical links with the anti-roads movement, particularly with the advice passed on to the GEN office from Road Alert!, which develops the anarchist concerns of activist organisation ( such as relations of equality and empowerment, and a desire to avoid institutionalisation and hierarchisation ).

I pay less attention to topics already assessed in Chapter 5, such as ( a ) criteria of success, because the anti-GM activists gained so much instrumental success, those articulations were less needed ( *EF!AU* No.62 1999: 2; *GU* No.15 2000: 3; *GU* No.28 2004: 9 ); and ( b ) the tension with FoE and Greenpeace, because with the GM issue they joined in the direct actions and Greenpeace in particular was on the same wavelength as the EF!ers. In 6.4.3, Forms of Anti-GM Direct Action, the liberal rationale of Greenpeace direct action does however contribute to an anarchist consideration of the liberal justifications and conceptualisations of anti-GM direct action. I look at the most promising forms of this direct action for an anarchist perspective – blockades, mass public decontaminations, crowsquats, the Bayer campaign, and



crop decontamination in both its covert and open forms. In 6.4.4, Genetics Snowball and the Covert-Overt Debate, I follow much more closely the dialogue that took place within EDA regarding the strategic rationale of Genetix Snowball. This was a conscious introduction of a peace movement form of direct action into the GM field, and it provoked an articulate debate upon anarchist terms, from which we may learn much about the identity of activist anarchism.

I do not consider here the relationship of GM technology to anarchist ideology, which was controversial to some in the more traditional anarchist movement ( Room 1999; 2002 ), although ecological anarchists were generally united in seeing GM in the terms of a “commodification of life” ( *EF!AU* No.29 1996: 3; *Do or Die* 1999: 91; *Do or Die* 2003: 97 ), or at least as a “bad science ... led by profit” ( Beynon 1999: 307; cf *Gene-no!* 2000; *Schnews & Squall* 2000 No.225 ). Salient anarchist attitudes to ‘feeding the world’ were also brought into play against those who presented GM as a quick-fix solution to third world poverty ( *EF!AU* No.59 1999: 2; No.70 2000: 8; No.79 2001: 4-5; *GU* No.19 2001: 4-5 ). The concern of this chapter lies more finely with the relationship of anti-GM activism and anarchism, and the circled A symbolism in Figure F6.6 provides one indication that many in the movement consciously recognised the affinity:

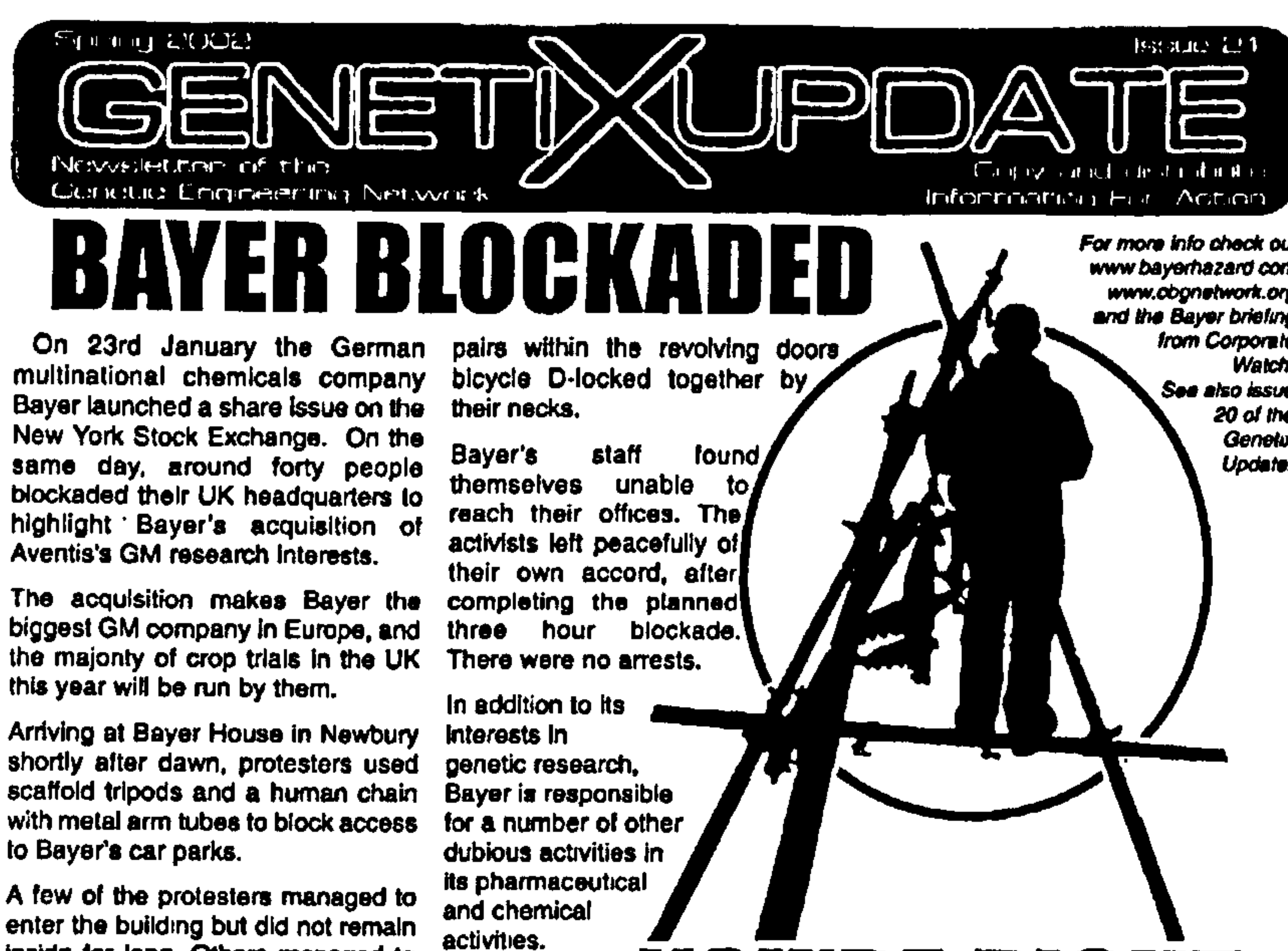


Figure F6.6 Tripod in form of Anarchy Sign ( *GU* No.21 2002: 1 ).

## 6.4.2 Anti-GM Networks

“Their weapons are the scythe, the billhook, the sickle, and their own boot-clad feet. They attack in large groups by night, trampling, cutting and destroying the carefully nurtured experimental strains of wheat, and other crops, which the groups have nicknamed Frankenstein Food... The eco warriors pose in capes, wearing masks and goggles and carrying their slashing implements, for pictures on the Internet which celebrate the perpetrators as ‘superheroes’. Evidence suggests their supporters are an ill-matched alliance of green activists, protest veterans and young idealistic recruits, many of them on Government-funded education grants” ( Paterson & Lewis 1998 ).

An impressively heterogeneous mixture of people took up anti-GM direct action ( Vidal 1999: 2 ). Newspapers identified the main components ( accurately, in my view ): “Some are former road protesters.



Others are drawn from the wider peace and environmental movements, or are first-time activists who fear that the new foods will cross-pollinate conventional and organic crops and contaminate the food chain" ( Farrell 1998 ): organic farmers and bee-keepers were amongst the latter group ( GU No.25 2003/2004: 4-5; No.28 2004: 1-2 ). The anti-GM direct action took place against a backdrop of massive public concern with GMOs and genetic engineering, and there were powerful points of connection, psychological as well as material, between the direct activists and mainstream 'civil society' organisations such as the Womens Institute and the RSPB. Vidal thus reported that, in a more generalised and across-the-board way than with roads, "A stunning array of middle England is now roughly united in disapproval or fear of the implications and is not impressed by corporate claims that GM is totally safe, healthy and will benefit the world" ( 1998 ). GM was not, like roads, an environmentalism based around cherished local landscapes, but was a more generalised, technological risk for which local sites were 'protected' in a more destructive manner! Activists mobilised a discourse of risk and the 'precautionary principle' ( Melchett 1998; Helen Mordan quoted in Hopkins 1998 ), and sought to shine a spotlight on the disparity between corporate and popular influence on government.

The crossover from roads protest was particularly noted by the press: "The roads issue is fizzling out now and, every time there's a GM story in the papers, more roads people will get involved" ( Jerry Middleton quoted in Farrell 1998 ). Although it is a distortion to paint a picture of rent-a-mob protestors as bored and needing an issue to fight for ( "roads are out, genes are in" ( Farrell 1998 ) ), cross-over between the anti-roads and anti-GM movements was certainly significant.<sup>152</sup> I shall look at this with a consideration of the sharing of practical experience gained by Road Alert! and passed onto the anti-GM networks.

Anti-GM direct action was undertaken across the country by decentralised and autonomous groups, including ENGOs such as Greenpeace and FoE, organic farmers, and the counter-cultural activists introduced in Chapter 5, including those organised around the EF! network ( Hopkins 1998 ).<sup>153</sup> Compared with roads, there was much less of an expressive celebration of alternative, counter-cultural lifestyles, and activists showed a greater concern to present themselves as 'ordinary people'. Public co-ordination for the direct action elements of these dispersed and diverse groups was chiefly provided by the GEN office in London and the Genetix Update newsletter which it produced in the first few years ( it was taken on by Totnes Genetics Group from No.14 in 1999 ).

The purpose of the GEN network was defined as

"an information sharing network for anyone actively campaigning against genetic engineering. GEN also helps us to focus our strategies and facilitates exchange between 'big' and 'small' groups, organisations and individuals. A forum for this is... [ the Genetix Update ] newsletter. GEN is a decentralised network, with no central office or budget...this is the forum to inspire and inform each other" ( GenetiX Update 1998: 1 ).

At the inception of GEN its organisers ( whose experience included backgrounds in Reclaim the Streets and Earth First! ) received advice on how to set up their network from those who had co-ordinated 'Road Alert!' The advice provided gives us a useful articulation of activist anarchist approaches to organisation, and develops our understanding of non-hierarchical, leaderless co-ordination by defining and limiting the

"Roles the office should take on within a network: keep info flowing freely - write a weekly bulletin of latest developments & actions & contact points - help organise actions - write & distribute free info & news & briefing sheets on topics of interest, these help when answering inquiries" ( RA! 1998; cf GU No.23 2003: 7 )

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<sup>152</sup> Mel Jarman explains that "The Labour Government came in about the time that a lot of people involved in roads protests had reached burnout point anyway. With genetically modified crops, here was another technology that seemed to be unnecessary, ecologically unsafe and involved decisions made in the interests of a small group of unaccountable people. Practically speaking, the crops were all over the country and in place for criminal damage activities. Things fell into place in a way that they just do sometimes" ( quoted in Farrell 1998 ).

<sup>153</sup> Some individuals within EF! would place their involvement much higher than this: they consider that despite the 'public' declarations of all sorts getting involved, "we know it's the same people really ... the same old faces" ( comment at EF! Summer Gathering 2001 ).



The experience gained in the anti-roads movement informed a particularly anarchist concern for the potential of unwitting hierarchisation: “The office will be looked to by people...this gives those staffing it a lot of power/influence. They need to decide whether they want to steer...or watch and spread info. It is better that this done clearly and openly” ( RA! 1998 ). The GEN office, partly due to its location in London, had been criticised for encouraging a geographical centralisation of the movement, and RA! advised it to avoid taking on all the responsibilities and roles of a network upon itself: “If a movement is strong, it will soon stand on its own two legs, without the need for a networking centre. A genetix office should exist to make itself defunct” ( RA! 1998 ). This sentiment echoes the traditional anarchist slogan ‘a strong people needs no leaders’, and reinforces our understanding of the temporary, limited and role-specific forms of DIY ‘disorganisations’.

To avoid acquiring disempowering monopolies of information, Road Alert! made practical suggestions: “Set up a plan for getting people involved in the office...maybe identifying bite-sized roles and writing briefing sheets and organising training.” The GEN office followed much of the Road Alert! advice, for example in encouraging the decentralisation of the network ( GU No.23 2003: 7 ): “Put press onto local campaigns” and “Always make sure that consultation with grassroots groups is complete and remember that you do not have to play the media game all the time” ( RA! 1998 ). I consider this advice, passed from the anti-roads to anti-GM scenes of action, to be highly noteworthy for expressing the anarchist ethics and principles embedded in EDA.

Most anti-GM direct action ( and all crop sabotage ) took place outside the capital, and the pages of GenetiX Update are filled with reports from many, often temporary local groups such as Newcastle’s Gene-No! ( GU No.13 1998; No.52 2002: 4 ). The GEN office fulfilled a supporting role to these agricultural sites of direct action by providing “those in the trenches with essential background information and it acts as their publicist” ( Hopkins 1998; GU No.23 2003: 7 ).

The different context of the GM issue required a different interplay of networks. The organisational role of GEN was not identical to that of Road Alert!, but rather by its separation from the organisation of action, it equally resembled the information-distributing role of Alarm UK. It is tempting to suggest that the maturing of the Earth First! network enabled it to play the role that Road Alert! fulfilled during the early anti-roads movement, although being not so singly-focussed it could not fulfil exactly the same functions.

When it came to discussing action and co-ordinating local groups, this was not done via the GEN office or newsletter, but through discussions at gatherings such as the Big Gene Gathering or the Earth First! Summer Gathering. Often the dynamic would be that a few keen individuals would have done a lot of preparation and research in readiness for these gatherings, where the different local groups could decide how, if at all, they wished to co-ordinate. Other national co-ordination took place ‘on the quiet’ between already-existing groups, effectively selected for inclusion in the plan by a small number of committed activists, as for example with the national blockades of Sainsburys ( see Figure F6.7, below ). I shall discuss these and other forms of direct action in the next section.

### 6.4.3 Forms of Anti-GM Direct Action

I am continuing to use *EF!AU* references in this case study, but a much more complete record of anti-GM direct action may be found in the Genetix Update, which for our purposes may be considered as an offshoot of the *EF!AU*.<sup>154</sup> While less ideological, its tone partook of EDA militancy and it featured a contacts page akin to that in the *EF!AU*. Here, the GU advised that “If there isn’t a listing for a group in your area, Earth First!, Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace may have a local group working on GM” ( No.28 2004: 8 ). Although other editions of the GU had slight changes of wording, and the ordering of FoE and Greenpeace swapped around, it is significant that EF! was always given the priority.

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<sup>154</sup> Where there are duplicate references from the *EF!AU* and the GU I have used only the *EF!AU*.



In this section I shall consider the repertoires of anti-GM direct action most promising to an anarchist framework: the public rallies, often allied to mass sabotage conducted in a spontaneous, carnivalesque manner; occupations of GM fields by temporary camps known as cropsquats; and the application of animal rights pressure tactics on one GM company. I shall also introduce the practicalities of both covert and accountable methods of crop sabotage in preparation for the more discursive assessment in 6.4.4. This direct action took place against a background of more conventional ENGO campaigning, which involved churches, scientists, MPs and bee-keepers amongst others. The first guides to action that were produced, for example, ( by and for activists ) included many less militant repertoires that anyone could do in a supermarket or from the comfort of their home ( SYWS 1998: 1 ).

Anti-GM campaigning has included AGM protests ( *EF!AU* No.59 1999: 1 ), office occupations ( No.69 2000: 1; No.37 1997: 5 ) and the targeting of research establishments ( *EF!AU* No.53 1998: 1; *EF!AU* No.75 2001: 4 ) and regulatory agencies ( *EF!AU* No.75 2001: 4 ). It has featured numerous stunts and banner-drops by protesters dressed as superheroes ( No.64 1999: 2 ), as GM turkeys and eco-chickens ( No.72 2000: 2 ), or naked ( *EF!AU* No.43 1997: 2; No. 2005: 3 ). The GU comments that “Taking your clothes off really does always make the papers” ( GU No.24 2003: 6 ). There were explicitly reformist lobbying efforts, such as the ‘Five Year Freeze’ campaign, aided by tactics such as a community garden outside the Welsh assembly ( *EF!AU* No.68 2000: 3 ), a GM picnic outside DEFRA ( *EF!AU* No.83 2002: 7 ), and the ‘pilgrimage’ of tractors and trolleys to London in 2003 ( *EF!AU* No.89 2003: 9; [www.tractorandtrolley.com](http://www.tractorandtrolley.com) ). While prefigurative elements might be included in these demonstrations, chiefly through the substitution of GM with organic food ( *EF!AU* No.69 2000: 2; No.89 2003: 11), these were often primarily symbolic and remained within the realm of reformist, non-anarchist action insofar as they sought to ‘represent’ the opposition to GM, and deliver it to the centres of power. Crop-trashing was the clearest case of physically-effective direct action, but even here, it was often designed to get media-coverage of the issue. This was the case with Gene-no!’s first attempted decontamination at Hutton Magna in June 1998, for which the press release stated the decontamination “has been spurred on by [the]... recent statement that the government has no power to close down these test sites” ( Gene-no! 1998a ).

Direct action was frequently justified according to the terms of liberal democracy, for example with the ‘Green gloves pledge’:

“a pledge to take, or support others who take, non-violent action to prevent genetic pollution and its damage to life and livelihoods. You will be acting in the public interest with the support of many others. The number of people signing the pledge will indicate to the government how many people are willing to actively defend nature and democracy. It will remind Tony Blair where real power finally lies: with the will of the people” ( *EF!AU* No.89 2003: 4; [www.greengloves.org](http://www.greengloves.org) ).

Similarly, it may be argued that the use of trolley blockades in supermarkets ( *EF!AU* No.57 1999: 2; No.59 1999: 7; cf GU No.28 2004: 1-3 ) ( a repertoire already reported in use for other issues in the *EF!AU* ( No.4 1993: 2 ) ), were non-anarchist insofar as they operated as a form of consumer pressure ( No.71 2000: 2 ): the same applies to the stickering of GM food ( *Express* 1998: 7; *Do or Die* 1996: 54-55 ). Figure F6.7 illustrates a blockade which Gene-no! organised as part of a campaign intended to ‘send a message’ up the management chain to the supermarket head office, while also serving as an attention-grabbing stunt from which to leaflet and discuss the issue with customers.



Figure F6.7 Gene-no! Trolley Blockade June 1998, stills from camcorder footage.



With the GM issue, direct action was frequently justified on grounds of 'failed democracy', as a last-resort tactic that 'ordinary' people felt compelled, reluctantly, to undertake ( Goldsmith [Z] 1998; Melchett 1999; Monbiot in GU No.14 1999: 1 ).<sup>155</sup> The sense of majority 'public opinion' affected the choices of repertoires used ( MFLB 2001: 1 ) – media-friendly, not too alienating, justified according to the moral high ground ( and framed according to the terms of liberal democracy ), and ideally something that would encourage others to take direct action for the first time. Genetix Snowball was the pinnacle of this thinking, and we shall assess its relationship to more militant and devil-may-care discourse in 6.4.4.

I will now look at the anti-GM repertoires most promising to an anarchist perspective: mass rallies, often incorporating sabotage; cropsquats; and the Bayer campaign. First, participation of 'ordinary' or 'new' people was most clearly encouraged for public rallies ( *EF!AU* No.70 2000: 1; No.74 2001: 3; No.84 2002: 2 ), which often involved a carnivalesque atmosphere and an attempt by ( some of ) the crowd to destroy the crop ( No.77 2001: 2; No.83 2002: 2; Wall 2000: 80 ). This repertoire ( in which I participated at the Fife EF! 'stop the crop' rally of 1999 ( *EF!AU* No.57 1999: 2; GU No.13 1999: 1 ) ) may be seen as truly anarchist in organisation and procedure, and as spontaneous direct action as opposed to carefully planned group direct action in the style of Greenpeace: "the 'organisers' provide little more than the site and a few props and use the net to advise people of the issues. The rest is left to the crowd" ( Vidal 1999: 2 ).<sup>156</sup> Such an application of anarchist organisation succeeded in involving people who followed a 'militant lobbying' approach, seeing their acts of sabotage in terms of "saying to government: 'Listen to us'" ( Pat quoted in Vidal 1999: 2 ). Rallies such as those at Watlington in 1999 were viewed as phenomenal triumphs on all fronts: effectiveness, publicity, participation, and spreading the message ( *Do or Die* 1999: 99; Heller 2000: 122 ). The one concern expressed with this repertoire was that some would get 'carried away' by the spontaneity and then regret getting themselves arrested: as antidote to this, peace-influenced activists recommended preparation ( Tilley 1998b ).

At the Fife EF! Stop the Crop rally, we had discussed some of the expectations of the rally with the people we were staying with on the night before. Knowing that some Scottish activists would begin uprooting plants, the three of us from Newcastle made up ( so we thought ) our own minds, with one deciding to trash until arrested, one deciding definitely not to trash, and myself deciding to see how I felt at the time and maybe trash a bit but avoid arrest if possible. On the day, all three of us found ourselves on our knees digging up the fodder beet till the very end, with just two Scottish activists. This was because the 'known faces' of Fife EF! were arrested as soon as they entered the field, and we responded to the situation with a feeling that we should not let the police think that by targeting a few 'ringleaders' they could stop the decontamination. This kind of spontaneous and emotional strategising is what much SM analysis fails to recognise, but it is central to an anarchist recognition of the power of direct action ( Roseneil 1995: 51; Roseneil 2000: 192; Heller 2000: 64 ).

The repertoire of cropsquats was imported from the continent ( *EF!AU* No.58 1999: 7; No.59 1999: 1; No.83 2002: 2; Farrell 1998; 'Crop Squat!' email 1998 ). The flyer for the first of these presents a case for direct action motivated by 'risk':

"We all know genetic engineering is risky – for health, the environment and food production. We know our bodies and planet are being used for a huge experiment in which the only winners will be the multinationals. So what to do about it? Write to your MP? Lobby your local supermarket?"

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<sup>155</sup> Useful examples of the liberal discourse of direct action are provided by Zac Goldsmith and Peter Melchett: "It is clear that democracy is failing us. Despite unambiguous resistance from the public at large, genetic engineering is being allowed to storm ahead - virtually unhindered. As a result, increasing numbers of people are deciding to take things into their own hands. Angry at the prospect of giving in to corporate bullying, they are setting out to accomplish by 'direct action' what their political representatives have so lamentably failed to do on their behalf" ( Goldsmith 1998: 312 ).

"Governments hate non-violent direct action because it makes clear when a democracy is failing. Astonishingly, the peaceful removal of GM crops before they flower is practically the only democratic veto UK citizens currently have to prevent genetic pollution ... At no point have the people given their consent ... The private interest of a small handful of chemical companies have been raised above the public's right to an uncontaminated environment and access to organic and non-GM food" ( Melchett 1999 ).

<sup>156</sup> "They had only got a short distance when individually and spontaneously they all headed straight to the test site and started trampling down the crop. It was extraordinary. There was no signal or word given" ( Participant at Watlington 'Stop the Crop' rally quoted in Vidal 1999: 2 ).



**NO! OCCUPY A GENETIX TEST SITE Challenge Industrial Agriculture and help create something better” ( 1998 ).**

These occupations act as a form of propaganda, temporarily demonstrating an alternative way of living on the earth. Like the anti-road camps, they may act as a challenge to conventional norms of development and modes of living, and also to the notion of private property and exclusive ownership of land ( Nick Harris in Koziell & Brass 1997: 56 ), by seeking to demonstrate the germ of the alternative future in practical ways ( Walter 2000b ). Hopkins argued that the crop squat was a distinctive new use of the campsite tactic: not “strongholds to defend but ... festivals with workshops and organised talks” ( 1998 ).<sup>157</sup> They functioned not only as an effective barrier to sowing GM seeds ( and were often preceded by covert trashings of the same site ), but also as publicity tools ( Colin McLeod quoted in Seela 1997: 115 ). For this reason efforts were made to present an attractive and “positive image which will not alienate people but make them say ‘oh, isn’t that a good idea’” ( ‘Occupy a Genetix Test Site May 23/24’ flyer 1998? ). Walter records that “for local residents who dropped by to visit, it was a compelling advertisement for the activists’ ideas, as they looked at the open squatters’ garden with its wooden boards explaining sustainable agriculture, and compared it to the Model Farm across the road, with its fields of GM rape and burly guards to keep them out” ( 2000b; cf GU No.14 1999: 1 ). The discourse of public approval and participation was here playing a role in activist discourse and strategy. Although I do not disagree with the above points, and I recall how inspirational the cropsquats were for EDA activists, their actual impact was perhaps less than that suggested by the reports.

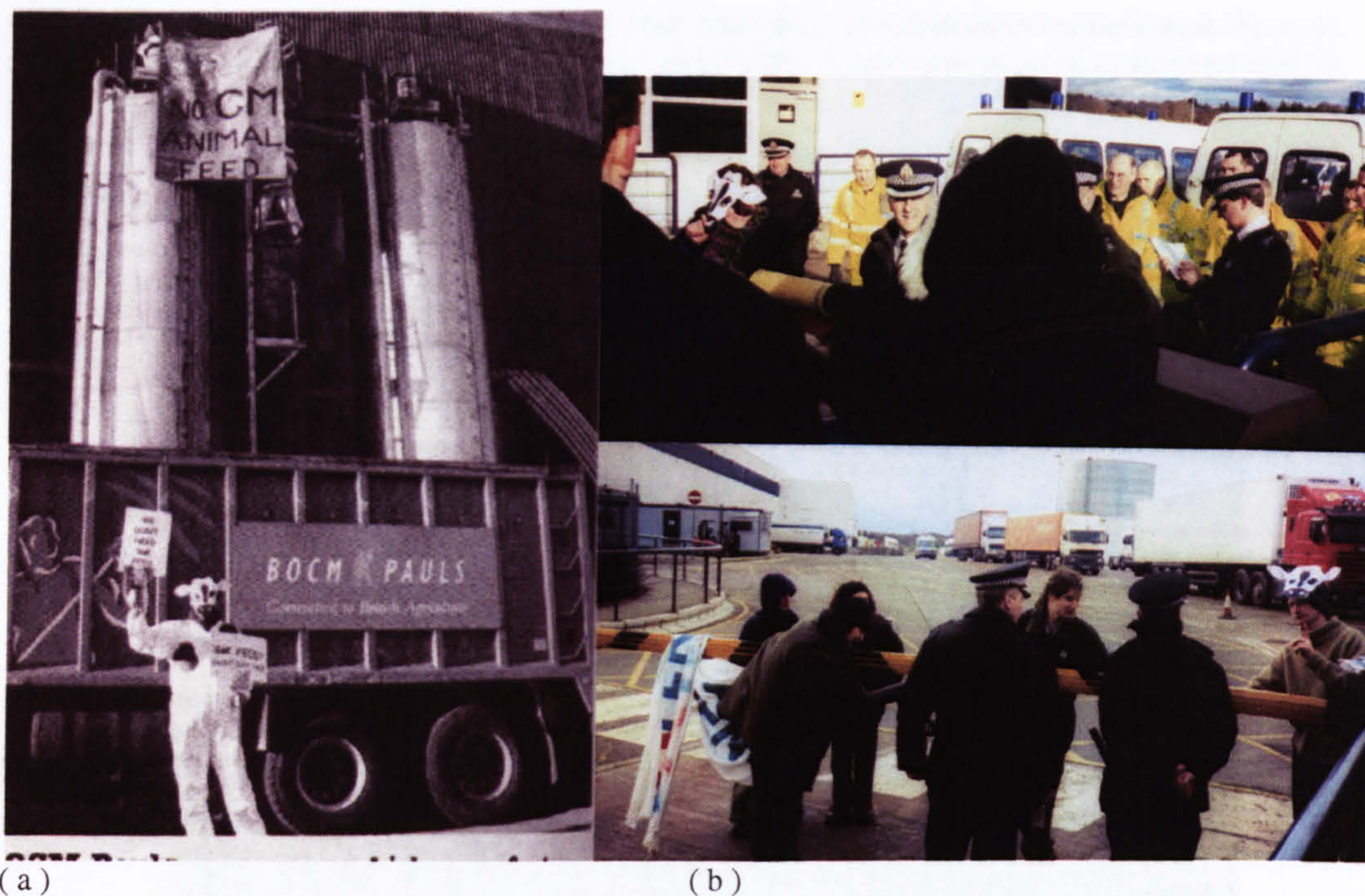
From 2000, with most experimental crops finished and many proposed commercial applications withdrawn, anti-GM activists adapted their tactics to targeting the only large commercial sector, GM animal feed. Anti-GM activists had already emphasised that their enemies were not the farmers who grew GM but the big corporations ( Paul quoted in Farrell 1998; cf Tilley 2001 ). This facilitated efforts to ally with small farmers, and the two lobby groups cooperated on national blockades of distribution companies and supermarkets ( *EF!AU* No.70 2000: 8; No.73 2001: 8; No.74 2001: 1-5; No.75 2001: 1; No.76 2001: 7; No.81 2002: 2 ).<sup>158</sup> Figure F6.8 illustrates my own participation in these.

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<sup>157</sup> The effort that went into digging tunnels as defences for the ‘Pink Castle’ occupation might belie this assumption ( GU No.22 2002: 7 ).

<sup>158</sup> An ex-TAPPER strongly resisted our involvement in these blockades on the basis that the farmers would gain more from it than the anti-GM protesters: this individual had gained a profound resentment towards farmers through his experience in anti-snares and anti-hunting activism.





**Figure F6.8 ( a ) BOCM Pauls Cow Banner ( Gene-No! 14.12.1999, reproduced in *Schnews* 2000 ); ( b ) National Sainsbury's Shutdown, East Kilbride, 2001**

One specific company, Bayer, was targeted, particularly after the 2003 EF! Summer Gathering, with a strategy consciously adapted from the animal rights movement, of targeting all areas of a company ( not just the crops ) with persistent, obstructive and pestering tactics ( *EF!AU* No.89 2003: 6-7 ).<sup>159</sup> The “continuous actions against Bayer Cropscience” ( No.91 2003: 8-9 ) included the blockading and occupation of Bayer’s HQ, offices and factories, disruption of its AGM, presentations, promotional stalls and conferences, flyposted information and graffiti, home visits, hoax security alerts and ‘pieing’, the jamming of locks and damage of computers, leafleting, noise demos, GM free picnics, and ‘armchair activism’ including ordering Bayer junk and false subscriptions, making false phone calls and placing free ads with their phone number attached ( *EF!AU* Nos. 89-92, 2003-2004 ).

Those of the above tactics which do not stand as direct action in its prefigurative sense, may be viewed within the frame of a typically animal rights strategy of corporate intimidation, for which the essential ingredients were identified as “A committed, diverse and at times militant approach” intensively focussed on Bayer. The *EF!AU* note that “The demoralisation of a company through the creation of an ‘unpleasant working environment’ is not to be underestimated” ( No.92 2004: 4 ). I did not take part in this campaign ( for contingent, not ideological reasons ), but it is perhaps indicative of the animal rights influence to note that the attempt at imposing a permanent injunction on the activists was responded to in a significantly different manner than that of Genetix Snowball: “you have to be served with the injunction for it to have an effect, so this just led to more hit and run actions” ( *EF!AU* No.92 2004: 4 ).

Now that I have considered repertoires influenced by animal rights endurance campaigns, and by public participation at crop squats and celebratory rallies, I will turn to the most direct of anti-GM direct action - crop decontamination - whose popularity increased to such an extent that one *EF!AU* could report ‘Nine trashed in one night’ ( No.59 1999: 1 ). Wall reports that “an individual may enter a field and pull up genetically modified crops as part of a Snowball group, an Earth Liberation Front ( ELF ) cell or within a

<sup>159</sup> Briefings by Corporate Watch showed how the different companies were interconnected and provided advice on how to affect them ( *EF!AU* No.89 2003: 4; [www.corporatewatch.org.uk](http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk) ).



festive situation resembling a skimmington" ( Wall 2000: 80 ). The distinction between these forms of sabotage were recorded in both the mainstream ( Vidal 1999: 3 ) and activist press, as demonstrated in Figure F6.9.



**Figure F6.9 Formats of Crop Decontamination** "covertly ... in the open ... accountably ... inspections ... prevented ... up and coming" ( *EF!AU* No.58 1999: 1 ).

I have introduced the carnivalesque approach above, but the vast majority of crop decontaminations were undertaken covertly, in small groups, under the cover of night. There was minimal co-ordination between the different groups, although we in Newcastle were contacted on two occasions to check if we had our eyes on particular sites in North Yorkshire: when we replied in the negative, one of these sites was then sabotaged by an EF!-affiliated group from elsewhere in the country. On another occasion, however, a crop near Sunderland was sabotaged by individuals from Manchester with whom we had no communication, or knowledge of, before or after. Despite the necessary anonymity, several revealing and evocative accounts of covert trashings were publicised ( Hopkins 1998; *EF!AU* No.89 2003: 4; Lynas 2004: 26-30; *Do or Die* 1996: 59; *Do or Die* 1999: 101; Szerszynski 2005 ) and there is no need for me to add my own experience

Several guides for covert sabotage were produced and distributed around EDA circles, such as 'A Gardener's Guide to Survival in the Modern World', cheekily attributed to HRH Prince of Wales ( *EF!AU* No.53 1998: 4-5 ) and adapted for the US context in 1999. One of these guides, 'My first little book of GM crop decontamination', consciously echoing the roads-protest-oriented 'My first little book of peaceful direct action' ( 1996 ), and it referred readers to the Genetix Snowball handbook as the companion guide for open decontaminations ( MFLB 2001: 2 ). These guides are interesting in themselves in demonstrating the active sharing of experiences amongst activists ( MFLB 2001: 1 ), according to an anarchist conceptualisation of knowledge: autonomous, decentralised, collective, non-expert, as I introduced in



Chapter 3. They also demonstrate an increase in sophistication from the basic starting points listed in ‘Got a test site near you’ ( GTSNY 1998 ) and ‘So you wanna stop the genetics experiment’ ( SYWS 1998 ) to the experiences gained and shared from the repeated decontaminations of ‘Weymouth’s farm-scale trials’ ( WFSL 2001 ), documented with detailed assessments of, for example, the level of plant recovery following different trashing techniques ( 2001: 4 ). The different emphases in the different guides demonstrates the diversity available at the grassroots level of direct action.

The ‘how-to’ guides emphasise that decontamination was accessible for “all sorts of people, with all levels of fitness” ( MFLB 2001: 13 ), and that there was not one prescriptive manner in which it has to be done: “Are night-time actions the only option? Absolutely not, after all there is beauty in diversity” ( WRGO 1998: 2 ). MFLB details the advantages and disadvantages of open and covert repertoires in a neutral tone that belies the impassioned debate assessed in 6.4.4, and it also notes that there are ‘middle ways’, such as “the covert-to-overt action, begun quietly in the dark and completed openly after dawn” ( MFLB 2001: 2; *EF!AU* No.77 2001: 2 ).

#### 6.4.4

##### **Genetics Snowball and the Covert-Overt Debate**

Genetix Snowball ( GS ) represent a conscious and explicit translation of civil disobedience and ploughshares discourse from the peace movement into the field of environmental direct action.<sup>160</sup> For this reason, it is a valuable case through which to consider the relations, conversations and disagreements that took place between this discourse and that of other EDA strategies. In order to make direct action against GMOs more accessible to the wider public, GS explained in depth exactly how it organised and what it did ( 1998: 1.4 ). Finding evidence for a CD methodology of EDA is thus made simple. By contrast, one might at first expect those who prefer covert night-time anonymity to be more tight-lipped about their activities, but when it comes to talking politics, this tendency has proved equally loquacious, albeit with pseudonyms. I will first introduce the GS format of EDA, and then set the context for the resulting critique and dialogue from those pursuing a covert repertoire.

The Genetix Snowball Campaign was inspired by the Snowball campaign of the eighties against Cruise, which introduced property damage to the UK peace movement ( Snowball 1986; Heller 2000: 72 ). The tactic was for people, who often labelled themselves “simply ordinary residents of this area” ( Penrose 1986: 6 ), to cut a single strand of perimeter wire at nuclear bases. Although causing minimal damage, the vandalism led to hundreds of arrests and court appearances which were followed avidly by the media: “Snowball was a PR triumph. We could do the same thing in fields of GM crops. Individuals digging up one plant at a time” ( Jacklyn Sheedy quoted in Hopkins 1998: 2 ). The Snowball repertoire of sabotage was purely symbolic, and of a lobbying intent ( Snowball 1986: 1 ). The GS handbook states that “Hopefully we are combining the best of the original Snowball and the best of Ploughshares with our experience and understanding of environmental actions to produce an action that is appropriate for the particular circumstances of genetically modified crops” ( 1998: 1.2 )

In Figure F6.10 I utilise the GS’ own account of their action to highlight the elements of CD discourse ( established in 6.3.4 ), but it is also evident and explicit in all of their many public testimonials, and in the GS aims and principles. GS account is on the left, my notes are on the right.

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<sup>160</sup> Green Anarchist define this when they criticise and oppose the influx of ‘peace movement ideas’ into EFi, including “Gandhian preconceptions about openness, accommodation with our enemies, more than a whiff of careerism ... and seeing campaigning as a particularly vigorous form of lobbying to be done through the media” ( *GA* 1999: 2; cf *ACF* c1991: 38 ).



“The first snowball action was carried out by a group of people who knew each other very well; ... Before doing the action, we’d distributed several hundred leaflets giving information about the campaign at public events and through publications. We’d also written to farmers hosting the GM release sites, all the companies releasing GM crops, the Thames Valley Police to let them know about the genetiX snowball campaign and the Environment Agency specifically to let them know that there would be bags of biohazard which needed their attention. The letter to the farmer invites them to join the campaign. The letter to the companies asks them to remove the crops themselves” ( GS 1998: 2.1 ).

“We walked to the site carrying a banner, brightly coloured flags, tape to cordon off the area and heavy duty plastic bags marked with the biohazard symbol for the GM plants. As an example of a more sustainable way of producing our food we also took an apple tree to plant at the site, Five people took the decontaminating role and four others did support work: liaising with and explaining the action to press, farmer and police and recording what was happening. We took known and trusted press with us whilst Andrew ( press liaison ) met other press at a point nearby. The police had decided to meet there too and took advantage of a guide to the action. The ‘decontaminators’ used ordinary gardening tools and wore protective suits which we decorated with messages. Each puller chose a number of plants significant to them; Jo chose to pull up 25 as she is 25 years old, Kathryn pulled 64 for the number of experimental trials currently in progress, [etc..]

We arrived about five minutes before the police and just about had time to put on our protective clothing and begin digging up the plants. The police were met by Jane and Phil ( farmer and police liaison ). We felt a man and a woman together would be safe and not intimidating. They introduced themselves and explained who we were and what we were doing. An agent for Monsanto then arrived and gave us a warning to leave the site. When the police tried to stop us digging one of us explained that we couldn’t as we had work to do. A sergeant asked if there was anything they could say that would persuade us to leave the site. Rowan said ‘Yes, arrest Monsanto! They’re causing criminal damage to other farmer’s crops through genetic pollution and we are preventing this by removing Monsanto’s GM crops’. The police officer went off to speak to his superior. We continued digging up, snapping in half and bagging up the plants. We were asked again to leave, we continued decontaminating.

The police began to arrest us for criminal damage after about twenty minutes. Our action/legal observer busily noted down significant events, the time that they happened and names, numbers or descriptions of people being involved. At this point more press arrived and Zoe and Mel both managed interviews with them before being arrested... The decontaminators left their signed statements for the farmer and the company... The arrested decontaminators were taken a few miles from the site and released without charge. The police confiscated our tools and the banner. Twelve days later and just two days before the second snowball round the five decontaminators were served injunctions by Monsanto”

Affinity Group formed before action.

Information provided to the public and concerned bodies.

Dialogue with other bodies.

Participation / a response is encouraged.

Visible and public.

The alternative demonstrated.

Division of roles.

Media strategy.

Tools and techniques accessible and everyday.

Symbolic.

Planning for the most peaceful outcome / response.

The opponent is involved in the action.

The police are involved in the action.

The ‘turn around’, pinning the moral blame on the opponent, challenging the police to question their role.

Process of dialogue/interplay between opponents.  
Legal aspect planned and prepared for.

Media.  
Accountability made explicit.

No immediate punishment

The opponent forced to respond.

**Figure F6.10 Account of the First Genetix Snowball Action ( GS 1998: 5.2 ).**



This account demonstrates how Genetix Snowball acted and argued according to principles of accountability, nonviolence, democracy, openness and responsibility ( 1998: 1.1; cf Snowball 1986: 17 ). These CD principles were of central rather than tactical importance, indeed GS expressed the “hope that groups will experiment with pushing the frontiers of openness out much further than our minimum ground rule” ( 1998: 6.7.1 ). Like the original Snowball, GS sits firmly on the side of a ‘principled’ or absolute view of non-violence as opposed to the tactical view more common in EDA ( Tilley 1998a ).

Genetix Snowball declared various aims, beginning with the demand that the government impose a five year moratorium on the deliberate release of GM plants in Britain, except for government sponsored ecological health and safety tests ( in enclosed systems ), and the removal of all GM crops already existing.<sup>161</sup> There were also additional aims and principles, that express the key themes of CD strategy, including the urge for a mass, participatory movement; for a dialogue in society and a workable, peaceful solution; and the urge to disobedience: “To encourage people to question mindless obedience and to move through their fears into a position of shared power balanced with a strong sense of responsibility ( 1998: 2.1 )

In keeping with the CD discourse elaborated in 6.3.4, the role of direct action is articulated by GS as democratic and reasonable ( as well as a liberating break from convention ). In the handbook for action they are upfront about “inviting people to join together to take nonviolent action by safely pulling up genetically engineered crops: to carry out their action openly”, and “In the spirit of democracy we are asking people who take part in the genetix snowball to be prepared to take the consequences of their nonviolent action” ( 1998: Acclaim ). Using the wordplay characteristic of the handbook, GS term their acts of direct action ‘civil responsibility’ ( rather than civil disobedience ).

In the critiques I present below, we may witness the dialogue initiated when one particular method of activism was launched onto the EDA milieu. Representing a ( CD ) strategic rationale generally critiqued within anarchism, the ensuing dialogue brought to the surface many of the activist-anarchist arguments that, I maintain, are implicit behind much EDA. Although I frame this as an anarchistic EDA critique of ploughshares activism, the criticism was equally, if not more so, directed the other way ( Vinthagen 1999; Tilley 2001 ).

Many in EDA were shocked that GS should advocate “that we should do our illegal actions ( criminal damage for example ) in a totally open way, providing our names and addresses to the authorities, submitting to arrest and justifying our acts in court” ( Bob 1998: 1 ). This reaction of outrage was unsurprising insofar as tactics of sabotage are more at home within a covert campaign: the Ploughshares tradition proves the exception to this rule, yet even there sabotage usually needs to be covert at least until the deed is done ( Tilley 1998b ). When the GS activists held a discussion at the 1998 EF! gathering, therefore, they had to begin by recognising that their tactics were a departure from the usual form activists in EF! used.<sup>162</sup> They nonetheless emphasised the worth of open CD tactics on the basis that they would ( might ) draw non-activists into taking direct action for the first time ( cf Wall 2000: 84 ). Ultimately, it was this mobilisation of ‘normal’ people that legitimised the snowballers within an anarchist discourse.

The role of this workshop in enabling this critical dialogue amongst activists to take place should be emphasised: in my mind it validates the very existence of events such as the EF! Summer Gathering: see 5.3.10. This was the event for which activists critical of CD methods prepared the discussion documents ‘accountable to who?’ ( Bob 1998 ) and ‘Fuck the disobedient, let’s get civil’ ( Black Bat 1998 ).<sup>163</sup> The discussion documents were later reprinted in Peace News, entering a debate already

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<sup>161</sup> These resembled the three limited aims of the original Snowball campaign ( Snowball 1986: 1 ). The reasonableness and reformist ( not revolutionary ) character of the aims were emphasised by a Northumbrian snowballer who states that “no-one can call them outrageous or unrealistic”, and that “Were any one of these met the whole campaign would stop, and gladly” ( Penrose 1986: 7 ). This is liberal not anarchist direct action.

<sup>162</sup> Hancock recorded that, when in prison for accountably disarming a nuclear-capable warplane, his fellow-prisoners accepted his law-breaking and anti-militarism, but couldn’t understand his ‘hanging around to get caught’. He notes that “A similar head-shaking has gone on in the anarchist and environmental movement”, despite “an emerging respect for open actions, especially in response to the Seeds of Hope ploughshares women” ( 1997 ). Seeds of Hope refers to four women who damaged a warplane bound for Indonesia where it would most likely be used against civilians in East Timor. They were acquitted of all charges by a jury in 1996 ( find refs ).

<sup>163</sup> This was a collective of individuals from Leeds EF!. The content was less offensively phrased than the title, and there was a disclaimer that stated ‘We hope to make constructive criticisms, not personal slaggings’ ( Black Bat 1998: 1 ). Several



underway between covert ( EDA ) and overt ( ploughshares ) positions, and later perpetuated in the letters pages: I draw on these as additional sources. The EF! critiques targeted: reformism; reliance on the State; delegitimation of other 'non-accountable' actions; hostaging activists to ( non-anarchist ) public opinion<sup>164</sup>; and the ineffectiveness of a method of action that gets participants arrested without causing significant harm to the crops. The alternative proposed included widespread covert destruction, alongside more crop squats and public actions against test sites, laboratories and offices ( Black Bat 1998: 4 ).

In the workshop many activists made criticisms face-to-face with two of those engaged in the Genetix Snowball campaign. The two GS spokespeople had expected criticism, but afterwards commented that they had not expected so much: one said he felt activists were seeing GS as an attack on their own ( covert ) methods of activism, whereas their strategy was not meant to replace, but to add to and increase activism. Criticism chiefly addressed two GS principles: making a 'reasonable' demand of the government, and accepting punishment. I will deal with these two elements in turn, then move onto the debate over mass movements, elitism and empowerment that resulted.

The GS call for a moratorium ( above ) was condemned as reformist ( "dead end single issue reformism" in Black Bat's words ( 1998: 2 ) ): it allowed corporations and governments to set the agenda - and also negated the challenge of more fundamentalist direct action. The GS handbook's discussion on democracy, furthermore, implies that if the powers that be acted 'morally' and 'accountably', there would be no problem ( 1998: Acclaimer; Black Bat 1998: 2 ). The 'democratic direct action' of GS resembles the 'liberal direct action' critiqued in 6.2.1, and this is underlined by a government-dependency in ( some of ) their thinking: "taking direct action... was necessary because the Government wasn't listening to what people were saying and had waived its responsibility" ( Tulip in Rowell 1998: ). This is amongst the least anarchist of the themes that were commonly articulated around anti-GM direct action, and Black Bat argue "it blurs the lines between lobbying and direct action, a blurring which comes dangerously near in its effect to that of recuperation" ( 1998: 3 ).

The appeal to the authorities for reforms contradicts the Earth First! no-compromise principle, a principle interpreted to mean here that GM crops must be abolished full stop: "Direct action is making our individual and collective desires into reality, regardless of the laws that try and control us. It's taking, occupying, destroying or building – it can't be asking or demanding" ( Bob 1998: 1 ). In the EF! workshop, the GS activists defended these aims as tactical, not ultimate: from a sabotage perspective, for example, all GM sites being contained indoors would make them a much easier target to find. Yet this was not convincing.

Even more than this issue, EF! critics focussed on the arrestable consequences of accountability versus the practical effectiveness of the anti-GM movement. In the workshop, accepting punishment was generally seen as plain stupidity, and not an option for most. It was also pointed out that it implicitly condemns those who act covertly as 'non-accountable' and 'non-democratic' ( Black Bat 1998: 3 ). Most in EF!, and most in EDA, were unwilling to get arrested for something so ineffective as uprooting a handful of plants. Genetix Snowball declined in part because of the lack of active support from other activists.

Hancock justifies the accountable position on the basis that only those claiming responsibility endure the immediate legal repercussions, and that it is easier to talk about such actions afterwards. From a CD perspective, with the goal of dialogue in mind, the potential for communication is thus enhanced: accountability makes it more possible for the opponent to trust you. It is also "easier to ensure and claim that the action is non-violent", particularly as "the wider public often associate covert action with violence" ( cf WRGO 1998: 2 ). Hancock argues, furthermore, that "Democracy needs names and faces – it cannot function with anonymity" ( Hancock 1997: 14 ).<sup>165</sup>

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correspondents to Peace News nonetheless took offence at the content of the critiques and the anonymity of the authors ( Needham 1998 ).

<sup>164</sup> GS suggest that "Reaching into your community ... is vital and is more democratic than a small isolated action which does not make reference to its locality" ( GS 1998: 6.10 ). These principles are applied to the Snowball methods of organisation ( consensus decision making, transparency etc. ) and action ( openly writing to the police before the action, signing nonviolence pledges before the action and so on ). Critical activists queried the idea that their actions had to be in line with public opinion, when the radical impulse could be on the extremes of accepted norms and cutting a path for society to follow ( Black Bat 1998: 3 ).

<sup>165</sup> In other 'how to' guides, dialogue was also suggested as a part of the campaign, both with the farmer and with the corporation, to be followed if necessary by direct action ( GTSNY 1997: 2 ).



Hancock argues that open actions are more disobedient and undermining, that they undermine the power of prison and that the trial increases the symbolic impact of the action. Anonymous Bob disagrees, stating that “The idea of giving yourself to the police, of arguing your position in court, legitimises their power and the system that power protects. It respects their ‘right’ to judge you and your actions. This is fine if you basically agree with that system” ( Bob 1998: 1 ).<sup>166</sup> The revolutionary position, however, is clearly in opposition to this. Hancock demurs, using the CD conceptualisation of power ( cited in sections 2.2.4 and 6.3.4 ) to suggest that open strategies can be more of a challenge to state authority:

“Covert actions might in some way challenge the validity of the state to punish us, but they also uphold the state’s power by somehow making us ashamed of our actions. To openly accept the consequences of one’s actions, indeed to use these consequences as an important part of the power of your action, can undermine and confuse the state no end, and opens up an arena in which vital debate can take place” ( 1997: 14 ).

The strongest plank with which the GS activists constructed their defence, was the possibility of greater mobilisation and radicalisation of people ‘new to NVDA’ ( see 5.13 ). They never designed their method for the already-active, already-radicalised saboteurs in EF!, but envisaged it as a device for making sabotage accessible. The anarchist reading of the purpose of GS was thus to involve masses of otherwise passive people in direct action, in opposition to the state, and in doing so to regain individual autonomy and build a collective resistance. As well as the obvious tactical ( media-friendly ) benefits of the Snowball organisation, the opening up of organising direct action neatly subverted the paranoising and marginalising of activists by the state, and a successful GS would create a support base for the small number of covert saboteurs criticising it.

It is on the ( anarchist ) logic of mass participation that Hancock thus stakes his defence of open campaigns: “Any action which alienates or limits participation must be keenly questioned – this is as true of ploughshares-type actions as it is of non-violent covert property damage” ( 1997: 13; cf Black Bat 1998: 3 ). He concludes his argument with the theme we have already encountered in 6.2.2, and which we shall return to in 6.5: “if it creates cultural and organisational forms incapable of wider, radical change, then it’s a reformist strategy, rather than a revolutionary one” ( 1997: 14; Black Bat 1998: 4 ).

It is therefore apt that it is on this very same ground that the advocates of covert action *opposed* the open strategy and its acceptance of punishment. Anonymous Bob states that suggesting activists go to prison is “hardly the best way to help our movement grow” ( 1998 ). Hancock accepts this point: “we cannot sustain large numbers of activists being imprisoned, in terms of our numbers or our energy.” Thus covert forms of action are potentially more effective because they offer the possibility “of repeating our resistance again and again” ( Bombadill 1997: 14 ). Tilley questions the understanding of the word ‘effective’, considering the GS manner more likely to be effective in the long run. She insists that GS is “radical and revolutionary”, on the basis that for radical social change to happen “everyone will need to be involved” ( 1998 ).

I would suggest that covert actions are a very hard way to get more people involved in an issue, because it is so hard to talk about it. Hence one of the guides states “do not talk about the action with anyone other than those directly involved in it” ( MFLB 2001: 10 ). The one attempt at a participatory, EF!-organised covert decontamination, ‘Smash Genetix’ ( *EF!AU* No.59 1999: 1 ), did not go to plan, and amongst the ‘lessons’ to be learnt was the exclusion of the less physically able ( “people with kids, those unable to run etc.” ( LSGA 1999: 1; cf *Do or Die* 2000: 67 ) ) from future decontaminations. This action was considerably less empowering than participants found the more open and festive Watlington rally of two weeks before.

Bob nonetheless argues that taking responsibility for illegal actions makes us *less* accessible, the heavy sentences and financial penalties meaning “the only people prepared to break them will be the young unemployed with less to lose” ( Bob 1998 ). Ploughshares actions require too much time and bravery, leading to a high level of burn-out, experienced particularly by those who’ve endured prison terms.

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<sup>166</sup> Bombadill therefore argues that “Covert action not only allows for lesser commitment in terms of lifestyle but also does not demand that trust be put in institutions which are a core part of the concerns that activists are opposing. Covert action questions the legitimacy of the legal system’s handing out punishment” ( Hancock 1997: 14 ).



Critics thus argue that this is a form of elitism, incapable of building a mass movement ( TANL quoted in Welsh 2000: 175; cf Black 2004: 7; Cunliffe 2002: 10 ). In the ploughshares case, the anarchist attention to elitism is seen through the lens of 'martyrdom'.

Hancock records that "A major criticism of ploughshares is that martyrdom appears to be an essential component" ( 1998 ). Critics like Jonathan X argue it is disempowering and alienating ( 2000: 164 ). Although ploughshares activists seek to distance themselves from martyrdom, the theme of public, exemplary suffering and other motifs rooted in religious traditions remain. Hengren argues that

"Civil disobedience does not ... mean martyrdom... The strength of civil disobedience lies in overcoming the fear of suffering. The whole challenge is in overcoming fear. It forces us to realise what our possibilities are. Martyrs do exactly the opposite. They take opportunities away from others. We love them because they offer themselves for us. They are our proxies. But nobody else can free us. Freedom can be won only by overcoming fear and taking the consequences" ( 1993: 136 ).

Hancock, however, accepts that there does exist an issue of martyrdom in the ploughshares movement, stating that "there is no doubt that such actions are playing around with dramatic and heroic 'energy', however humble the activists themselves feel" ( 1998 ).

Anonymous Bob warns that the GS strategy "seems likely to reproduce the spectacle of the few committed activists being cheered on by their totally passive supporters" ( Bob 1998: 1 ). Even successful ploughshares actions like the 'Seeds of Hope' disempower others, making them feel they can only support those who did it ( Bob 1998: ). The Genetix snowballers thus admitted they were uncomfortable at how they were put on a pedestal as martyrs by some locals at Totnes for their arrest, when their aim was to make direct action a mass-accessible technique ( My notes, EF! Gathering 1998 ). The GS style of direct action may therefore encourage a similar process of separation and elitism to the ELF strategy critiqued in 6.5.3.

One way ploughshares activists have responded is to state that "what is required is neither bravery nor purity, but good support and thorough preparation" ( Hancock 1998 ). Much of the ground-rules and procedure of ploughshares activism, such as that of Trident Ploughshares, are rooted in this perceived need for support and preparation. Others in EDA prefer spontaneity, and associate the structured, controlled form of action in CD to be antithetical to the nature of revolution: "the assumption that training is needed before such actions, and the symbolic nature of many accountable actions ... shows a pretty strange idea of direct action" ( Bob 1998: 1 ). Indeed, the critics suggested that having stated 'principles' equated to limiting ground-rules, which act as a constraint on freedom of action.

Bombadill argues that covert action is the most effective form of NVDA because it is empowering to the participants, and thus has a healthy impact on them: "A group of people overcoming the road-diggers and stopping them from working not only generates healthy disrespect for the machinery but also demonstrates how these weapons of destruction are merely machines which we can defeat when we come together" ( Bombadill 1997: 14; cf Merrick 1997: 4 ). However, it is actually very hard to engineer these situations, as my experience of Smash Genetix indicates.

Bombadill also presents an alternative argument for accessibility to activism. He accepts that "The realisation of our strength as a movement comes from the understanding that our actions are accessible" but notes that "To many people with families, jobs, and priorities other than campaigning, increasing the risk of imprisonment through greater openness would mean a corresponding decrease in their readiness to get involved." By way of example, he cites the locals who, during the M65 campaign in 1995 would slip onto the worksite at night to sabotage the machinery. This was "what they felt was their most effective contribution to the campaign, as they were not able to commit themselves to live on site full-time or to write letter after letter to some faceless bureaucrat" ( Bombadill 1997: 14 ). Anonymous Bob, several participants in the EF! workshop, and previous writers of EF! discussion documents have also made the link between 'accountable' actions and the middle class. The converse to this is that sabotage is considered more accessible to the working class ( WPH 1998: 2 ). I consider this a lazy argument, although not necessarily without some truth in terms of the culture of morally articulate, 'worthy' and 'reasonable' peace movement activism.



The accountable Snowball campaign received a major blow when its opponent, Monsanto, succeeded in getting severe injunctions passed against the first Snowball participants. This represented a significant deterrent to the virgin activists that Genetix Snowball hoped to involve. These “SLAPPs, or Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, are designed to chill people into silence, by suing them for defamation, injury or conspiracy, not necessarily to win the case, but to bring victims to the point where financially or emotionally they cannot continue their defence” ( Rowell 1998; cf Manes 1990: 204-205 ). The second Genetix Snowball action still occurred two days after the injunctions were served, but ultimately GS became stalled in the very legal process it had hoped to exploit. This is evident in the chronology of events on the GS website ( <http://www.fraw.org.uk/gs/chronol.htm> ), and conversations with two of the activists involved have also confirmed that their own campaigning energy got sucked into fighting the legal battles. A snowball effect, therefore, did not happen ( certainly not on the scale of the original ), and GS wound down in 1999.

The snowballers emphasised that GS was only one technique amongst many which they personally supported, including the covert effective trashings advocated by Black Bat. As we have seen, however, their proposed strategy was viewed with hostility by others within EDA. This is interesting, because the GS activists sought to add something new and supportive to the movement, not to convert the whole EDA milieu into CD Methodists. The common argument launched against those who wish to impose non-violent principles on a campaign, furthermore, is that we should allow a diversity of actions: “I believe that covert protest can share the vision of a more just and sustainable society while admitting the need to embrace a diverse strategy to achieve this” ( Bombadill 1997: 14 ). In later sections I will assess this argument for diversity and consider whether its effects are actually such as they are framed.

#### 6.4.5

##### **Anti-GM Direct Action: Conclusion**

This chapter has continued our assessment of EDA’s demonstration of an anarchist practice, sensibility and discourse, with an examination of anti-GM direct action and the most significant strategic debate that grew out of it. 6.4.2, Anti-GM Networks, noted the extension of the cross-class alliances noted in the anti-roads movement, and the deployment of mass EDA against a new environmental threat, this time characterised by the discourse of risk, corporate power versus democracy, and the commodification ( enclosure ) of life. I paid particular attention to the crossover of anti-roads experience in organisational form. This builds upon the previous assessments of DIY networks, and other forms of activist-anarchist organisation, to demonstrate the continued strength and applicability of anarchist organisational tenets to different environmental contexts.

In 6.4.3, Forms of Anti-GM Direct Action, I assessed the place of anti-GM direct action within frames of ‘failing democracy’, and found much activism constituted only ‘liberal’ direct action ( or ‘militant lobbying’ ), framed as a ‘last resort’ intended to inform the decisions made in higher spheres. I noted some genuinely anarchist elements in the spontaneous decontaminations, crop squats, covert and overt decontaminations, but also noted that each of these repertoires had limitations. The crucial point is that the activists themselves recognised this, and put their concerns into words: it is here that the anarchism of EDA is most clearly demonstrated.

In 6.4.4, Genetix Snowball and the Overt-Covert Debate, I assessed these concerns by framing a dialogue between CD/Ploughshares discourse from the peace movement, and a covert approach more redolent of the animal rights movement ( note that both have a place within EDA: I wish to exclude neither ). This is the strategic debate that I consider most fully, and as such balances the focus on questions of organisation and identity in Chapter 5. I consider it to be amongst the most important of the strategic debates that grew out of EDA, and certainly the one most clearly articulated in the language of political theory. It does not matter that agreement was not reached: it is the expression of anarchist sentiments, and the experimentation with positions available within a broad anarchist value-system, that makes the debate of importance to my study. Nor was this debate the end of the matter: in the next case study I shall take our examination of ecological sabotage into a new context, and consider the issues of exclusivity, elitism, divisions between passive and active campaigners, and unequal



relations of power that may all arise within a militant, anarchistically-informed campaign of ( non-accountable ) sabotage.

## **6.5 Peat and the ELF**

### **6.5.1**

#### **Introduction**

In these sections I continue the study of ecological sabotage that I began in 6.3.5 in relation to previous, workplace frameworks of sabotage, and which I developed in sections 6.4.3 & 6.4.4 by presenting the range of sabotage forms deployed on the GM issue, and the resulting covert-overt debate. This field of inquiry explores further the place of sabotage within EDA, and presents additional vectors of anarchist critique. I am paying particular attention to the interface between unapologetically ‘militant’ and ‘effective’ tactics, and the ethical views at the core of anarchism. I do not, however, dwell on the theoretical issues of violence and non-violence ( this is covered in 6.3 ), but rather seek to reinsert the strategic debates considered in Chapters 4 and 5, into the actual practice of UK EDA.

In 6.5.2 I resituate sabotage within EDA, and consider the ‘split’ declared between EF!UK and the ELF. I frame the economic strategy that lies behind ecological sabotage ( and on which basis it has been claimed as a success ), and consider its twin characterisation as, on the one hand, an application of cold, strategic thinking and, on the other, as light-hearted, passionate, and embedded in the wider EDA community. These characteristics stand in some contradiction.

In 6.5.3 I pursue the first of these characterisations by considering the escalation of ELF ambitions and organisational form in the USA, and I present something of the critical dialogue that resulted from anarchists ( of various ‘brands’ ), uneasy about the relationship of a quasi-militaristic ( or ‘guerrillaistic’ ) organisation, to broader, more fundamental and long-term anarchist ethics. Elements of anarchist critique that come into play include: the critique of elite or vanguardist models of change ( introduced in 5.2 ); the critique of organisational models that predicate a division between active participants and passive ‘supporters’, or which act as barriers between a mutual interchange; and the anarchist celebration of grassroots, passionate spontaneity against top-down militaristic strategising.

In 6.5.4 I return from these grand and earnest discussions to a more down-to-earth, action-focussed and participatory context, which I consider to be a more positive, and perhaps more ‘real’, site of ecological direct action. This is the campaign of obstruction, trespass and sabotage against peat milling which reached a particular peak of activity between 2000 and 2003, under the co-ordinating efforts of the EF! offshoot ‘Peat Alert!’. With this case-study I will re-establish the grounded, fluid and diverse character of UK EDA.

### **6.5.2**

#### **Sabotage in EDA**

“Don’t remain a machine hater – become a machine trasher. If a development is decimating your local ecology or your work is shit – you need sabotage” ( TLWI: 18 )

I will begin this section by returning to Earth First! In 6.3 we noted that the primary repertoires of EF! were variations on blockades, occupations and other civil disobedience methods. *Do or Die* and *Green Anarchist* argued for the central importance of sabotage, however, and in a survey of EF! repertoires, Rootes found that attacks on property came second to ‘confrontational’ actions, ahead of ‘conventional’ or ‘demonstrative’ forms ( 2000: 42 ). Although covert sabotage is integrally difficult to



quantify, and suffers from an under-reporting ( Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 203 ), its prevalence is easily established through participation in EDA camps and gatherings, and textual evidence is provided by guidebooks such as 'Practical Monkey Wrenching' ( 1993 ) or the Ozymandias Handbook ( 2002 ). In 6.4, furthermore, we noted that certain forms and fields of sabotage are actually quite fully documented and discussed: the case of peat shall provide another example of this in 6.5.4. One point to note is that these handbooks for covert sabotage consider blockading, civil disobedience and manufactured vulnerability repertoires to exist within essentially the same framework: they are termed 'noble sabotage' ( Ozymandias 2002: 1; PMW 1993: 1-2 ). As with the handbooks considered in 6.4.3, wherein the accountable approach of the Genetix Snowball handbook was referred to in those focussing on covert action, a diversity in methods and proclivities is recognised as the outset.

The range of forms of ecological sabotage has been indicated in the previous parts of this thesis, including peace-movement fence-cutting or warcraft-smashing, and supergluing locks and disabling computers during office occupations. Three forms are of particular note. First, the famed EF!US repertoire of 'spiking' trees to hinder their cutting and prevent their profitable sale was utilised at several anti-roads sites, including Newcastle ( Little Weed 1994: 2-3; Seel 1997a: 119; *Do or Die* 1998: 22; Wall 2000: 85; Welchman 2001: 97 ), but it was used comparatively less than in the US, and it was not *relied upon* as a central tactic. Second, arson was used, particularly for strategically crucial machinery, at road sites such as Twyford, Newbury, Pollok and the M65, sometimes by a joyous crowd ( *Do or Die* 2003: 10; Merrick 1996; *Do or Die* 1994: 23; *EF!AU* No.12 1994: 2 ).<sup>167</sup> Third, and most interestingly for me, there was recurrent sabotage at sites of environmental destruction that worked with the elements, and with the surrounding environment, to seek to undo the destruction of 'development': for example, restoring the watercourse at Twyford ( *EF!AU* No.3 1992: 2 ) or pumping water back into a reservoir at Bury ( *EF!AU* No.62 1999: 8; cf Booth 1997: 25 ). The sabotage considered in 6.5.4 represents an extension, and the most popular form, of this latter, remedial and nature-allied sabotage, for which economic strategising is only a secondary consideration. Ecological sabotage should also not be seen as a discrete repertoire separate from other EDA, but instead as just one fluid ingredient which may be combined with, or spontaneously emerge out of, other repertoires such as blockading, street parties and mass trespasses ( *Aufheben* 1995: 15 ).

Notwithstanding its widespread use, disagreement over the use of sabotage was common at anti-road sites ( *EEV* 1997; *Do or Die* 2003; *AF* 1996b ). Within the broader arena of EDA, EF! provided a slightly more formal space in which discussions concerning sabotage left a clearer paper trail, which facilitates assessment ( *EF!AU* No.3 1992: 5; No.16 1995: 2 ). At the Brighton gathering of 1992 ( see 6.3.2 ) the issue was brought to a head when sabotage at Hatfield peat works costing £100,000 ( see 6.5.4 ) was attributed to EF!, and the press carried a quote from an "EF!(UK) activist that argued that radical greens might carry out bomb attacks ( Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 202 ). It was felt that the sabotage at Hatfield "was an individual act and ... claiming it as the responsibility of EF! was unfair to those in the movement who disagreed with it" ( *EF!AU* No.3 1992: 2 ). The decision was made that "Earth First! would be split into two. On the one hand there would be an underground group, the Earth Liberation Front, which would do ecotage and all the embarrassing naughtiness stuff and, on the other hand, all the open civil disobedience kind of thing would retain the name Earth First!" ( 'Edgar', quoted in Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 202; cf Snorky the Elf *GA* 39 ). The EF!-ELF split was not competitive but intended to be mutually supportive, and it was ultimately more apparent than real: a convenient separation for purely strategic purposes.<sup>168</sup> Plows, Wall & Doherty note that "Ultimately no durable ELF network developed as a consequence of this gathering" but "ecotage diffused amongst the growing numbers and networks of direct action environmentalists" ( Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 202-203 ). The ELF name resurfaced later in the 1990s in the USA, however, associated with much grander, pro-active and spectacular acts of property destruction. It was also given a more concretely defined organisation and identity: I shall present the anarchist critique of this in 6.4.3.

<sup>167</sup> It was noted in 6.4 that "For many 'normal everyday people' covert sabotage was less risky than overt 'civil disobedience'" ( *Do or Die* 2003: 17 ), but on several occasions mass, and quite public expressions of sabotage were performed in a manner akin to the carnivalesque celebrations or 'skimmingtons' noted in 6.4.3 ( Wall 2000: 88 ).

<sup>168</sup> Considering EF!'s position on sabotage: "A line of 'we neither condemn nor condone' was agreed upon" ( *Do or Die* 2003: 8; cf *EF!AU* No.30 1996: 3 ). EF! continued to "tacitly but not officially" support sabotage ( Purkis 2001: 273 ), and the *EF!AU* periodically reported acts of sabotage, sometimes attributed to the ELF ( No.53 1998: 2; No.68 2000: 2; No.75 2001: 3; No.91 2003: 7 ): indeed most of the news reported from the USA concerned major acts of ELF sabotage or arson ( No.55 1999: 2; No.57 1999: 2; No.65 2000: 2; No.74 2001: 2; No.76 2001: 2; No.77 2001: 2; No.81 2002: 2; No.87 2002: 3 ). Notwithstanding Plows, Wall & Doherty's suggestion that "virtually no actions have been claimed by the UK ELF since 1996" ( 2004: 203 ), since 2000 this trend has been reversed. The most recent *EF!AU* has gone furthest in its support for aggressive sabotage, encouraging its readers to sabotage SUV cars: a repertoire already popular in the USA, though more a hallmark of the ELF than EF! ( No.93 2005: 1; cf Coronado 2003: 14-15 ).



In the UK, the original choice of the ELF name identified the network as a companion to the ALF ( Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 202 ), although it was socially as well as ecologically concerned ( Tara 2000; cf *Do or Die* 1994: 16 ). The name recalled legends of pixies ( elves ), hence the UK term of 'pixieing' for the US 'monkeywrenching' ( *Do or Die* 1994: 16 ). The destruction of road-building equipment was often reported in terms of 'mother nature's revenge': it was "a humorous thing with a serious nature to it that just took off" ( Tara 2003: 46 ). Although the name was "consciously light-hearted" ( Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 214 ), the ELF initials themselves came to provide anarchists with a focus for criticism, as I shall consider in 6.5.3

In a style that should be becoming familiar from our previous considerations of other DIY EDA networks, the ELF was presented in organisational terms as a fluid, non-existing network:

"ELF had no command structure or solid network, each group being independent. There was no press officer or office, so the authorities had nowhere to focus their eyes and ears. ELF units would attack, cause damage and then let either the company or press know that it was ELF who did it" ( Tara 2003: 46; cf Foreman & Hayward 1993: 9 ).<sup>169</sup>

At the *EF!AU* we occasionally received typed 'communiques' reporting damage to car showrooms or peat-digging material, and would publicise them ( *EF!AU* No.63 1998: 2; cf *EF!AU* No.62 1999: 8 ).

The economic rationale of much anti-roads direct action was noted in 6.2. On the basis that "the only thing likely to stop these roads being built is the escalating cost of the projects" ( PMW 1993: 1; cf Merrick 1996: 66; Little Weed: 2 ), destruction of property was advocated as "the most effective way" to cost them money ( 'Andrew' quoted in Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 208 ). In Halloween of 1992, the first 'Earth Night' was declared and machines at Twyford Down and elsewhere were destroyed. Tarmac were forced to spend thousands on security, and the actions were proclaimed a success on economic terms. This economic rationale ( Foreman & Hayward 1993: 8 ), forms the basis for strategic arguments over how to increase the effectiveness and impact of such tactics. It is these I wish to look at now. To take Earth Nights as an example, "A national Earth Night gives the opportunity for all groups to hit on the same night and so make the amount of damage more apparent. Instead of having 2 machines and a battery hen unit being hit in one night, we have 100 machines and 50 battery units being trashed. In this way we can capture the media and so make our arguments ram home" ( *Do or Die* 1993a: 7; cf *EF!AU* No.8 1993: 2; No.29 1996: 6; No.30 1996: 6 ). Yet focussing acts of sabotage on one publicly advertised night would clearly become ineffective if all a controversial company needed to do was to increase security on one day of the year. Thus it is that most strategic arguments are made running: they do not hold firm for all time, and they only make sense when understood as part of an ongoing dialogue.

In an appraisal of the tactic, CM writes that "if the sole purpose of ecotage is to make an adverse financial impact ... it must be judged a success" ( 2003: 85; cf *The Havoc Mass* 2004: 18 ). In the UK this was most notably the case with anti-GM direct action, prompting repeated withdrawals, cancellations and expressions of dismay from GM advocates, such as Professor Michael Wilson who stated "I am afraid that the Luddites have effectively won" ( quoted in *The Independent*, 4.7.2004: ). Although corporations may seek to neutralise the impact of sabotage by passing on the cost to customers, CM asserts that in the case of timber felling, for example, "a higher cost for wood products will inevitably mean that fewer wood products are bought" ( 2003: 84 ), furthermore, and we shall see that in the case of peat it was not separated off from other forms of activism. We shall also, however, note that much sabotage was motivated by the urgent need for ecological defence or restoration, not just economics.

In 6.4 we explored criticisms of covert sabotage from the perspectives of non-violent and mass movement discourses of change, but CM also claims it as a success in terms of public impact and consciousness changing: "The radical environmental message, whether concerning old growth or dolphins, would not be receiving the widespread coverage it is today were it not for the 'publicity value' of monkeywrenching" ( 2003: 85 ). Similar claims have been made for animal rights militancy ( Garner 1998 ). Plows, Wall & Doherty argue that the effect of economic sabotage "is greater when combined with public campaigns against the same targets" ( 2004: 209-210 ), and Carter returns us to

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<sup>169</sup> Compare this with Curtin's statement that "The ALF has never been an organisation – it has only ever been there in spirit. It simply comes from the heart" ( c2001: 8 ).



the themes of Chapters 4 and 5, when he argues that ecotage has a significant role to play in the long-term progression to a ecological society:

“Given a mounting concern for the condition of the environment in response to increasing ecological destruction, polluting industries could expect to suffer more and more from a growing willingness by activists to engage in ecologically-motivated sabotage ... This could easily reach a stage where pollution would no longer pay” ( 1999: 241; cf Carter 1998: 29-47 ).

Ecotage has thus a legitimate place within both the radical green project considered in Chapter 4, and the process of getting ‘from here to there’ considered in Chapter 5. In the US, ELF actions escalated into spectacular arsons such as that at Vail in 1998: the FBI have recorded 600 ELF and ALF actions since 1996, causing damage worth more than \$40,000,000 US dollars ( FBI 12.2.2002 ). The incident at Vail encouraged a split between EF!US and the ELF similar to that in the UK, and the ELF became more concrete and organised, with a ‘Press Office’ and self-appointed publicity officer. In the next section I shall present anarchist critical appraisals of this ELF model, but in the UK “the ELF failed to establish itself because activists rejected the idea of a specific group which would base its strategy on ecotage as its principal form of action” ( Plows, Wall & Doherty 2004: 207 ), and UK EDA has by contrast demonstrated “a pattern of many small acts of sabotage” ( 2004: 205 ), which *Do or Die* emphasise was mostly embedded in, and undertaken by “by those campaigners onsite” ( 2003: 16-17 ). I argue that this format escapes the chief anarchist criticisms, and provides a much healthier movement milieu for anarchist themes and empowering practices: the assessment of peat direct action in 6.5.4 shall support this view.

### 6.5.3

#### **Anarchism and the Earth Liberation Front**

In 6.2 I distinguished attitudes to sabotage as the defining difference between radical groups such as EF! and Sea Shepherd, and liberal groups such as FoE and Greenpeace: this was given practical demonstration in episodes such as the Foe-EF! rupture at Twyford. In this section, however, I will present a form of sabotage that is clearly not liberal, but which still failed to escape the other negative dynamics that, in 5.2.1 and 5.3.3, Greenpeace was accused. I shall therefore be bringing the ethics of the anarchist revolutionary tradition to bear on forms of militant ecological direct action, in order to explore tensions and orient our understanding toward ‘best practice’.

Arguing from a materialist and militaristic framework, green anarchists in the US have argued that activists should see the enemy as a configuration with strategic pressure points ( BGN 2002: 15 ). UK adherents to this line have argued that a “strategic review is needed to tell us where best to hit the System” ( GA 1999: 4 ). An early contributor to *Do or Die*, for example, argued that “It is very hard to unbuild a freeway, dam, clearcut, or other such atrocity”, but “there are ‘bottlenecks’ where a small effort on the part of the activist can have an enormous effect in hindering or stopping that process ( environmental jujitsu ). Your job is to find and exploit those pressure points” ( *Do or Die* 1993a: 12; cf Reinsborough 2003 ). On this occasion, heavy machinery was identified as the crux: on certain road camps one specific, even unique piece of equipment was essential for the eviction and was therefore carefully targeted by sabotage. Indeed, it lies in no contradiction to the passionate and spontaneous ethos argued for Earth First! in 5.3, to recognise the strategic thinking that also lay behind its tactics: “standing back, viewing the whole operation, identifying a weak point, and going for it mercilessly. The perennial spanner in the works – using the element of surprise and doing the unexpected” ( *Do or Die* 2000: 176; Scarce 1990: 5 ).

Such ‘strategic thinking’, however, has been given a heavier tone by Ted Kaczynski, the ‘Unabomber’ whose views have been publicised in the US anti-civilisation press ( notably *Green Anarchy* whose editorial staff includes the leading primitivist theorist John Zerzan ) ( Eggen and Gates *Washington Post* 27.7.2002 ). He writes that activists should adopt “The principle ... that in any form of conflict, if you want to win, you must hit your adversary where it hurts”: not the fist but the sensitive and vulnerable parts ( Kaczynski 2002: 1 ). He argues, for example, that “Smashing up McDonald’s or



Starbuck's is pointless" and "is not a revolutionary activity. Even if every fast-food chain in the world were wiped out the techno-industrial system would suffer only minimal harm as a result" (2002: 1). The same goes for raiding fur farms ("As a means of weakening the techno-industrial system this activity is utterly useless") and the timber industry: another 'fist'. The 'vital organs' in the view of Kaczynski and others are communications, computers, propaganda, biotechnology and the electric-power industry (Kaczynski 2002: 18). Note that it is not the militancy of the tactic, but the strategic thinking behind it, that marks the distinction and which is the topic of concern here.

The edition of *Green Anarchy* which followed demurred from "the authoritarian and limited advice" Kaczynski offered, instead celebrating the spirit of spontaneous revolt.<sup>170</sup> Grounded in the anarchist ideals of mass participation and empowerment (which Kaczynski is not), the anarchist editors celebrated acts of revolt not as "some massified, preplanned action, but the outcome of spontaneous rage" (Rage 2002: 1). In contrast to Kaczynski's presentation of cold, tactically perfect revolts, they argue that "It is in this rage and spontaneity that we find the spirit of resistance" (2002: 1). The sabotage guides of the UK offer cool and careful security advice, insisting that ecosabotage is "not about love and rage" or vandalism, but sensible, targeted and strategic (Ozymandias: 1, 3.1; cf Foreman & Hayward 1993: 9), but I concur with Plows, Wall & Doherty that, certainly in the UK, "Anger, frustration, love – passionate emotions fuel the fire of ecotage" (2004: 208).

The difference between the *Gay* editors and Kaczynski is worth noting, as it provides a marker between anarchist and authoritarian forms of violence.<sup>171</sup> Although the anti-civilisation current of anarchism is held at arms-length from mainstream British anarchism, it is a body of theory that can nonetheless support many of the same tactics: those "which allow the dispossessed to seize direct control of their lives – strikes, riots, squatting and occupations of streets and neighbourhoods" (Rage 2002: 8). This perspective supports an analysis of ELF activity as merely one organised manifestation of a much wider (and not necessarily green) tendency to sabotage: "the dispossessed will always be resisting work and commodity relations by slacking off on the job, shop-lifting, dodging fares and many other tactics" (ASAN 2002: 8). This fits the view of everyday sabotage contained within the mainstream anarchist tradition (Sprouse 1992), as I considered in 6.3.5.

Primal Rage note that "not all revolt is equitable with the fight scenario that Ted uses as his analogy" (2002: 1). This is the most important point of their argument for me, one which tends to be lost amongst the US anti-civilisation journals and their UK following, such as *Green Anarchist*. They commonly utilise war metaphors not just in their theory but also in the general format of their papers, such as the "prisoners of war" listing. Often these listings (similar versions of which are also features of *Gay* and ALFSG), give inordinate attention to examples of violence, particularly bombs, arson and shootings. *Green Anarchist* became reviled amongst mainstream UK anarchists when it opined that the poison gas attacks of the Aum cult, IRA bombs and the Oklahoma bombing were tactically 'inspirational' (AF 1998d; cf Booth in GA No.51 1998). Watson points out that such 'revolt' is not anarchist because it is indiscriminate in its victims, and because it "wilfully disregards the intimate connection between means and ends" (1998: 61), and Atton comments that "it is difficult to see how such random acts of extreme violence and cruelty could be fitted into any anarchist philosophy" (1999: 29).<sup>172</sup>

I also share grave doubts about the relation between the 'spectacular' acts beloved of some anti-civilisationists, and the social, organisational and political process that might lead to an anarchist world (cf Heller [C] 1999: 33). There has been a class-struggle, anarcho-syndicalist articulation of this

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<sup>170</sup> Implying a contrast with Kaczynski, the authors state that "we have no notions of grandeur as to a vantage point of ours" and presented their ideas as a humble "offering". This avowed distinction between anarchist and authoritarian primitivism maps onto the anarchist viewpoint of bottom-up revolution, and the assertion in Chapter 3 of an anarchist perspective that knowledge is not top-down but everyone's.

<sup>171</sup> The recognition of anarchist themes is made especially clear because a different 'brand' of anarchism – primitivism or anti-civilisation anarchism – is involved: one with which I do not identify and was not overly-familiar with. The articulation of recognisably anarchist arguments and principles therefore 'stood out'.

<sup>172</sup> Atton charts the progression of GA's editorial line from an inclusive, NVDA-supporting content in the mid-1980s to a "a blend of theoretical critique (Moore, Zerzan) and the (apparently indiscriminate) support of terroristic violence" by the late nineties (Atton 1999: 31). Watson notes that "It is one thing to write critically about the dialectic of civilisation and empire, its origins and contradictions, and to challenge the assumptions embedded in the ideology of progress. It's quite another to think you're forging a political tendency to carry out civilisation's destruction ... this is a fantasy contaminated by today's style of paranoid politics, an ugly and authoritarian fantasy" (1997). It should further be noted, however, that in 2001, GA split into rival editions, one of which returned to a markedly more inclusive, liberal and non-violent editorial line, although it failed to carry much of the previous readership with it.



concern. A correspondent to *Green Anarchy*, for example, writes: "The primitivists try to seize on acts of revolutionary violence and focus on them, rather than constructively assess the movement-building that takes place. Why? Because they aren't anarchists, and aren't interested in the construction of anarchist federations" ( 'Bakunin' 2002: 3 ). Although this was part of an unnecessarily sectarian exchange of generalisations, the argument is given weight by the Italian insurrectionist Alfredo Bonanno's suggestion that "In the past hypothesis where a strong working class existed, one could fool oneself about this passage and organise accordingly" ( 1998: 23 ). With the absence of this 'fulcrum of change', it is feared that only violence fills the gap ( Richard Livermore in *Freedom* 24.1.2004: 6 ). As I argued in Chapter 2, however, I consider a mechanistic view of class struggle as limited an analogy for social change as a militaristic conception of 'the system' as an organism that can be killed through destruction of its physical components. My own view is that the diverse, grassroots and often small-scale EDA covered in this thesis has an equal validity and potential to the struggles of the industrial workforce.

An angle from which we can more usefully address this issue is with the anarchist organisational critique. The ELF, underground, anonymous and decentralised as it is, might appear to share affinity with the disorganisations of practical, activist anarchism. Yet a useful critique has emerged of the actual form in which ELF activity has become ordered in the USA. ASAN argues that "As a 'front', the ELF takes a bit of the Che Guevara image of third-world 'national liberation' movements such as the Algerian 'National Liberation Front'" ( 2002 : 8 ), and a letter in *Do or Die* similarly stated that "Abbreviations such as the ALF, IRA, EDR, EDF, RAF, PLO and even ELF simply instil fear. They put a negative image across. Lets leave our actions to be the message. By turning monkeywrenching into the act of some shady sounding organisation, rather than the emotional reaction of people against the machine, we alienate a lot of potential activists and give the capitalist propagandists a handy label which they can use" ( *Do or Die* 1993b: 53; cf IE 2005: 21; TTHH 2000: 1 ).

There are various anarchist points brought into service in this critique. First, there is the critique of authoritarian revolutionaries, who perpetuated authoritarian power-relations even as they struggled against the dominant power of the time ( Holloway 2002 ). Pointing out that the real-life 'fronts' ended up imposing gulags, ASAN condemn "the organisational setup of the ELF as reinforcing many of this society's relations of representation, specialisation and authority at the same time it challenges the immediate power of the system" ( 2002: 8 ).

Second, and related to this point, ASAN argue that "The underground cells of the ELF windup as essentially specialists in destruction, intentionally cut-off from the entire milieu by the necessary security culture" ( 2002: 8 ). With the case of the anti-GM movement, TTHH state that the "gulf between the 'elite cadre' of activists and the majority whose ( even largely passive ) support is so crucial, is big and problematic enough already. There is a danger of becoming isolated" ( TTHH 2000: 1 ). The anarchist conception of revolution is one that must involve everybody and affect everybody: it cannot be won by an elite using force of arms or expertise on some distant battlefield.

Third, ASAN argue on lines familiar from the critique of Genetix Snowball in 6.4.4, that ELF activism is disempowering, indeed "the more elaborate the vandalism pulled-off by ELF cells, the more ... most people feel like they could never join such an effort" ( 2002: 8 ). This line of critique has an additional support from the condemnation of the division between 'action teams' and 'supporters' in Greenpeace's model of activism ( see 5.2.1 and 5.3.3 ). The danger is that "'ELF supporters' windup as followers, viewing their activity as just an adjunct to the 'real work' of the ELF" ( ASAN 2002: 8; cf McAllister Groves 2001: 213 ).

Fourth, the ELF model can be condemned under the terms of the 'Social Relationship' critique of attentats, propaganda of the deed and 'guerrillaism' considered in 6.3.3. TTHH thus warn against falling into the trap of "those who wish to conceal the exploitative and destructive nature of capitalism to seek out individuals to blame and punish, rather than addressing the system" ( TTHH 2000: 1 ). As I have insisted throughout the thesis, anarchists conceptualise the problem as a 'system', and as this section makes clear, this simple notion translates into a sensitive analysis and practice of models and processes of change.

Fifth, the ELF are criticised for being "dependent on the mainstream media to report their actions, which otherwise do not touch the lives of the mass of dispossessed people" ( ASAN 2002: 8; cf Ruins



2003: ).<sup>173</sup> This not only gives power away to the media conglomerates, preventing the action from being insufficiently 'direct', but it also indicates the action is 'spectacular' or merely political, as opposed to a fully social and embedded action that takes place amongst "the day-to-day lives of ordinary people" ( Bufe 1998 ).

ELF activists in the US have responded to this critique by, for example, denying "the myth that we who feel strongly enough to take action are not part of the 'mass of dispossessed people'. It is precisely because we are part of the dispossessed masses that we feel the loss caused by society's destruction of, and alienation from nature, enough to be driven to act. Those who sit on their asses and write about inspiring the masses fail to realise that the greatest inspiration is action" ( Critter 2002: 9; cf AEAG 2001: 22 ).<sup>174</sup> Yet looked at from an organisational point of view, the form of ELF activism does imply a division between the actors and the masses, mediated through communiqués and interviews by the press office. As another critic suggests, "Communiques/Press Releases are a broken model", and "Media Obsession Reinforces Apathy" ( TEP 2003: 12; cf TTHH 2000: 1 ). Although the press release is only one small part of ELF activity, it is a useful handle for this critique, as revealing of the pernicious social relations whose demise is the aim of anarchism.

Guerrillaism, even when undertaken collectively and with the intent of being 'of the people' as well as 'for the people', is condemned as a variant of vanguardism ( Skirda 2002: 54; AF 2001c: 7 ). Bufe argues that "guerrillas attempt to act for the people – attempting to substitute individual acts for mass actions – thus perpetuating the division between leaders and followers ( in this case, spectators )" ( 1998 ). Doherty notes that greens argue "any turn to violent strategies would lead to a more elitist underground organisation" ( 2002: 6 ). The anarchist critique of those who advocate 'extreme' methods abstracted from social context. is not the same as a condemnation of violence, however, as demonstrated by class war's celebration of "mass working class violence, out in the open' not created or led by Class War or others, but developing according to its own dynamic, as a means of self-empowerment" ( CW 1997: 5 ).

The 'black bloc' which came to the fore in the anti-globalisation protests of 1999 onwards, triggered another anarchist elaboration of many of the same themes. The black block, which began as a tactic of dressing the same when engaged in property destruction or street fighting, in order to hinder easy identification by the police, was quickly mistranslated into an organisation: as a club with a name and identity, and to which you had to belong, or admire from afar ( Grosscup & Doyle 2002: 1; Dixon 2001: 23 ). It was criticised by anarchists for its uniform and militaristic model ( AF 2001d: 9 ), and for mistaking the militancy of a tactic – economic damage - for a revolutionary quality: "property destruction, spray paints and looking menacing on television is clearly not enough to bring on a revolution" ( AF 2001d: 14; cf Grosscup & Doyle 2002: 2 ). In a discourse of revolutionary ethics equally similar to that applied to the ELF, the black bloc was accused of being "substitutionalist" ( AF 2001d: 10 ) ( instead of being 'of the people, by the people' ), and it was challenged to provide in its actions and organisation a "model for an anarchist and free society" ( AF 2001d: 11 ). Here, the textual output of black bloc participants, which had chiefly focussed on condemning 'fluffies'; defending economic sabotage ( *Do or Die* 2000: 125 ); and seeking to find a more strategically effective method of continuing their style of activism ( which tended to increase "centralisation and militarisation" ( AEAG 2001: 51 ) ), was challenged to move from a strategic mindset to an ethical one: "Rather than examining our practice first and foremost on the level of tactics and strategies, of effectiveness in battle, our first priority should rather be to examine them in terms of whether they indeed reflect and are therefore capable of creating – not just in the future, but also here and now – our aims. Do they reflect in practice the principle of individuals self-determination and the collective struggle of individual realization?" ( AEAG 2001: 52 ). In all these criticisms and clashes of themes, the case of the Black Bloc reinforced all the points made with regard to the ELF in this section.

A final warning made regarding ELF or guerrilla-style activism is that, as with propaganda of the deed, 'spectacular' acts may give "the state extra leverage in using political repression against individuals

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<sup>173</sup> Note that precisely *because* the ELF is underground ( and also draws on the romance of that ), the communication with the 'above ground world' becomes all the more central, hence the form of the communiqué and the role of the press office. The tension within the 'effectiveness' of such covert actions is between the ability to escape undetected and strike again ( the low arrest count is claimed as the ELF's particular strength ( MPCL 2002 ) ), and the desire to publicise the efforts ( to give the action impact ). This tension between anonymity and notoriety cannot be easily dissolved.

<sup>174</sup> That may be so, but the textual output of that current tends to denigrate such social projects, and in romanticising street riots and arson attacks the anti-civilisation press are in danger of repeating all the dangers of the 'Propaganda of the Deed' years ( see 6.3.3 ).



and the left in general” ( Bufe 1998 ). We noted in 5.5.2 that anarchists anticipate repression of successful resistance movements anyway ( *EF!AU* No.26 1996: 3; cf Corr 1999: 131 ), but there is a difference in that “A developing mass movement ... will also produce numbers of people with clear aims and the organised means of reaching them” ( Bufe 1998: 6; cf Carter 1971: 106 ), whereas “When by their own actions terrorists serve such ends, they are contributing to the ... closing of various options for the spreading of ideas before they have been fully utilised” ( Bufe 1998: 5; cf Tolstoy 1990: 15; Burch 2002: 54 ). It was on these grounds ( of building a mass movement ) that Northern California Earth First! famously renounced tree-spiking as a tactic and issued a ‘code of non-violence’ in 198?: “Now the workers [ and ] ... the peace movement could ally with us.” ( Bari 1997a ). In the US context, this declaration thus made tactical sense,<sup>175</sup> yet the same extremes of repression and escalation have not forced the issue in the UK.

Corresponding to increased state repression, several commentators have warned that environmental direct action was becoming more and more covert, mirroring in many ways the development of the animal liberation movement ( *EF!AU* No.26 1996: 3; Goodwin 1996a: 18-19 ). This is a concern because of the apparent logic of escalation in the animal liberation movement ( Durham 1995: ), such that Dominick states from an anarchist viewpoint that “the tactics of the animal lib movement are in dire need of critique. From pointless protests to violent attacks, the movement has become increasingly angry and decreasingly grounded” ( 1996: 18 ). The development of bombs recalls the same development in anarchist propaganda of the deed years, from small, jokish gadgets, to “serious, lethal devices” ( Skirda 2002: 54; cf McAllister Groves 2001: 213 ). In 3.3.5 I noted the concern that sabotage would lead to violence, and in 6.4.3 I noted that in the field of anti-GM campaigning more intimidatory tactics had been used ( WRGO 1998: 2; TTHH 2000: ).

This would seem to be supported by movement statements such as “If the government uses dirty tricks and violence to perpetrate gross acts of vandalism then why shouldn’t their opposition?” ( PMW 1993: 1 ). Yet in the UK the ELF has stayed largely low-key, restraint has been shown in the forms of sabotage used, and a media mechanism has not developed in the US form. Plows, Wall & Doherty suggest that eco-saboteurs are “not isolated from ties with a wider activist community and therefore unlikely to undergo the kind of psychological transformation noted in leftist terrorist groups of the 1970s” ( 2004: 217 ). I will detail how sabotage remained embedded in a broader, more participatory campaign in 6.5.4.

#### 6.5.4

##### Peat Alert!

“Restoration management in its simplest form involves ... blocking of ditches in order to raise the water table” ( ‘The Cumbria Biodiversity Action Plan’ 2001: 257 ).

Stopping peat extraction from habitats such as lowland raised mires is an environmental struggle characterised by ( a ) defending specific sites, as with the anti-roads movement and ( b ) justification on the conventional conservationist grounds of biodiversity, wildlife and ecological stability ( RSPB & YWT 1998 ). It also links with both the wider ecological themes of climate change and of protecting ‘wilderness’, and it fits *Do or Die*’s strategic identification of “Land deemed ecologically or strategically of prime national importance, which the movement as a whole can recognise and act on” ( 2003: 62 ). Chiefly, the repertoires of the peat campaign were justified on grounds of ecological urgency: “It may not be possible to restore the site as a peatland if Scotts manage to cut as much as they want THIS SEASON” ( PA! ‘Mass Trespass on Hatfield Moor’ 2001; cf PA! ‘Jim Thackerey’ 16.7.2001 ). Peat direct action saw a deployment and cross-fertilisation of blockading, anti-enclosure mass trespassing, and street partying repertoires from different fields of EDA, all within a general umbrella of sabotage. I will argue that this particular field of EDA made sabotage accessible,

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<sup>175</sup> Note that this episode should not be misconstrued as a principled rejection of sabotage as violent: “Ecofeminists did not denounce monkeywrenching, but encouraged it by timber workers as a means to disrupt the labor process and slow the cutting of trees. Workers were no longer viewed as necessary targets of sabotage, they were viewed as potential eco-saboteurs” ( Jeffrey Shantz cited in Bell 2003: 9 ).



participatory and grounded in a broader movement, in a way that the notions of an organised and distinct 'ELF' are not.

I noted in 6.5.2 that peat was a decisive issue at the beginning of Earth First!'s ( and the ELF's ) history when on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1992, "a young Earth First! caused £100,000 damage to machinery that was digging up peat on Thorne and Hatfield Moors" ( RTP 2002 ). The saboteurs' communiqué placed them squarely within the no-compromise heart of EF!:

**"All our peat bogs must be preserved in their entirety, for the sake of the plants, animals and our national heritage. Cynically donating small amounts will do no good. The water table will drop, and the bog will dry out and die, unless it is preserved fully. FISIONS MUST LEAVE ALL OF IT ALONE – NOW!" ( GA No.30 1992: 6 ).**

This sentiment of no compromise was previously declared by William Bunting, a local anarchist, ecological saboteur and anti-enclosure activist active in the 1970s: "the essence of conservation lies with one simple word, NO! Don't become like those prostitutes in the Nature Conservancy. Say no, mean no, fight to retain the places we have" ( *Do or Die* 2003: 246-257; cf Caufield 1991: 45 ). Informed by the institutionalisation thesis of 5.2.1, it was this recurrent tradition of non-institutionalised direct action ( romantically linked to the pre-industrial 'bog people' of the area, famous for their ungovernability ( 'Mass Trespass on Hatfield Moor' 2002; *DA* No.23 2002 : 9; cf Booth 1997: 24 ) ), that was contrasted to the compromised approach of conventional groups such as FoE ( *GA* No.30 1992: 6 ). As with other issues, the direct action element was only one, wave-like component and it existed alongside liberal campaigning by local conservationists and ENGOs, which included writing to MPs and calling for stronger legislation ( *WT* n.d. ). As "75% of the peat sold goes to domestic gardeners" ( *EF!AU* No.80 2001/2002: 4 ), the solution to the problem was also brought home in the holistic, lifestyle approach considered in 5.3.6: in this case, chiefly gardening without peat. This was supported by tactics similar to those used in the GM issue: boycotting and pressuring retailers and large users ( such as councils ) to adopt stronger policies on peat ( *EF!AU* No.80 2001/2002: 5; *PA!* June Newsletter 2002 ).

The most popular and ecological form of direct action against peat extraction was a form of sabotage not primarily viewed as an economic strategy but in terms of ecological defence and restoration. William Bunting's group of self-styled 'Beavers' had previously used dam-building at Thorne moors to prevent ecological devastation ( Caufield 1991 ), and EF! activists brought the repertoire brought back into use from 2001 to 2003. EF! trespasses onto the site also acted as sabotage ( a ) by preventing work for the day and ( b ) by filling in drainage ditches. These forms of sabotage worked *with* the seasons and the site: the trespasses were chosen for dates between Easter and October, on the basis that "Peat milling can only be done when the peat is dry enough to support heavy machinery" ( *PA!* 30.9.2001; *PA EF!AU* No.80 2001-2002: 5 ). Much of the sabotage was intended to prevent the ground drying out, or obstruct the machinery used to strip the peat from the dried-out surface, layer by layer: see Figure F6.11.

'Peat Alert', a temporary, issue-specific network, was set up by EF! groups, and co-ordinated a 'National Day of Action' on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2002, which saw Scotts Head Office occupied in Surrey, its Fertiliser plants blockaded in Suffolk and disrupted in East Yorkshire, a 'home and garden plant' occupied in North Wales, trespasses and ditch-filling on Hatfield Moor and a Newcastle group's trespass on Wedholme Flow ( *TGAL* No.53 2002: 11; *EF!AU* No.81 2002: 3; No.82 2002: 'Day of Action Against Scotts' *PA!* website ).



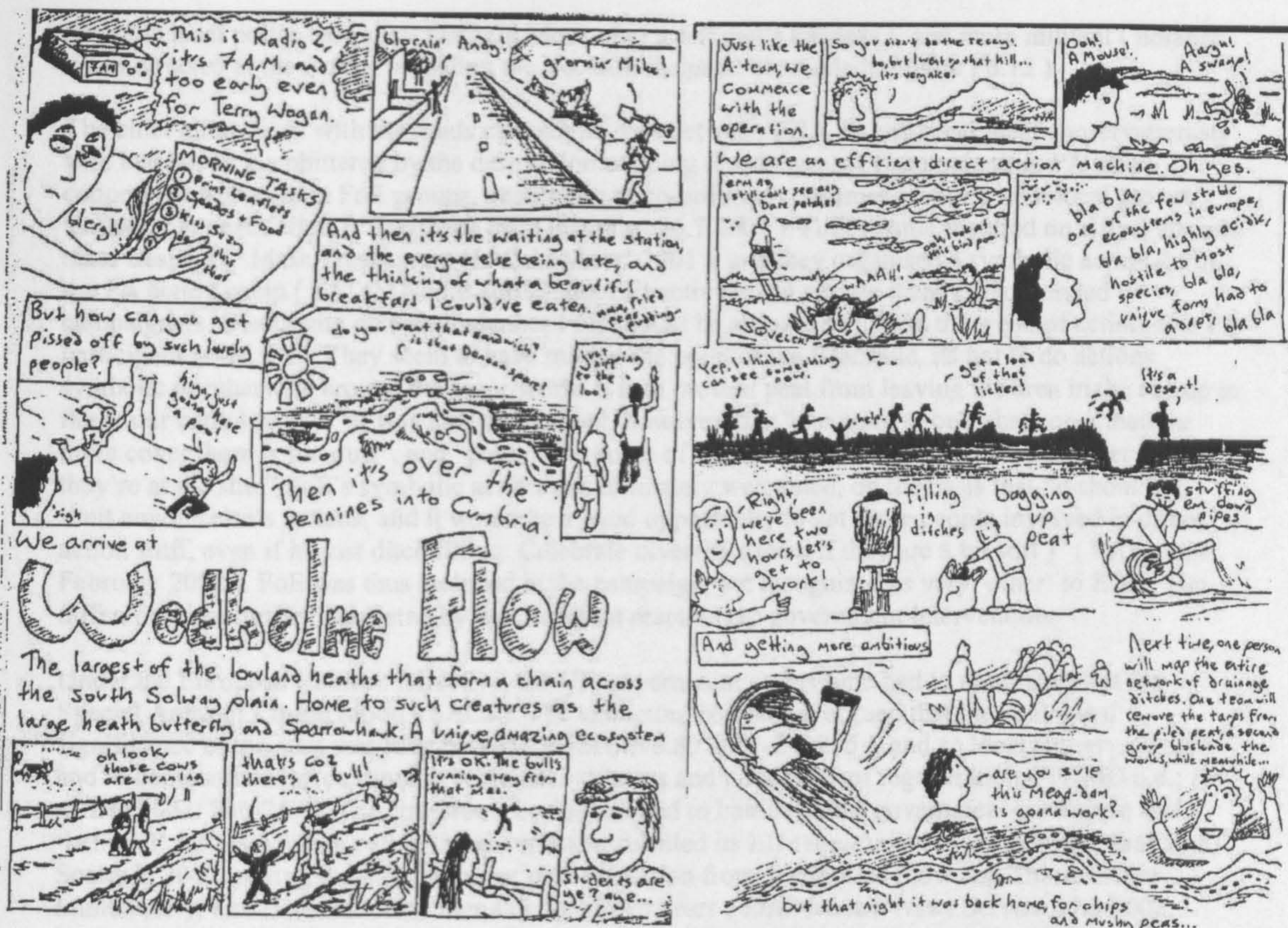


Figure F6.11 Wedholme Flow, by author.

At other trespasses the sabotage element was openly talked about: "Lots of drainage ditches were blocked, various big bits of machinery were disabled and one peat train derailed itself" ( PA! 30.9.2001 ), and on occasion night-time sabotage followed on from day-time mass trespasses ( power cables at Hatfield were sabotaged on Mayday 2002, for example, soon after the peat camp, below ). Some sabotage is referred to as the act of 'pixies', and "peat pixies" feature in *TGAL* ( No.51 2002: 4 ). The merging of trespass and sabotage repertoires demonstrates the fluidity EDA tactics that I characterised in 5.3.5. At one trespass, conversations overheard between police and manager, that "disrupting the factory works would cause them massive problems" ( PA! 30.9.2001 ), encouraged a shift of focus and in November 2001 around 30 people tried to shut down machinery, occupy offices and block the bridge to the works: additional acts of sabotage, such as "missing keys", accompanied the action ( PA! 2.12.2001 ). Acts of sabotage were not here isolated from the flexible dynamics of grassroots EDA.

The economic logic considered in previous sections was deployed, with economically vulnerable companies targeted at economically significant times of the year: "We want to target the Scotts Company in the run up to the Easter bank holiday weekend. This is the busiest time of year for the peat industry, and we hope that strong action at this time will severely affect their operations" ( RTP 2002; cf My notes 3.9.2002<sup>176</sup> ). The PA! website lists holdings and addresses, including "People to bother: some key personnel, their telephone number, e-mail addresses and so on" ( PA website; cf Corporate Watch 2003 ). The economic and pestering strategies utilised in the anti-roads and other environmental campaigns, and particularly animal rights campaigns, were thus given another airing.

Elements of secrecy came into some of Peat Alert!'s plans, such as those codenamed 'Project Y' and 'Project Likely Lads': "Sorry to be so vague, I don't know who reads your post, but I know who reads mine sometimes!" ( PA! 'Feedback from meeting' 26.7.2002 ). Overall, however, the sabotage was notable for the unusual openness and accessibility. This was not done in a rigid, Genetix Snowball format, furthermore but in a messy, mixed form that included both covert night-time action by small experienced affinity groups, and open daytime action involving a whole mixture of people. The sabotage was both ecological and economic, and could be both friendly ( I recall smiles and waves

<sup>176</sup> Concerning the firm working Crowle Moor: "There's a feeling that this small family firm could be put out of business" ( 3.9.2002 ).



from the local police as we left Hatfield Moor after a full day's trespass ), and more militant ( notably when directed at the works, including the 'reclaim the peat' blockade in Figure F6.12 ).

The chief alliance, as with the roads campaigns, was between EDA activists and local conservationists who had become embittered by the destruction ongoing despite years of campaigning. PA also cooperated with certain FoE groups, attempting to co-ordinate consumer pressure with local groups leafleting at peat outlets ( 'Feedback from meeting' 26.7.2002 ). FoE's name featured on a flyer for one mass trespass ( 'Mass Trespass on Hatfield Moor' 2001 ), and they organised a symbolic action during the PA action camp ( *EF!AU* No.82 2002 ), but EF! activists did not see them as likeminded campaigners. Discussing on email whether FoE should be allowed to join in the week of action, one PA participant noted that "They seem to have missed the point of the Blockade, its not to do actions symbolic or otherwise around the moor/works it is to prevent peat from leaving the area in the run up to the easter bank holiday." It was also pointed out, however, that "the more people that come then the more cover there is for stuff", and "potentially some of them may want to be involved in other things if they're at the site." FoE's symbolic action was ultimately welcomed, on the basis that "it shouldn't limit anyone else's actions, and it would be a good opportunity to get more people involved in direct action stuff, even if its just ditch filling. Celebrate diversity ( even if they are a bit soft )" ( PA! emails February 2002 ). FoE was thus included in the campaign, yet recognised as very 'other' to EDA. The difference was further illustrated by the divergent reactions to government intervention.

Under the European Habitats Directive, the UK government at this time had to nominate sites for Special Areas of Conservation ( SACs ). The extracting companies argued that the ecological significance of the sites was long passed ( *EF!AU* No.80 2001-2002: 5 ), and so local conservationists had to demonstrate the continuing ecological richness and possibility of regeneration ( THMC n.d.; *Do or Die* 2003: 246-257 ). This grassroots ecologism had to battle against government unconcern and 'betrayal' for many years before the government fulfilled its EU requirement by arranging a deal with Scotts in 2002, paying them for stopping peat extraction from Wedholme Flow and Thorne Moor immediately, and Hatfield Moor after a delay of two years ( *Environment News Service* 27.3.2002; Harper 2002: 76-78 ). This does fit the demands of the RSPB, PCC and Thorne & Hatfield Moors Conservation Forum - "the Government must act now" ( RSPB & YWT 1998 ) and it was welcomed by groups such as FoE ( PA! 27.2.2002 ). PA!, however, gave it only a grudging welcome, objecting to the continued digging at Hatfield and at other peatland sites, and worrying that "the problem may well be shifted overseas" with imported peat destroying bogs in, for example, the Baltic states ( PA! 27.2.2002 ). This demonstrates the global analysis that EDA incorporated into its stuggles over local sites: see 5.3.5.

Where ENGOs saw this as a victory and scaled down their campaigning on the issue, therefore, the groups connected to Peat Alert! kept up their activities: indeed escalated them with an action camp in April 2002. This included an impressive squatted camp ( see Figure F6.12 ) and an attempt to introduce 'Reclaim the Streets' repertoires to the peat issue ( see 7.2 ) ( *Schnews* 2002: 253:



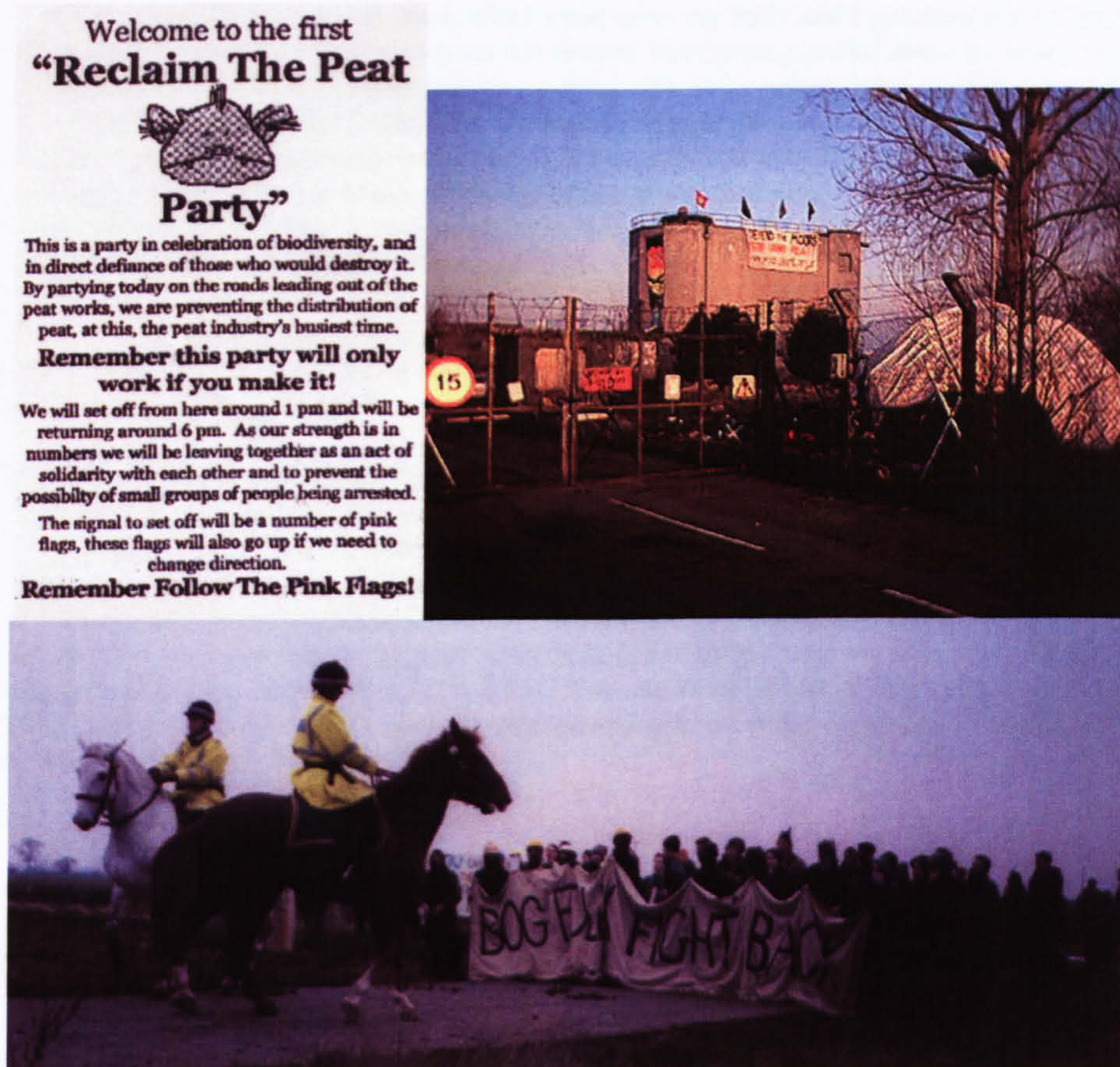


Figure F6.12 'Reclaim the Peat' flyer, Blockade and Squatted camp from the 2002 action week

This week of action was followed by "a mass trespass on Hatfield Moor in memory of Benny Rothman, leader of the original Kinder Scout Mass Trespass, who died on January 23rd" ( 'mass trespass 11.05.02' PA website ). Rothman had also spoken "at the mass injunction-breaking trespass at Twyford Down in 1993" ( *Do or Die* 2003: 246-257 ), and the linkage between the discourse of ecological restoration ( sabotage ), and that of anti-enclosure ( and 'reclaiming' ), was consciously made: "This trespass is also to protest against the enclosure and subsequent destruction of this ecologically important site. This event combines access to the moor to many people who will never have seen the devastation first hand. Whilst there we will be stopping peat extraction and undertaking ecological restoration" ( 'mass trespass 11.05.02' PA! website; cf *DA* No.23 2002: 9 ).

As a non-NIMBY manifestation of EDA, peat direct action did not solely confine itself to Hatfield, or end when the destruction there ceased. Rather, additional targets were identified, such as the William Sinclair company, who extracted at Solway Moss in Cumbria and were threatening to take the SAC decision to judicial review: "time to let them feel a bit of heat I think!" ( *Peat Alert! News* June 2002 ). A second action camp from 28<sup>th</sup> August to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2002 launched a week of daily actions ( *Do or Die* 2003: ), in which I participated at Solway Moss, where my notes record the experience:

"I hadn't known which was the target until I turned up in Carlisle on the day. But luckily I'd done a summary recce of the site on the Monday, and as no-one else had this made me a relative expert: I told people the snippets that I knew, in the van. One group occupied the office in Carlisle, not expecting arrest but receiving it until released without charge. The larger group – about 15 of us – invaded the works: our first look at it ( the lairy workers meant that most of didn't wanna hang around ). We trapped in 9 lorries – very good timing on our part, but then we wandered and ended up away from the important work going on, by a shitty little digger that people wanted to trash – and then the police came round the corner. I'd reckoned that we could easily escape to the road but when I went ahead to check, I found the small beck was flooded and impassable. I crossed it once, fast water up to my knees and a



little scary, but on the way back it had risen up to my balls and I got dead scared holding fast to the taut barbed wire that crossed the stream. Feet getting pulled away by water. I felt really shit and guilty for leading people into a dead-end, and contemplated making a run for it alone if everyone was getting nicked for trashing the digger. But luckily the police had turned up just before serious damage was done, and we could leisurely leave via a farm. I still feel guilty though. Everyone was soaked from the rain and we sped away to get charity-shop dry clothes. Compared to the other action camp days, this was less effective – largely because it hadn't been properly reced" ( My Notes 3.9.2002 ).

The messy, exciting and disorganised experience of peat direct action recorded in my notes, is evocative of many of the mass action days at Hatfield, and stands at a far remove from the representations of ELF in the USA.

The Peat Alert network is currently dormant, as are the peatworks of Thorne, Hatfield and Wedholme Flow. Echoes of direct action continue to be heard, however, such as the blockade of Scott's factory and distribution centre in January 2003 ( 'Scotts shut down in Ipswich' 16.1.2003 ), and the significant property destruction reported at the end of 2004 at a peat processing site in Somerset. The plant involved used peat from or near five SSSIs, all within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: it was an act of destruction motivated by ecological restoration ( Jane 2005 ). It is my view that this ecological motivation is sufficiently strong that, even if EF!, PA! and the ELF completely disappeared, another grouping or mobilisation would be likely to emerge and apply similar repertoires of direct restoration, just as Bunting's Beavers did in the 1970s.

### 6.5.5

#### Conclusion

Where the anti-GM sabotage of 6.4 was considered in terms of the critical dialogue between an open, rigid, ploughshares-style method, and a covert, anonymous style more redolent of the animal liberation movement and EF!US, in the sections of 6.5 it is another tension which I explore. This is the tension between two different attitudes to sabotage: calculated economic strategy predicated on 'effectiveness' that is in danger of separation and elitism and liable to a logic of escalation, and a more spontaneous, passionate and participatory ecogism, grounded in community settings of EDA such as road sites or EF!.

In 6.5.2, Sabotage in EDA, I reconsidered the locations of sabotage in EDA and I considered how the tensions within the EDA movement over sabotage led to the split between EF! and the ELF in 1992. I introduced the salient characteristics of the latter 'organisation', particularly in terms of the economic strategy on which its strategies of sabotage are justified, and claimed as a success.

In 6.5.3, Anarchism and the Earth Liberation Front, I followed the development and escalation of the 'strategic thinking' behind ecologically-motivated, economically-targeted sabotage. I noted that strands of anarchism that have no qualms about advocating other forms of violence, nonetheless expressed concern at some expressions of quasi-militaristic anti-civilisation sabotage. It is my view that in confronting the outgrowth of an escalated strategic thinking, and articulating their concerns with reference to anarchist first principles ( and 'first emotions' ), the critiques of 'spectacular actions', communiqués and the ELF name which were launched within and around US primitivist circles demonstrate the ongoing relevance of anarchism in EDA. I therefore delineate the different aspects of anarchist discourse that are employed in this critique. They spell out a direction that some of the dynamics of ecological sabotage might have led UK EDA towards, were its embedded culture and circumstances different.

The spectacular sabotage at Hatfield peat works in 1992 was a landmark event for UK EDA and prompted the creation of the ELF, which escalated that form of activism in the US. In the UK, however, sabotage remained embedded within a broader grassroots activism, and in 6.5.4 I returned to Hatfield and peat direct action to demonstrate how this has operated. I describe a field of EDA in which economic strategising, covert property destruction and a desire to effectively and efficiently cripple an



industry were all in place, yet which retained an openness in sabotage, a desire for mass participation and local involvement, a tolerance of reformist fellow-travellers, and a fluid, adaptable and open-ended cross-fertilisation of repertoires. Peat provided a field of action in which EDA could express its radical, anti-institutional and fully anarchist desires, yet remain grounded in a communitarian, participatory and diverse counter-culture. It provided an issue of profound ecological importance, in which the EF! network found its core identity enjoying a second blossoming. The strengths of the network were played to, with direct action taken to the sites of destruction and many of the most popular EDA repertoires adapted and reapplied. Let it serve as a contrast to the development of urban and generalised activism that I shall chart in chapter 7.

## 6.6

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has been concerned with violence, sabotage, and the tensions between strategy and ethics. It has provided an examination of the anarchist ethics of action ( which were established in 4.3.4, and then described with the example of Earth First! in 5.3 ), and it has brought these ethics to bear against the most militant and strategically contested forms of ecological direct action. In doing so it has highlighted the tensions, contradictions and incompatibilities that lie between different strategic frameworks of direct action. This has aided an understanding of anarchism as a contested terrain that may contain and be run through with different frameworks and emphases; in which CD discourse merges with the anti-guerrillaist arguments of anarchism, and the project of educative empowerment is lifted from the heart of the anarcho-syndicalists' industrial struggle, and transplanted into the class-crossing project of environmental defence. At the same time as I am arguing for the essential diversity that exists ( and moves, and talks ) within anarchism, I am also arguing for the essential sameness of the ethics and effects that bind it

By looking at the specific cases of anti-GM direct action and peatlands defence, I have brought the ethical and strategic issues to bear against real terrains of struggle. In the first of these, I have drawn on debates within Earth First! that challenged the discourse of open, accountable and respectful direct action that was brought in from the peace movement tradition by Genetix Snowball. These debates were articulate and thorough, referring to anarchist principles of participation and anti-elitism; autonomy; and the refusal of authority. Most interestingly, these were not purely theoretical debates, but were enacted in practice. The EDA activists explored with their own bodies and their own efforts how to bring an anarchist approach to bear on opposing GM. How to make sabotage participatory? How to challenge the foundations of the legal system most effectively, without hampering the immediate struggle? By doing so the activists on both sides of the debate brought anarchism back into the real world, made it relevant, and made it effective. By referring their actions to ethical principle they also made their anarchism conscious and intelligent. Crucially, in my view, both sides of the covert-overt debate achieved this, to a significant degree, by pursuing divergent strategies with different strengths. The anarchism they made real, therefore, was not only an anarchism of practicality and of experience, but it was one that they demonstrated to be characterised by diversity and flexibility also.

In the second case of applied anarchism and ecological sabotage, I looked at the origins of the property-destroying wing of Earth First! - the ELF - noting its impish origins and seeing past its grand talk to recognise its grounding in broader, and messier, EDA milieus. I then charted the US development of the ELF idea into an impressive, but worryingly separate and distinct seeming organisation. Where UK activists had borrowed the Earth First! idea and manifested it in a socially engaged and mass participatory way, US activists had seemingly borrowed the ELF idea back and turned it into a 'front' complete with press officers and stockpiles of incendiary devices. This went counter to the historical anarchist critique of guerrillaism and the separation of elites from spectators, and I noted the consequent articulation of these points in this new setting. I concluded the chapter, however, by returning to the grassroots movement of UK EDA and demonstrating, with the case of peat, that sabotage need not be elitist or regimented, given a peace movement structure or a narrow, economic strategy. Rather it could be used by ordinary environmental activists to work with the seasons and aid the natural processes of peat ecosystems. In this, I do not wish to appear to synthesise



and resolve all the apparent tensions and strategic contradictions surrounding sabotage and the other practices of EDA, such as manufactured vulnerability. Rather I wish to emphasise the astounding capacity that activists – active human beings – demonstrate when they apply themselves to the diverse needs and contexts of the environmental struggle. The issues of violence charted in 6.3 will always be there, but given the setting, given the freedom, and given the right attitude and common purpose in any group of people, then a solution will be found. If it is temporary, specific and incomplete, then that is most likely a good thing because it will be apt to the context, and also because it leaves the future open for the next group of people to come along and work out the next solution. In this way the intelligence of activist anarchism will continue to manifest itself in dialogical debate and practical application.



**7.1**

**Introduction**

In this chapter I consider Reclaim the Streets ( RTS ) both as the particular London group ( London RTS ) which made the name, and the tactics of street parties popular, and also as the broader tendency itself, including self-organised street parties in other cities: specifically Newcastle. RTS in both these senses was the form of EDA most celebrated by anarchists and most successful at expanding its repertoire into a major challenge to the authorities. Yet overall I argue that despite RTS's impressive development into confrontational, challenging and thought-provoking manifestations, its very size and strength has revealed the limitations and tensions embedded in the relationship between anarchism and EDA.

In 7.2, Reclaim the Streets in London, I situate the origins of RTS within EDA, introduce the development of the street party form, and establish the anarchist identity of the London RTS group. In 7.3, Reclaim the Streets in Newcastle, I use my own experience to provide an example of the diffusion of the street party repertoire across the country. In 7.4, Anarchist Dimensions of RTS, I highlight the anarchism expressed in the practice of Critical Mass and Reclaim the Streets events. I also look at the ideological articulations of the London RTS group, and analyse these, particularly by considering the relationship of carnival to anarchist revolution. In 7.5, Mayday, I follow the trajectory of London RTS to more traditionally ideological anarchist city centre mobilisations. Here I assess the interaction ( both practical and discursive ) between EDA and more traditional, ideological anarchism at the Mayday 2000 event. I conclude with a consideration of whether the emotional, experiential and strategic power of place that marked the upsurge in EDA was lost in the move to city-centre confrontations, and I consider the limitations of an abstract 'anti-capitalism' as a unifying and sustaining theme.

**7.2**

**Reclaim the Streets in London**

Reclaim the Streets formed in London in 1991, out of the Road Alert! and EF! networks ( *EF!AU* No.2 1992: 2; *Do or Die* 2003: 7 ), indeed it was the London contact for EF! in the early nineties ( *Do or Die* 1995: 23 ). As a history of RTS in *Do or Die* states, "With the battle for Twyford Down rumbling along in the background, a small group of individuals got together to take action against the motor car. They were campaigning 'FOR walking, cycling and cheap, or free, public transport, and AGAINST cars, roads and the system that pushes them'" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 1 ). The fight in the countryside was thus brought back to the city. Szerszynski states that

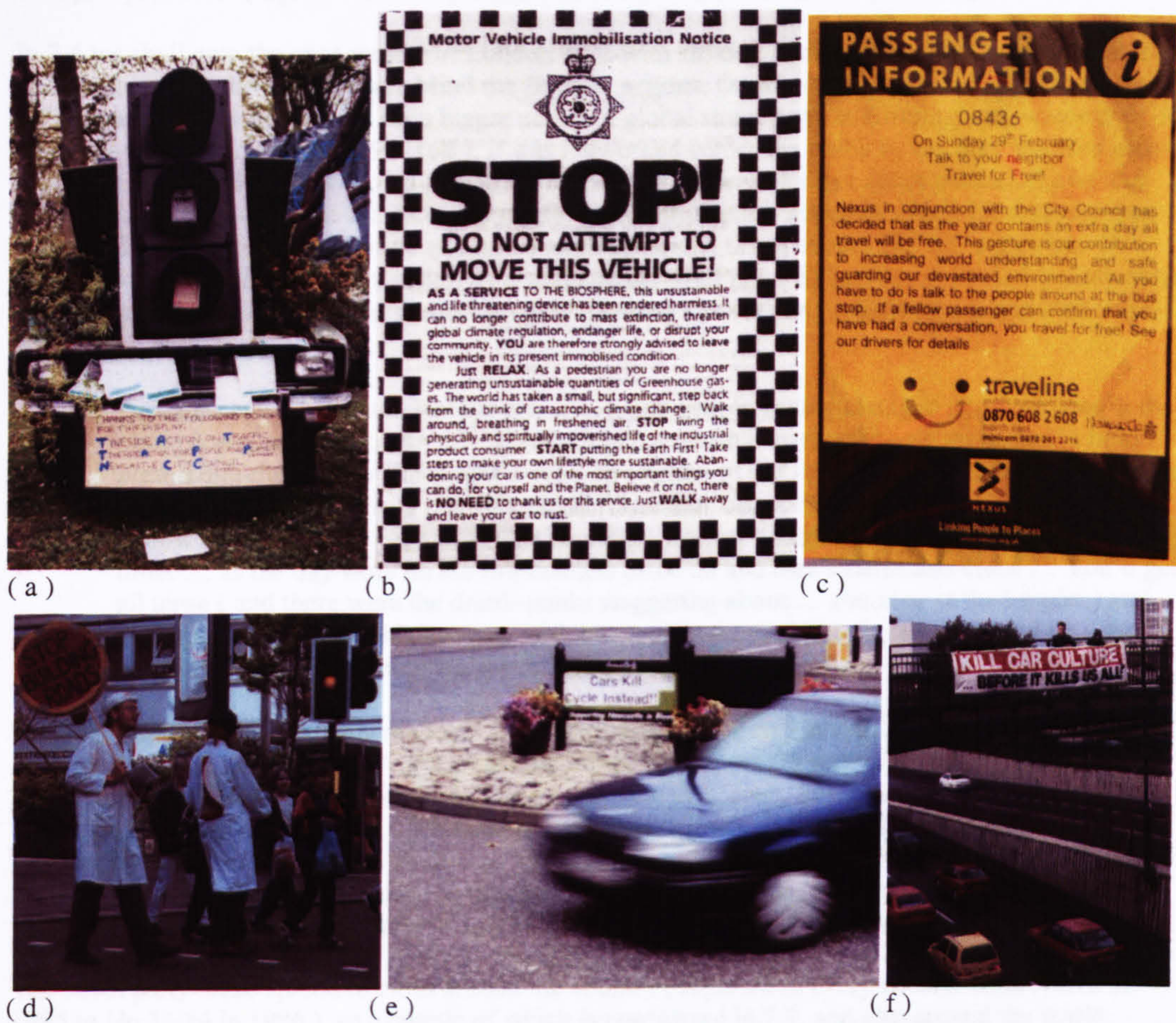
"From the beginning RTS also focused on the motor car, but less as a destroyer of rural habitats and more as a 'condensing symbol' for the general inhuman priorities of consumer capitalism" ( 1999: 214-215 ).

RTS expressed a form of EDA that was attractive to ideological anarchists due to its London location, its social concerns and explicit anticapitalism, and its defiantly anti-authority attitude. In this chapter I am viewing RTS as the furthest EDA went in expressing anticapitalism.

London RTS at this time was "drawing on protest repertoires not dissimilar to those employed by older organisations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth" ( Szerszynski 1999: 215; cf Wall 1999: 29-31 ). There were hints of future tactics, but on a smaller scale: "the trashed car on Park Lane symbolising the arrival of Car-mageddon, DIY cycle lanes painted overnight on London streets, disruption of the 1993 Earls Court Motor Show and subvertising actions on car adverts around the city"



( *Do or Die* 1997: 1 ). Most of these cheeky repertoires were not new, and they were simple enough to be reproduced and adapted by other groups, such as TAPP in Newcastle: see Figure F7.1.



**Figure F7.1 ( a ) Anti-traffic sculpture, May 1999; ( b ) spoof ‘Immobilisation’ warning used September 1999; ( c ) spoof ‘Travel for Free’ poster, February 2003; ( d ) Street theatre 1997; ( e ) subvertisement, September 2000; ( f ) banner drop, September 2000.**

In 1993, London RTS became absorbed into the No M11 Campaign, acquiring many ideas and practical skills from the experience of the anti-roads movement and anti-CJA raves ( *Do or Die* 1997: 1 ). In comparison to Twyford ( which “was nice fluffy landscapes and not about houses and people and their communities” ( No M11 Link protester, quoted in McKay 1996: 148; cf *Do or Die* 1997: 7 ) ), the No M11 was a fully urban campaign involving impressive mass collective confrontations, from which many ideological anarchists ( and others ) drew inspiration.

As the No-M11 campaign ended, RTS had a second beginning which saw a swift development from small to large, both in the scale of the events organised, and in the scope of the organisers’ ambitions. Most notably,

“1995 saw the birth of the RTS ‘Street Party’, where motorised traffic in urban streets is halted, and the resultant spaces ‘reclaimed’ temporarily by crowds enjoying sound systems, jugglers, street theatre and a general air of festivity and pleasure. Two such Street Parties took place in that year, followed by the extraordinary Street Party of July 1996, involving 8,000 people, sound systems and food stalls, which stopped motorway traffic for eight hours” ( Szerszynski 1999: 215 ).

At this latter ‘extraordinary Street Party’, trees saved from the M11 destruction were planted in the motorway, symbolising the continuity of their actions and the interconnectedness of the issues ( similar demonstrations of continuity were demonstrated at, for example, the ‘Pure Genius’ occupation of land



at Wandsworth, where timber from Newbury was used to construct the meeting hall ( Goodwin 1996b: 6; Smart 1996 ). The ambitious scope of the M41 event far surpassed anything displayed before by transport protesters ( *Squall* No.14 1996: 26; Wall 1999: 88; *EF!AU* No.30 1996: 1 )<sup>177</sup>.

In 7.4 we shall note the engagement of London RTS with striking dockworkers, and its explicit anti-electoralism with the 1997 'Never Mind the Ballots' actions. On May 16th 1998, organisers under the RTS banner embarked upon an even bigger action: a global street party in Birmingham, where the G8 were due to meet ( *Schnews* 1999: 168 ). It was networked across the globe by the decentralised activist anarchist network, People's Global Action, in order to coincide with other street parties all over the world ( *EF!AU* No.49 1998: 2 ). This was the first UK anti-summit action in which EDA repertoires were used to mobilise masses of people into a confrontational urban event ( the UK's previous G7 summit was opposed with direct action by a small group of EF!ers ( *EF!AU* No.2 1993: 1 ) ). My notes from Birmingham record typical scenes and feelings from a street party, albeit on a larger than usual scale:

“whistles and gazoos and leaflets etc.. given out, people getting changed into costumes in the photo booth, an old woman giving out midget gems on a tray, before we moved off a horn blew a duh-durr! a few times, like ewoks on 'Return of the Jedi' ... nice symbolic dancers and fire-jugglers and prams on one side, in no formation, opposed by three-deep line of shiny yellow helmet-headed cops in a strict boundary-line, as if they were symbolically representing order ... as the day wore on the riot helmets came on and then shields and clubs ... You'd get all tense ( and there were the drunk-punks staggering about ... shouting at the hippies ) and then someone else would daub you with blue paint and you'd be forced to lighten up – the happier you were, the more we'd won” ( My Notes, May 1998 ).

The organisers of the Birmingham global street party, separate from London RTS, stated that “Our aims included increasing people's understanding of the role of the G8 states and raising awareness of the insidious way trans-national corporations are implicated in every detail of our lives” ( GSP 1998: 9 ). This broader horizon indicates the manner in which the growth of RTS's ambitions was mirrored by a closer identification with more traditional left-revolutionary discourse ( *Do or Die* 1997: 1; *Schnews* 2002: 5 ). The street party succeeded in occupying the city centre road system and the summit leaders abandoned the city for an alternative venue in the countryside.

The street party tactic spread to cities around the country ( reported in every *EF!AU* from No.18 in 1995 to No.33/34 in 1996 ), an example of which is considered in 7.3, and also around the world, beginning with a 1997 party in Amsterdam ( No.37 1997: 3 ). The London RTS group, meanwhile, became more and more associated with the largest anti-globalisation actions, such as the June 18<sup>th</sup> Carnival against Capitalism in 1999 and the MayDay 2000 demonstration that I consider in 7.5, and it became the European convener for the PGA. It is, however, the character and tactics of RTS *before* it became so closely associated with the big London anti-capitalist events that I wish to establish first, in this and the next two sections.

As RTS's scale and effectiveness grew, so they became more of a threat to the powers that be ( *Do or Die* 1997: 3 ). Police forces were angered by their repeated success at causing disruption to the capital. London RTS meetings were therefore infiltrated, computer files and publications seized and individuals were harassed at home, vilified in the media and on one occasion accused of attempted manslaughter ( Chesworth & Johnson 1996: 16; Paton Walsh 2000; *TGAL* No.20 1999: 3; *Schnews* 2000b: 113 ). Despite this attention, London RTS kept up weekly open meetings ( by all accounts terrible ( *Do or Die* 2000: 73; RTS Minutes 31.10.2000: 1; RTS 2000d: 18 ) ) and for several years managed, just, to cope with the notoriety and this “war of attrition” ( RTS 2000d: 1 ). It was unavoidable, however, that the desired anarchist paradigm of open, inclusive, horizontal organising was affected by this attention and took on aspects of secrecy and elitism ( RTS activist quoted in McNeish 1997; Vidal 1999: 2; Vidal 2000; OSPAD 2000; *Do or Die* 2000: 75 ). Even as they proclaimed their openness and denied the media image of “a virtual world of shadowy activists communicating in 'cells' over the internet and using mobile phones” ( RTS 2000d: 18; cf Mark quoted in Wells 2000 ), RTS had to accept it was

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<sup>177</sup> “A feature was the skirts - wooden frames in which a person would stand on a platform, looking like a giant in Elizabethan costume. Most of the time they just wheeled up and down the motorway with the person on top scattering glitter like at a carnival. Then we stopped them near the sound system to hide the noise and someone got in the bottom of each and started digging holes in the tarmac with petrol-driven road hammers” ( *Do or Die* 2003: ). The use of sabotage serves to mark the difference between RTS and a liberal group such as FoE, as I established in 5.3.5.



“mobile and furtive” ( ‘Maybe’ 2000: 20 ). London RTS became concerned about the issue of ‘herding’ people ( RTS 2000d: 21 ), and we will see that their organisation of Guerrilla Gardening at Mayday 2000 was “motivated by a wish not to replicate the spectator/participant dynamic from previous street parties and to break down the distinction between the ‘leaders’ and the ‘led’” ( *Do or Die* 2000: 74 ). Their mass actions were also condemned by GA on the basis that “the majority of participants in *any* big event are largely passive, voiceless and directed” ( 2000; cf Adilkno 1994: 107 ). I shall address this issue further in 7.5.

As their successful activities led the relevant authorities to view RTS as anarchist troublemakers, so fellow anarchists also identified with them. A list of events in the AF’s ‘anarchist marching season’ of 1997, for example, is dominated by three Street Parties and the ‘March for Social Justice’ ( *AF Organise!* No.47 1997 ). Even as RTS suffering under pressure, they were celebrated by others for “making anarchism groovy again” ( PGA 2002 ). In 7.4 I shall argue that such identification by others, and indeed self-identification by RTS organisers, stands as only a secondary ‘revelation’ of RTS’s anarchism. More centrally, the anarchism of RTS was expressed in their events, their practice and ‘disorganisation’. The spread of RTS Street Parties across the globe, for example, demonstrates a method of anarchist proliferation in which there is no ‘ownership’ of the tactic, or necessary ideological baggage. Rather, street parties presented a model that expressed anarchist ideas and practices, which could be utilised in diverse contexts, by diverse actors, for diverse reasons, in diverse ways. In 7.3 I shall use my experience in Newcastle to illustrate one example of this adaptability. Other records of organising autonomous street parties are provided by Chesters & Clarke ( 1998 ), Marman ( c1997), RTS in McPhail (1997: 11 ) and RTS (n.d.).

### 7.3

#### **Reclaim the Streets in Newcastle**

In Newcastle, recent veterans of Newbury and the No M11 roads protests tried to mobilise friends and students like myself for an attempted Street Party on 16<sup>th</sup> March 1996. Despite a practice run, however, on the day itself we were too slow at getting the tripod up and police had their hands on us and the scaffold poles while we were still figuring out how to arrange them. We ended up dancing with a small sound-system on the church grounds next to, but not on, the road. ‘Failed’ actions such as these are as much a part of EDA as the famous ones ( Ferrell 2001: 122 ), and often provide the background experience that enables successful ones to work.

On June 12<sup>th</sup> 1999, the one year-old TAPP group made a second attempt at a street party in Newcastle, this time building on a larger group experienced in blockades and other direct action. It was prepared for with extensive publicity ( flyering nightclubs, fly-posting the university ), and preparation ( practising tripod assembly, and holding elaborate meetings in which we split into different groups to work out routes, communication and responsibilities ). In one of those unpredictable elements of direct action, the volunteer tripod-climber damaged his hand on the night before, and so I was thrust into the central role as replacement. The organising group shared a profound sense of trepidation and tension ( I had a nightmare involving deaths at the hands of police and cars ), no-one knowing who would turn up or how events would transpire on the day. To keep one step ahead of the police, two separate gathering-points were advertised and were led by TAPPers in masks through Newcastle city centre, to a point where, just before the two groups converged, a third group carried the scaffolding poles out of hiding and quickly set the tripod up in the road ( Roads & Moor 1999 ): see Figure 7.2.





(a) (b)

Figure F7.2 Newcastle RTS 12.6.1999 ( a ) photograph ( b ) cartoon in *TGAL* ( No.25 1999: 1 ).

This was possibly the most successful action TAPP conducted, with the most participants, the best feedback from them, and the most positive memories from TAPPers in later interviews.<sup>178</sup> This was true despite the early confiscation of the soundsystem and the arrest of six individuals, most of whom had only a marginal connection to the event ( Kennedy 1999; Sunday Sun 1999; Hughes-Dennis 2001: 54-70 ). For Newcastle, this street party was an unusually ambitious and high-profile event. We might note the interesting assumption of the police, who did not believe we could have autonomously organised such an event and that we must have been led by individuals from London ( *TGAL* No.25 1999: 2 ). Although this was not true ( no such individuals were involved ), it may be noted that we did follow London RTS in our adoption of more explicitly anti-capitalist statements ( ‘Bea Green’ quoted in Kennedy 1999; cf TAPP 1999: 7; TAPP 2002: 2 ). With the propaganda build-up for June 18<sup>th</sup> at its peak<sup>179</sup>, this was an example of our ‘provincial’ group being influenced, at least in our textual expressions, by ‘national’ trends that were generally initiated by certain ‘leading’ groups. Nonetheless, the street party was entirely our own creation, and it gave us pride and confidence that we had joined the groups around the world that were able to put on such an event.

TAPP attempted a third Newcastle street party on ‘car-free day’ 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2000, although this involved fewer organisers ( and was largely initiated by one individual who failed to keep the group communicating together ) and also failed to completely block the road. There were also technical errors, with the tripod so short so that its sitter had to perch on the apex to avoid being pulled down. Although it was not a complete failure, and added to the impact of the other car-free day events, its perceived lack of success was a factor in the group not feeling confident enough to put the effort into the tactic again. TAPP’s debrief reflected this negativity with comments such as “planning was rushed ... no/poor communication with the person who initiated the action”, and “the event needs a proper process to build a proper event” ( TAPP SWOT analysis<sup>180</sup> September 2000 ). These factors are of crucial importance to ‘successful’ actions: a bonded group, confident in each other and popular with a

<sup>178</sup> The first ‘Eclectic City’ squat of 2000 was the other event most favourably commented upon. The reason these two events got the ‘votes’ is because they were elaborate, involved everybody, and could thus be looked back upon as impressive. Some individuals in the group preferred other, less elaborate actions, but as these involved less people they could not gain the ‘votes’. It is harder to give due attention to small events in a thesis, or any report, but they should not be forgotten as they are the ongoing pulse of EDA out of which the high-profile events emerge.

<sup>179</sup> An indication of J18’s importance within the activist scene was that *TGAL* had been advertising it since 1998 ( No.18: 6 ).

<sup>180</sup> SWOT analysis arranges comments under the headings Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats: it is a structure for discussion and note-taking that was utilised by TAPP on other occasions to review the Eclectic City squats, and to review the group’s annual activity.



wider circle of people was what made the 1999 street party successful. After 2000, the anticipated gains of using the tactic ( pleasure, political impact, meeting new potential activists ), were not again sufficient to outweigh the anticipated costs, including arrests, and most significantly the time needed to organise and publicise the event, to the occlusion of other activity. Note that TAPP was never solely transport ( or capitalism ) oriented, indeed its activism tended to follow the interests of the most active members of the group – from Zapatistas to incinerators.

These three local examples of the street party embodied in a small way the aspects of anarchism that I will draw out in 7.4, and then use to lead into London RTS's stated ideology. To use the most successful 1999 event as the example it was, first, characterised by an elaborate preparation, in which the organisation relied upon a mixture of open advertisement ( to get the crowd ) and secret knowledge, known only to a few ( PGA 2002 ). The police were unable to find an 'organiser' or 'leader' with whom to negotiate a closure of the event. Second, the events were premised on the active power of a crowd defying the police and the accepted uses of the city centre, and connected to this, efforts were made to create a festive, carnival atmosphere with costumes, banners and several forms of music ( sound-system, drums, home-made shakers ), which served to keep the crowd together. Third, the police responded to the event with violence and, with those arrested kept in cells for two nights ( at the command of someone 'higher up' than the officers on duty ), demonstrated a certain paranoia or fear regarding the potential of street parties ( this being the week before June 18<sup>th</sup> ). Fourth, the propaganda distributed condemned cars and capitalism together, moving away from the 'safer city' discourse that had characterised the previous critical mass events ( considered below ) ( Starforth 1998: 17 ) into a more utopian or 'revolutionary' rhetoric<sup>181</sup>: this was made even more clear with the propaganda produced for the 2000 street party ( NRTS 2000 ). It is this combination of a distinctive RTS discourse, and the practical anarchism of an authority-defying crowd, that I shall critically assess in 7.4.

## 7.4

### Anarchist Dimensions of RTS

"Freedom is there for the taking - so let's take it!" ( Leaflet for 6.6.98 Street Party ).

In this section, I shall build on the points with which I concluded 7.3, to clarify the various and diverse ways that RTS has expressed, and consciously engaged with, anarchist discourse and practice. I begin by considering the collective power enacted by a street party or 'critical mass' crowd, and highlight the antiauthoritarian spirit embodied therein. I then introduce some of the critiques expressed by London RTS, which may be used as indicative of the anarchist ideology that forms their basis, before focussing on the key elements of the distinctive rhetoric that London RTS utilised and made real. These include notions of imagination and possibility; the subversive power of festivity and the revolutionary potential of carnival; and the uneasy attempts to ally RTS's utopian and temporary manifestations with more substantial, traditional left projects such as solidarity with striking workers and the formation of a more long-lasting public sphere.

The partner to street parties were critical masses ( Carlsson, ed, 2002; Seaton 1999: 33-35; *Do or Die* 1995: 65-7 ), first begun in San Francisco in 1992 but adapted by diverse UK groups including EF! groups ( *EF!AU* No.7 1993: 2 ), anti-road groups ( No.20 1995: 2 ), the 'London Psychogeographical Association' ( No.12 1994: 6 ), London Greenpeace ( No.62 1999: 8 ) and ourselves in Newcastle,

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<sup>181</sup> Some titles given to these protests, such as 'Accessible City Events', 'Safer City Cycle Rides' and the 12.6.1999 'Safer City Street Party' presented a discourse of safety, accessibility and a communally shared city, and were supported by flyers which listed statistics of road deaths and the advocacy of practical alternatives such as public transport ( indeed a specific leaflet was produced for bus drivers at the 2000 street party ). I have not drawn on these more conventional discourses, but should note that they were allied to attempts at coalition with less radical groups such as Tynebikes and the Green Party. Several of these events were also allied to apparently instrumental or lobbying objectives, such as to show support for the Road Traffic Reduction Bill ( 27.1.1996 ), or to show disapproval of the building of the West Central Route ( 1998 ). I would maintain, however, that these were not the primary objectives of the events, but merely a convenient framing in which to place the activity of collective street-reclaiming, which was organised, and later celebrated in the pub, for its own sake. Of the ideological texts opposing cars and roads which were distributed around Newcastle ( specifically, kept in the TAPP meeting room ), some advocated changes in government policy and lobbying to that end, and some advocated more radical, non-state-centric attitudes ( French 1996; CCC 1996; IDHW 1996 ).



under the issue-specific label 'Tyneside Action on Transport' ( TAT ). The link between critical masses and street parties was demonstrated by Newcastle organisers using critical masses to build up enough confidence and collective experience to attempt a street party: this was true for both the first run of events from 1995-1996, and for the TAT events of 1998-1999; indeed the advertising of several bike rides as street parties blurred the distinction.<sup>182</sup> In 1995 monthly critical masses were held in 15 UK cities ( *EF!AU* No.14 1995: 3; cf *Social Control* 1996: 7 ), but this was the peak of their popularity: notwithstanding the continued listing of rides on the RTS website, the Newcastle events, for example, were still listed five years after they ceased, in 2000, after a rather limited run ( *Do or Die* 1999: 107 ): see Figure F7.3. Furthermore, more rides were advertised than actually took place: this was true both in Newcastle ( in leaflets and *TGAL* ) and nationally ( RTS website ), underlining the problems of using solely textual sources to record a history of EDA.



**Figure F7.3 Newcastle Critical Masses ( a ) 16.3.1996 ( b ) 8.10.1998 ( c ) 3.11.1998 ( d ) 5.12.1998**

In Critical Mass bike rides, collective action is celebrated for bringing collective power, and for bringing normally atomised individuals into right relations with each other. "An active crowd celebrates its own strength and enacts an unmediated diversity; and we all experience, albeit briefly, moments of collective control" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 10; cf Carlsson, ed, 2002 ). This is built in to the very structure of the bike-ride:

"These are gatherings of cyclists who ride together, en masse, taking control of the road space. Critical mass is pure inspiration, for those who ride and have seen their streets temporarily transformed from a transport sewer into a peaceful space for living... It is not just a demonstration, but people riding their bikes together, each with their own motivation. Making it happen doesn't require centralised organisation or leaders. Just talk to likely people... On the day, anybody can suggest a route. Be ready to adapt and keep together, even if that involves those at the back going through a red light" ( *RA!* 1996: 102 ).

Critical mass cycle rides, like street parties, make manifest the notion of the solidarity of free and equal individuals, who take control in opposition to 'the system'. A temporary anarchist body-politic is thus

<sup>182</sup> A further attempt to create monthly critical masses was made in September 2000, but after three attempts gained insufficient attendance these were called off. As the photos indicate many ( sometimes most ) of the participants did not have bicycles, which from a purist point of view, made the events more of a procession than a critical mass: this was not, however, how they were conceptualised by TAPP. Since late 2005, monthly critical mass rides have taken place in Newcastle, and these have been solely bicycle-based. This has been achieved in part by the addition of a bike-repair workshop recycling abandoned bikes: a good example of nonprotest ecological direct action.



formed: a living example of anarchist organisation, ethos and strategic thinking ( Ferrell 2001: 94 ). The attitude that participants share in a street party demonstrates the anti-authoritarian element of anarchism most successfully and definitively. As the 'how-to' guides put it, "The police may ask who's in charge. The correct answer is - NOBODY" ( RA! 1996: 102 ).

This oppositional, 'we're in control, not the authorities' attitude is also fundamental to the Street Party: "We are not going to demand anything. We are not going to ask for anything. We are going to take. We are going to occupy" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 6 ). This is not just a purely rhetorical or sloganeering attitude, but is carried through into the practice and experience of the event: the Street Party in its very essence opposes the autonomy of the reclaimed space to the police who enclose it. "Tell the police ( don't ask them, tell them ) that the party will end at a certain time" ( RA! 1996: 108; cf Ferrell 2001: 127; *EF!AU* No.30 1996: 1 ). The dynamics of a street party see protesters seeking to outwit police tactics using innovation and the spontaneous ability of a crowd ( *EF!AU* No.25 1996: 5; No.58 1999: 8; PPC 1996: 7 ), and when the street reclaimers gain the upper hand, their success is seen on the anarchist terms of human capability: "faced with an active crowd, the authority of the police dissolved" ( *EF!AU* No.30 1996: 1 ).

This genuinely radical dynamism of contention and outwitting was added to by the powerful and influential ideological rhetoric of London RTS. This employed elements from several varieties of anarchistic ideology, including anti-capitalism and anti-hierarchy; the social critique of liberal individualism; the opposition of enclosure to reclaiming; and the empowerment that comes from direct action. I will now look at how they pitted carnival, play and imagination against the deadening system of work-consume-conform. Their textual manifestations ( which had the highest profile of all EDA texts ) made it clear how far removed EDA was from single issue campaigns, such as traffic reduction.

The RTS critique of car-culture provides an entryway to the rest of their critiques and serves to link cars to capitalism, and consumerism to direct action. A version of this is reproduced in Figure F7.4:

"Cars dominate our cities, polluting, congesting and dividing communities. They have isolated people from one another, and our streets have become mere conduits for motor vehicles to hurtle through, oblivious of the neighbourhoods they are disrupting. Cars have created social voids; allowing people to move further and further away from their homes, dispersing and fragmenting daily activities and lives and increasing social anonymity. RTS believe that ridding society of the car would allow us to re-create a safer, more attractive living environment, to return streets to the people that live on them and perhaps to rediscover a sense of 'social solidarity'.

But cars are just one piece of the jigsaw and RTS is also about raising the wider questions behind the transport issue - about the political and economic forces which drive 'car culture'. Governments claim that 'roads are good for the economy'. More goods travelling on longer journeys, more petrol being burnt, more customers at out-of-town supermarkets - it is all about increasing 'consumption', because that is an indicator of 'economic growth'. The greedy, short-term exploitation of dwindling resources regardless of the immediate or long-term costs...

More importantly, RTS is about encouraging more people to take part in direct action. Everyone knows the destruction which roads and cars are causing, yet the politicians still take no notice. Hardly surprising-they only care about staying in power and maintaining their 'authority' over the majority of people. Direct action is about destroying that power and authority, and people taking responsibility for themselves. Direct action is not just a tactic; it is an end in itself. It is about enabling people to unite as individuals with a common aim, to change things directly by their own actions.

Street Parties...embodied the above messages in an inspired formula: cunning direct action, crowd enjoyment, fun, humour and raving...festivals open to all who feel exasperated by conventional society"

**Figure F7.4 Critiques Employed by London RTS ( *Do or Die* 1997: 2; cf Gorz 1973; Social Control 1996 ).**

As well as grounding their activism in a discourse of empowerment ( see 5.2.2 ), these paragraphs demonstrate RTS's allegiance to 3 distinct critiques and, most significantly, to making the links between them. These are ( 1 ) an anarchist critique of politics, noted as central to the anarchist tradition



in Chapter 2 and frequently reinforced with slogans such as “The only party worth having is a street party” ( *EF!AU* No.30 1996: 1; cf No.37 1997: 2 ). Other publicity condemned politicians ( RTS 1999 ) and the “increasingly meaningless ritual of the general election” ( RTS 1997 ), and insisted that workers could run things much better on their own ( RTS 1999 ). ( 2 ) an environmental critique of capitalism, which in Chapter 4 I argued was essential for green ideas to become fully radical and compatible with anarchism, and ( 3 ) A social critique of car-culture, premised on the anarchist conceptualisation of social-individual interdependence established in section 2.2.2. The car is identified as a source and symbol of ‘bourgeois’ individualist freedom, which “serves to reduce the freedom of everyone else” ( *Aufheben* 1994: 8; Phil quoted in Brass & Koziell 1997: 42; Merrick 1996: 67 ). These three elements ( anarchist critique of democracy, green critique of capitalism, social critique of capitalist individualism ) are translated into the red, green and black of the RTS flag, one hundred of which were produced for the 1997 march for social justice ( My Notes, RTS talk at Mayday 2000 ): see Figure F7.5.



**Figure F7.5** RTS flag, still from de Quijano ( 1998).<sup>183</sup>

The car represents a microcosm of capitalism ( McLeish 1996: 41 ), and while RTS attack the building of new *roads*, they seek to reintroduce the *street* ( *Do or Die* 1997: 4 ; cf ‘Maybe’ 1.5.2000: 12-13; Social Control 1996: 6 ). This opposition is framed as one of community against consumerism: “Ideally, street parties can temporarily recreate a sense of community that has been all but lost to the pollution and danger of cars” ( RA! 1996: 102 ). Later in this section I shall query whether this ‘sense’ can translate into something more tangible, but I wish now to emphasise that anarchists consider that “Any liberated areas, however limited, are a challenge to the capitalist order” ( Porter quoted in Downing 2001: 72; cf Heller 2000: 23 ).

In contrast to the “mechanical, linear movement epitomised by the car” ( *Do or Die* 1997: 4 ), RTS state that they seek to express the possibilities that our imagination could unleash, beyond the everyday routine we all get stuck in: “We are trying to show people that the way things are now aren’t the way they have to be” ( activist quoted in Field 1996 ). “Placing ‘what could be’ in the path of ‘what is’” ( *Do or Die* 1997: 5 ), Reclaim the Streets events are more than a negative act of obstruction: they are a positive and a constructive event in that they are demonstrating a potential alternative to the status quo.

In unashamedly “utopian and romantic” ( Chesters 2000c: 12 ) terms, the Street Party represents a world turned upside down: “There are transvestites snogging in the fast lane, stilt-walkers partying in the slow lane, and Parents encouraging their children to play in the overtaking lane. By a sound system on the hard shoulder, a 24-foot Pantomime dame sways to music, skirts billowing yards of pink fluffiness. Welcome to a typical street. Not” ( *Guardian* 17.7.96 ). The effect on participants is immediate and vivid, if a little confusing to the newcomer ( Participant quoted in *Guardian* 8.6.1998 ).

“Wow! Where can I get red streamers that float in the air? Spectacular ribbons tangling up maybe 100m! ...

<sup>183</sup> We should recall that in addition to rationalist objections to the rituals of the state, law and church, “Revolutionaries have always felt the need of their own symbolism” ( Carter 1971: 49 ). Hence the black and red flags of the anarchist tradition, and the red, green and black flags of RTS ( Jordan 2002: 25 ).



There is, still, a woman in baggy leopardskin shorts and a three-foot pink-spotted tail dancing on a ledge 10m off the ground...

Banner check: 'Protest is hope'. 'Misbehave for the planet'. 'Under the road, the dancefloor'" ( NNR 1998: 1 ).

The Street Party is notable for its high level of festivity, as the 'business-as-usual' of consumer capitalism gives way to a convivial, celebratory anarchy.<sup>184</sup> This is one of the immediate impacts of a street party, and also "One of our most powerful tools ... We're not interested in politics that doesn't include an element of fun" ( RTS activist quoted in *Guardian* 15.6.98; cf Goaman 2002: 229-238; Marman c1997: 3 ). The opposition between police and partiers at a Street Party was vastly different to the grim ritual of tree camp evictions ( *Do or Die* 1997: 12 ), and expresses better a microcosm of the anarchist worldview, of free collective pleasure against violent 'control' ( My Notes, Birmingham street party 1998; cf *Aufheben* 1995: 16 ). Ferrell writes that

"For those fighting the closure of public space, playful pleasure constitutes both the terms of engagement on which they are willing to fight, and also the sense of possibility, the imagination of an open city, for which they fight. Unfettered festivals in the streets, moments of spontaneous dancing and free-form music serves as sensual subversions, undermining the taken-for-granted order of everyday life and inviting passersby into the pleasures of playful insubordination" ( 2001: 235; cf Thrift 1992: 149; Goaman 2002: 229 ).

Aside from the ideological aspects, this 'festive mood' also serves to make the event attractive to a broad range of participants: "Our role is to inspire people ... The creativity, craziness and cheek helps" ( RTS activist in Vidal 2000; cf *EF!AU* No.31 1996: 8 ). It attracts those who enjoy a party, those interested in defying the law, and also those wishing to avoid getting trapped in a violent situation ( Adilkno 1994: 105 ). Although heavy-handed police attacks on Street Parties sometimes destroyed this mood ( *EF!AU* No.31 1996: 7; No.52 1998: 8; No.59 1999: 2; Heller 2000: 145<sup>185</sup> ), the success of festivity as a protest tactic is demonstrated by its extension to anti-summit events, as RTS gave birth to the pink and silver blocs ( and most recently the clowns ) that have become a prominent feature of anti-summit protests ( *Notes from Nowhere* 2003: 20; Farrer 2002; *Do or Die* 2000: 9 ): see Figure F7.6. At the Prague anti-IMF protests this tactic was not only more accessible than outright confrontation, but also proved the most effective in terms of penetrating the conference zone.



Figure F7.6 The 'festive' theme displayed for the Global Street Party ( 1998 ).

RTS took up the idea of a carnivalesque theorisation of revolution, as demonstrated by the title chosen for the June 18<sup>th</sup> protests: the 'Carnival Against Capitalism'. They argued that "The great revolutionary moments have all been enormous popular festivals - the storming of the Bastille, the Paris commune and the uprisings in 1968 to name a few" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 3; cf Chesters 2000b: 4; Grindon 2004: 148

<sup>184</sup> This is reinforced ( a ) by promotional material, encouraging participants to dress colourfully, bring instruments and get themselves in the mindset for fun, and ( b ) by banners, such as "They wanna fight: we wanna dance" ( 'Never Mind the Ballots' street party ) and the phrase traditionally attributed to Emma Goldman, "If I can't dance it's not my revolution".

<sup>185</sup> At DSEI 2003, for example, where the street party tactic was incorporated into wider direct action targeting the arms fair, the festival atmosphere did not really work anymore, because experience told people to expect police strategies intent on removing the 'fun': crucial ingredients of which included mobility, autonomy, varied interaction, spontaneity, music, and the unexpected. The introduction of the 'kettle' tactic, in which police pen a crowd into a small space for a long period of time to destroy their energy and enthusiasm, has proved an effective break on such 'fun' when successfully applied ( Raif 1.6.2000 ). London RTS had not organised a street party since 2000.



).<sup>186</sup> Employing rhetoric that speaks of “a gigantic fiesta, a revelatory and sensuous explosion outside the ‘normal’ pattern of politics” ( Leble quoted in *Do or Die* 1997: 12 ; cf Adilkno 1994: 15; ‘Maybe’ 2000: 9; *Schnews* 2000: 63 ), RTS present street parties as an “attempt to make Carnival the revolutionary moment” ( *Do or Die* 1997: 5; cf Jordan 1998: 5 ).

Situationist influences are often explicit in RTS discourse, slogans and tactics ( *Do or Die* 1997: 5; Goaman 2002: 234-235 ). McKay notes that “in 1995 Reclaim the Streets spread sand on the tarmac outside Goodge Street underground station in London, set up deckchairs and held a beach party in the middle of a central London road. This was a terrific literalisation of that Situ slogan, slightly inverted: *sur not sous le pave, la plage*” ( 1996a: 202 ). At the global Street Party in Birmingham a banner read “Beneath the Tarmac, the Earth”, making a link between situ-provocation and ecologism, and we in Newcastle made a similar point, illustrated in Figure F7.7.



**Figure F7.7 Newcastle ‘beneath the tarmac’ banner, 12.7.1999**

Linkages were also made with the convention-defying carnivals of the early middle ages ( cf Bakhtin quoted in *TCA* 5(1) 2002: 4 ), which celebrate “temporary liberation from the established order ... the suspension of all hierarchy, rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions” ( *Do or Die* 1997: 3 ). However, some commentators have noted that this Carnival served ultimately as a cathartic ‘safety valve’ measure ( Kershaw 1997: 266; Szerszynski 1999: 219 ) - a tool of social control, and GA warn RTS of having the same effect ( *GA* 1999: 4; cf Grindon 2004: 151-152; Cresswell 1996: 128-130 ).

Like Hakim Bey’s theorisation of the Temporary Autonomous Zone ( 1991; *Do or Die* 1995: 51; *Schnews* 2002: 159; Heller 2000: 45 ), a Street Party is fundamentally temporary: it does not strive to build on one spot, as earlier anarchist initiatives have done. Rather, it is “an uprising which does not engage directly with the State, a guerrilla operation which liberates an area ( of land, of time, of imagination ) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it” ( Bey 1991 )<sup>187</sup> This has been claimed as in keeping with a postmodern ethos; it is certainly a strategy designed to avoid being destroyed by the police. Bookchin and others, however, critique this from the perspective of anarchist revolution: “The ‘temporary autonomous zone’ is a pipe dream, as it leaves the prime source of oppression – the State – untouched, unchallenged, and intact” ( Neal 1997; cf Bookchin 1995b; Pepper 1993: 319; Grindon 2004 ).

<sup>186</sup> Compare with RTS: “Crowds of people on the street seized by a sudden awareness of their power and unification through a celebration of their own ideas and creations. It follows then that carnivals and revolutions are not spectacles seen by other people, but the very opposite in that they involve the active participation of the crowd itself. Their very idea embraces all people, and the Street Party as an event has successfully harnessed the emotion” ( *Do or Die* 1997: 5; cf RTS 2000a; Adilkno 1994: 9; ‘Maybe’ 2000: 8; Berman 1983: 82 ). “The liberated society that these carnivals envision is one based on diversity, joy, passion, spontaneity and generosity. The rigid rules, the hateful hierarchies and the monotonous uniformity of capitalism all melt in its intense heat” ( ‘Maybe’ 2000: 9 ).

<sup>187</sup> Compare this with RTS: “before it can be recuperated, it disappears – only to spring up again in another place at another time” ( ‘Maybe’ 2000: 20 ). TAPPers also referenced the TAZ concept ( TAPP 1999: 11 ).



Echoing the situationist identification with workers' councils, despite the wide gulf between that organisational form and the situationists' own tactics of 'constructing situations' ( Barrot 1996 ), London RTS strove to build practical links with striking workers. They joined the pre-election 'March for Social Justice' of 12th April 1997 with their own tactics and anti-election agenda: 'Never Mind the Ballots...Reclaim the Streets' ( *Do or Die* 1997: 7 ). They allied with striking tubeworkers in London ( *EF!AU* No.31 1996: 2; No.55 1999: 2; No.58 1999: 7 ), and with the sacked Liverpool dockers ( *EF!AU* No.31 1996: 3; No.32 1996: 1; No.36 1997: 2; No.43 1997: 5; No.52 1998: 1; AF 1998b; Fogg 1997: 9; Shelton 1997: 22-23 ). These were alliances not of the word but of the deed, characterised by occupations, joint actions and a blending of EDA repertoires with more traditional pickets.

Traditional anarchists celebrated these links ( 'Conference Programme' Mayday 2000: 24; *EF!AU* No.31 1996: 4 ), which operated on the terms of the anarchist ideal of alliance. Solidarity was actively expressed at the grassroots level, cutting out the hierarchical leadership, and encouraged a broadening out of the issues ( *Do or Die* 1997: 9-10; *EF!AU* No.31 1996: 4 ). Vidal argued that

"Their alliance with the dockers makes emotional and some intellectual sense. Almost uniquely the activists loudly and wonderfully articulate...the blindingly obvious - that the environmental and the social are indivisible. Moreover both groups are deeply principled and are being kept at arms' length by their peers - the union will not fully recognise the dockers; most Green groups are unsure what to make of the activists" ( 1996: 5 ).

Although RTS argued that "we recognised the common social forces against which we are fighting in order to combine our strengths" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 9 ), Vidal and Bellos warned that the alliance was dangerous for the direct activists in that it "makes it look like it is fighting battles of the old left" ( Bellos 1997 ). RTS, after all, did not have a narrowly workplace-centred philosophy, but "an expansive desire; for freedom, for creativity; to truly live" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 6 ): this could be lost in the specific and limited struggle of striking workers. GA also criticised the alliance as an attempt by narrowly ideological ( and unpopular ) anarchists to exploit the "Greenies ... numbers, enthusiasm and activity" ( 2000; cf *GA* 1999: 4 ). I will consider the development of these critiques in 7.5. Yet these attempts at alliance represent a key part of London RTS's wish for the Street Party to create something more than a festival. Aware that "the street party risks becoming a caricature of itself if it becomes too focused on the spectacular and its participant - the mass", RTS responded to the dangers of deradicalisation ( of a purely spectacular, rather than real radicalism ), with the hope that, "inherent within its praxis - its mix of desire, spontaneity and organisation - lie some of the foundations on which to build a participatory politics for a liberated, ecological society" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 4 ).

RTS aimed "For the recreation of a public arena where empowered individuals can join together to collectively manage social affairs." They suggest that "The street party, in theory, suggests a dissolution of centralised power structures in favour of a network of self-controlled localities" and advocate its extension into "a public meeting or community assembly that works in opposition to the state" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 5; cf *Social Control* 1996: 6 ). The organisers of the Global Street Party of 1998 similarly reflected that "It is hugely empowering for someone who always walks on the pavement to step into the road, but for most people that is where it ends. To achieve lasting change we must keep that person in the road, keep them dancing, and start them thinking... Maybe the next street party you go to will have workshops instead of a sound system?" ( *GSP* 1998: 9 ). In 7.5 I consider how this was manifested, to some degree, at the Guerrilla Gardening element that RTS contributed to the Mayday 2000 events.

In conclusion, I would suggest that the tension between the temporary, celebratory, and pleasure-based ( often drunken ) space of a street party, while radical and even revolutionary in part, is not equivalent to the basis for a 'commune of communes' that some RTS literature spoke of.<sup>188</sup> The street party does,

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<sup>188</sup> RTS suggest that the traditional anarchist notion of "the Commune of communes ... translated into current terminology, gives us the Network of networks or, more appropriately: the Street Party of street parties. That such a 'street party' would tend to undermine centralised state and government structures, constituting a 'dual power' in direct opposition to them, is obvious" ( *Do or Die* 1997: 5 ). I personally did not see this as a practical proposal but rather, at best, as a piece of artful rhetoric designed to raise ideas and a questioning of how radical activists' methods related to their professed aims. A street party is not a good place to materially achieve a discursive body politic. The mass of participants in a Street Party do not develop any political participation deeper than opposition to the police: an identification of 'them and us'. I speak from my limited experience of seven street parties, from which one slight exception might be made: at the 1999 Hull RTS, several people from Newcastle took the opportunity to sit in a circle in the middle of the street and discuss how to organise our own RTS in June. Even here, however,



however, open up possibilities in participants' minds, and the most significant political impact of RTS could be just this: to provide glimpses of freedom and collective power that undermine the normally accepted oppressions of everyday life ( 'Maybe' 2000: 8 ). Where the organisers of the anti-G8 global street party in Birmingham answered their critics ( who argued it wasn't 'political' enough ) that "It was a practical demonstration of our political message" ( GSP 1998: 8 ), a distinction nonetheless needs to be drawn between the sensibility-awakening effect of a Street Party, and the grandiose plans for revolution expressed in the literature of London RTS. The 'imagination' rhetoric of RTS, by 2000 familiar to the point of cliché to many activists ( 'Maybe' 2000: 23 )<sup>189</sup>, came to be attacked as "Grandiose simplistic and unrealistic demands" ( Stone 2000 ). As an EF!er drily comments, "I have no doubt that our tactics are weak. After all, what we need is more samba in order to rid ourselves of the plague of capitalism" ( K, sg2003 list 2003; *Do or Die* 2003: 42 ). It was Mayday that pressed this point home for many activists, and so it is Mayday that I shall look at now.

## 7.5

### Mayday

"Let red & black fly from the green Maypole heights  
Let riots of wild flowers spread like wildcat strikes

Yes, come all ye Wiccan-syndicalists & eco-agitators  
Ye anti-fascist faeries & allotments propagators  
Plant those Beltane barricades of hawthorn & yew  
& in the seasoned pagan cauldron cook an anarchist stew" ( Hancock 2001 ).

I will here use the Mayday 2000 protests to consider problems inherent in allying EDA and traditional ideological anarchism. Mayday is especially useful for my thesis in consciously allying EDA with traditional anarchists, both through self-identification ( see below ), and in press reports ( Harris, Walsh & Thompson 2001 ). The Sun, for example, listed the "extremist groups" that organised Mayday 2000 as "RECLAIM THE STREETS, which ran the Twyford Down and Newbury By-Pass protests... EARTH FIRST, an ecology turned anti-capitalist faction, BLACK DOG, an anarchist magazine, CLASS WAR, which has a long history of stirring up rioting, ANARCHIST FEDERATION and ANIMAL ACTION" ( 'Riot Demo's extremists' *The Sun* 2.5.2000 ).<sup>190</sup> The experience of the Mayday protests has also been of defining import for UK groups where other anti-summit actions ( bar J18 and the rural 2005 G8 protests ) were not ( TGAL No.32 2000: 2 ).<sup>191</sup>

An equal part to the actions was the plan for a conference ( 'Mayday 2000: Mini-Planning Conference' Flyer Mayday 2000; *EF!AU* No.63 1999; No.65 2000: 1 ), billed as "the most exciting and far-reaching attempt to spread our ideas EVER" ( 'Mayday 2000 A festival of anarchist ideas and action' Flyer Mayday2000 ). Unlike previous dates, chosen because they coincided with summits, "Mayday is different because it is a date chosen by us, because it is symbolic for us. ... Mayday gives us a chance to correct the one-sidedness of J18 and N30, in concentrating only on finance and business ... International Workers Day, it provides an ideal opportunity for us to show the foundation of the riches traded in the city" ( Brighton Mayday 2000 ). The 'us' of this statement, however, related to the classical anarchist movement much more than to the EF!ers. The Mayday notion of 'spreading ideas' is

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the sense of occasion and apt location was more poetic than useful: the vast majority of our collective planning and discussion took place in houses, meeting spaces and pubs.

<sup>189</sup> The flyer for the DSEI street party in 2003, which featured a typical image of festivity with a small number of key words such as 'imagine' and 'carnival' was criticised by one EF!er for being a 'parody of an RTS flyer'.

<sup>190</sup> This list by *The Sun* is full of mistakes ( RTS did not run the Newbury or Twyford protests, and by 'Black Dog' it must be assumed they mean 'Black Flag' ). It is largely copied from a similar list in the Sunday Times, which cites Reclaim the Streets as "central to recent protests, presenting an image of a group prepared to bend rather than break the law, although 'members' have been arrested for violent offences." Earth First!, it considers a "Long-standing eco-group which has turned itself into a wider anti-capitalist organisation" ( 'Who's Who on the Streets', *Sunday Times*, 30.4.2000 ).

<sup>191</sup> Mayday 2000 was, like the Birmingham Global Street Party and J18, networked as a PGA call for action. The idea for an international Mayday action was initiated by the Canadian Postal Workers' Union but, in the UK, it originated from the Bradford Mayday conference of 1998, at which EF!ers and ideological anarchists had their first formal encounter ( AF 1998c: 7-8 ).



also distinct from the active solidarity and demonstration by example which marked most of the activist anarchism in this thesis.

Several EDA voices warned that the event was “poorly conceived” and organised “ad hoc” (*Do or Die* 2000: 79 ), and they resented the date both because it left insufficient time to prepare, and because it provided a way in for authoritarian left groups like the SWP ( and some anarchists ) who had up till that point failed to get a foothold in activist events. Furthermore, “AUTONOMOUS organisation has not been stressed from the start ... the ‘event’ already seems to have been planned right from the outset ... we now have a form of ‘central committee’ of our own, with people bickering about who can or who can’t attend” ( Mayday 2000 2000e ).

The 1999 EF! Summer Gathering did support the idea for an action on Mayday, but at the following Winter Moot in 2000 it was agreed that the RTS action on Mayday would not be a national EF! action as it had been for J18. RTS therefore planned their event as one action amongst many, but encountered the “problem of being a London group, i.e. working in the capital. Inevitably any action we do tends to have national significance even if we try to localise it!” ( RTS 2000d: 6 ). Mark Brown also cites the “unrealistic expectation of RTS’s organisational capabilities”, whose active membership started to decline around 1998 ( Jim Paton 1.12.1999 ) at the same time as, “Conversely, RTS actions have grown in popularity” ( Mark Brown 17.5.2000; cf RTS 2000d: 4 ).

There was an uneasy relationship between the organisers of MayDay, and the Earth First!ers who they sought to mobilise (*Do or Die* 2000: 72 ). Some EF!ers felt they were approached with a “fait d’accompli” and expected to join in without any real control over events. GA translated the resentment evident at the 2000 EF! Moot into an ideological critique:

“MayDay 2000 doesn’t come out of Reclaim the Streets ( RTS ), Earth First! or anywhere else in the direct action / DiY milieu. It’s prime movers are the Anarchist ( Communist ) Federation, old guard anarcho-Lefties more into promoting themselves and their ideology than revolution” ( 2000 ).<sup>192</sup>

GA argued the conference represented an attempt to push ideology, and the actions on May 1st are “just used as a come-on to sell the conference and up their ideological cred” ( 2000; cf *Do or Die* 2000: 72 ). We may view this hostility to Mayday as an expression of activist anarchist critique of ideological anarchism, although GA’s crystallisation of this ( while useful for my thesis in being ‘spelled out’ so clearly ), is itself marked by an ideological emphasis. The practical points made by GA were nonetheless representative of other views mooted around EF! circles. For example,

“Although International Workers Day is an attractive enough date for people from their ideological tradition and would boost their conference internationally, it was a significant departure from previous world days of action inasmuch as they’d been selected to coincide with dates the WTO were actually meeting. Even this practice had been criticised as giving those outside the country concerned no opportunity to act directly against the WTO meeting, but the choice of May Day eliminated even this direct action component, reducing the whole to empty protest” ( 2000 ).

GA also criticised the date because it sat on a bank holiday, which meant there was no practical ( as opposed to symbolic ) focus for the action, and they note that “N30 Euston shows the cops know how to contain and control this stuff even if there were” ( 2000; cf *Do or Die* 2000: 71 ). This indicates a critique of the city as a place for meaningful, effective protests, that I shall consider at the end of this section.

First, however, I wish to record the meaning given to the history of Mayday by the literature advertising the event: it is particularly useful for my thesis in articulating different ideological facets of

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<sup>192</sup> A TAPPER, connected by friendship to the Mayday organisers, saw this as a sign of the cliqueness in EF!: the Mayday organisers sought to engage in the network on the basis that EF! presents to newcomers: that an idea can come from any point in the network and autonomous groups will choose whether or not to support it. Yet the resentment arose because the Mayday organisers were not recognised as ‘one of us’, familiar from Twyford and all the other bonding experiences of the network. Although I am unable to dismiss this comment, I can note that the GA statement is ( as usual ) not entirely accurate: the Mayday organisers did include individuals engaged in DIY and direct action ( anti-CJA activism in Newcastle, for example ), but from milieus less familiar to ‘core’ EF!ers.



the anarchisms<sup>193</sup> involved. Some, for example, saw Mayday primarily in terms of the anarchist movement's identity ( McKay 2001b ), or as a solely workers-based, anticapitalist event ( Mayday2000 2000b ). Most of the plethora of literature produced, however, placed great emphasis on joining the different meanings of Mayday into a shared celebration:

“MAYDAY is RED for international workers day, GREEN for Beltane – the ancient fire and fertility festival that signals transformation and rebirth, and BLACK for the anarchists executed for their part in trying to bring about a shorter working day with enormous strikes on Mayday 1886. MAYDAY is a time when RED, GREEN and BLACK converge – a catalyst for hope and possibility...” ( RTS 2000a; ‘Maybe’ 2000: 7; ‘Brighton & Hove No Leaders’ 1.5.2000: 2).<sup>194</sup>

The symbolic emphasis was thus on the alliance of “the red and black and green” ( Brighton Mayday 2000; cf EGGE 2000; Hancock 1.5.2001 ), illustrated in F7.5 on the RTS flag.

Other themes given to the day were that of reclaiming, in opposition to “Our rulers [ who ] responded by first trying to control and then banning the May fairs” ( Mayday Monopoly 2001b: 4 ), and continued to make efforts to stop the 21<sup>st</sup> century version ( *Hate Mail* 1.5.2002: 4 ). This echoes the discourse of enclosure made popular in nineties EDA by TLIO and others ( *Do or Die* 1997: 40-53; Monbiot 1994; *Schnews* 1996 No.19 ). In keeping with the themes identified in 7.4, Mayday was billed as a day of Carnival ( 2002: 12 ), a festival of diversity to celebrate strength ( *ASW* 2000 ), and a device to continue to build the anticapitalist network ( Thomas Johansson email on allsorts list 10.1.2000 ): both fun and political. The press, on the other hand, came to term it “International Riot Day” ( *Scotsman* 2001: 1 ), and it was the theme of violence and property destruction that dominated all media coverage before and after the events. I shall consider these issues of violence after I have assessed the RTS Guerrilla Gardening event.

RTS took on the ‘Guerrilla Gardening’ component of Mayday 2000 ( *EF!AU* No.67 2000: 4-5; *Do or Die* 2000: 69-81 ). Their intriguingly mysterious literature stated that Guerrilla Gardening was intended “to transform a symbol of capitalism” ( RTS 2000a ), utilising green themes of ‘compost not commerce’ ( ‘Maybe’ 2000: 10-15 ). The organisers felt this event “fitted the spirit of Mayday perfectly” as it melded social and ecological issues, required no ‘target’ that the police could protect, and was proactive, positive and creative ( RTS 2000d: 7 ). The proclaimed strengths of this event are interesting, as they were viewed in terms of responding to the concerns and overcoming the limitations previously identified with street parties, namely ( 1 ) herding ( the problem of secret leadership and an open crowd ), and (2) participation ( as opposed to spectatorship, which Street Parties had been criticised for by, for example, *Organise!* ( AF 2001a: 30 ) and *Aufheben* ( 1995: 167 ). The RTS plan for Mayday organisation was thus “motivated by a wish not to replicate the spectator/participant dynamic from previous street parties and to break down the distinction between the ‘leaders’ and the ‘led’” ( *Do or Die* 2000: 74 ).

( 1 ) The logistics of London demo's are complex: on J18, for example, “approximately 150 people were needed to split the crowd into four and have them regroup at the final location” ( RTS 2000d: 11 ). Those of us from outside the city and the preparation, found following one of these groups disorienting and confusing ( which added to the experience ). In Mayday 2000, RTS used three colours of flag to signify ‘follow’, ‘converge to garden’ and ‘gather to decide’ ( RTS 2000b; RTS 2000e: 17 ). On the day, however, a large part of the crowd followed the “restless’ samba band up Whitehall. This was not part of the plan, indeed on this occasion the action was to take place at the same place as the meeting point, but “Such is the nature of autonomy, and the unpredictability and spontaneity of mass actions” ( RTS 2000e: 18 )

The focus of street parties was typically the sound system ( ‘Mayday 2001: Overview’ Metropolitan Police ), harking back to the ‘repetitive beats’ outlawed by the CJA. Police reaction to street parties therefore commonly took the form of confiscating the sound system ( as at Newcastle in 1999 and 2000

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<sup>193</sup> I use the plural deliberately.

<sup>194</sup> Similar themes were produced for future Maydays, this continuation demonstrating a certain vitality and sense of ‘aptness’ to the rhetoric: “Mayday has been a celebration of life, renewal and pleasure since ancient times. More recently it was declared international Workers’ Day to commemorate the execution of 4 anarchists in Chicago for their part in the struggle for an eight-hour working day. Both these aspects of Mayday were intertwined – a festival against work, want and denial, and a vision of freedom and plenty throughout the world” ( ‘Mayday 2002’ Flyer; cf Fozzori 2003; Mayday Monopoly 2001b ).



). Guerrilla Gardening, however, successfully managed “An RTS action without a soundsystem: who’d have believed it!” ( RTS 2000e:17 ), signifying that the more mobile samba band had taken on the unifying, celebratory focus of the more static, centralised, vulnerable sound system ( PGA 2002; *Schnews* 2002: 26. Police also recognised the ‘leadership’ role of the samba band and musicians by focussing their attention on them, with arrests and heavy surveillance ( *EF!AU* No.31 1996: 8 ). In 2002, a group of less than 30 samba players demonstrating outside the Argentinean embassy found themselves monitored by their very own police helicopter, and at other unconnected events, individuals from samba groups have been addressed by police by name, in a communication that they are being watched.

( 2 ) Literature repeatedly stated that “Guerrilla Gardening is not a street party. It is an action demanding everyones participation and preparation. An adventure beyond spectating!” ( RTS 2000a; cf EGGE 2000; ‘Maybe’ 2000: 8; *Do or Die* 1997: 5 ). The event was designed to “demand participation”, with people encouraged to bring seedlings and trowels ( RTS 2000e: 8 ), and “public assemblies on the day” to “allow people on the action to decide what they wanted to see happen” ( RTS 2000d: 8 ). It was considered a qualified success in that regard, gaining “A higher level of participation” than street parties ( 2000a: 16 ). This is illustrated in the flyer reproduced in Figure F7.8:

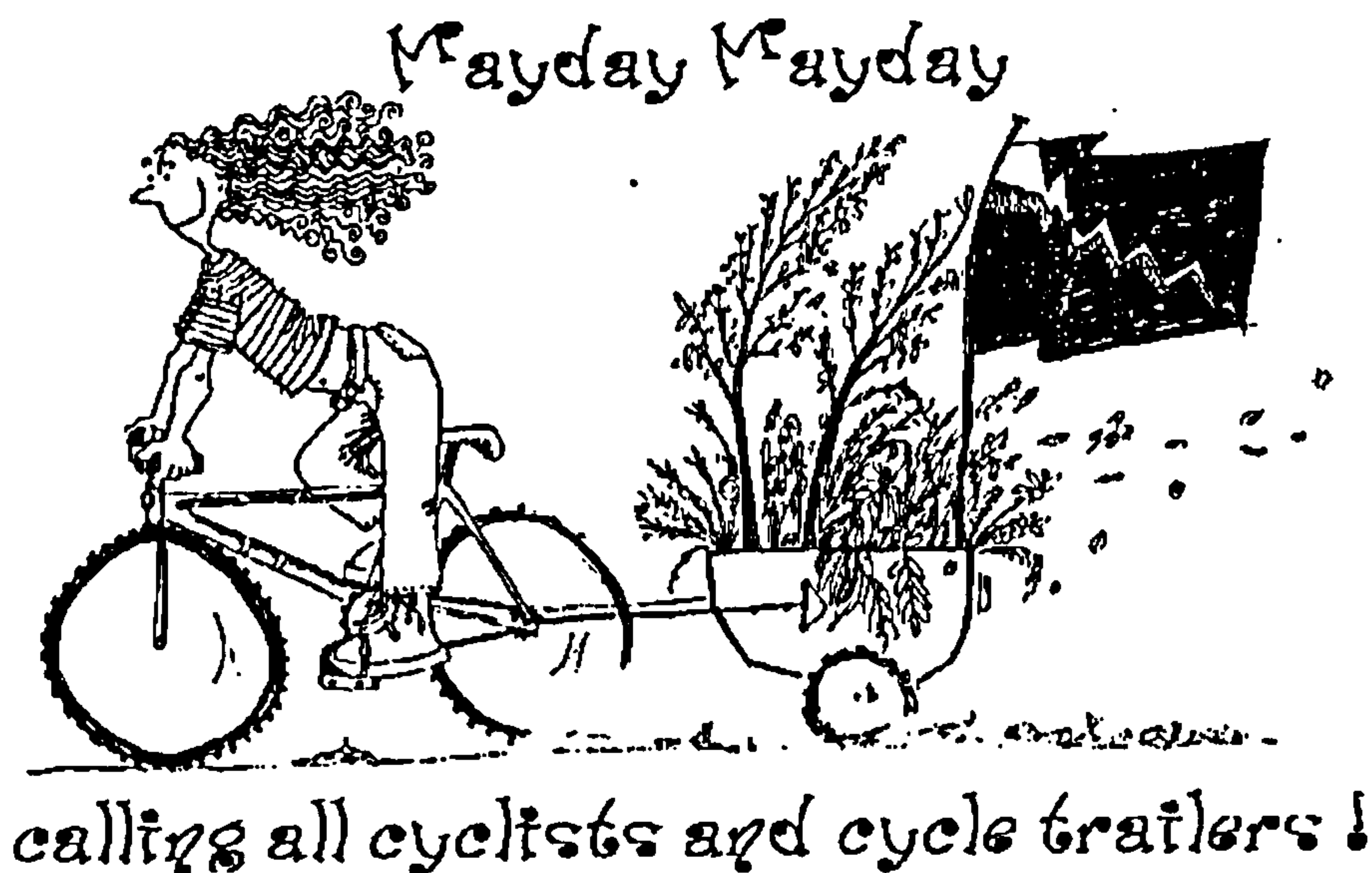


Figure F7.8 ‘Calling All Cyclists and Cycle Trailers’ ( Flyer RTS 2000 ).

Where supporters claimed the event as direct action in opposition to ‘spectacularisation’ ( ‘CopWatch’ 5.2000 ), however, I must side with critics of the action who stated “If this was not a protest, how come it was taking place in Parliament Fields, across from the Houses of Parliament. Wasn’t this a statement of public intent, a declaration, a protest in fact?” ( Stone 2000; cf Monbiot 2000b; TWNP 1999 ). RTS did indeed choose the site for its symbolism ( RTS 2000e: 11-12 ), and other protesters at Mayday also targeted “Establishment’ symbols” ( Baldwin, Eden & Pook 2000 ). The trashing of McDonalds, for example, was by now a ritualistic event ( its symbolic significance is demonstrated by the use of its famous ‘golden arches’ symbol on a later year’s Mayday Monopoly Guide to denote all “corporate scum” ( OurMayday 2003 ) ). The property damage on the day may therefore be viewed as liberal as much as it may be seen as anarchist direct action.

I would now like to consider the issue of violence and property destruction at the event, illustrated in Figure F7.9, in order to draw out the difference between liberal and radical/anarchist approaches to protest. I will situate the problems involved in these tactics in terms of the city location.



# How the laughter turned to terror



By **BARBARA DAVIES**

WHEN the first cries rippled across the surging crowd I felt fear run through me like electricity.

They charged, and caught in the heaving mass I was forced with them, desperately trying not to fall under their stampeding feet.

Yet minutes earlier I had stood next to a young woman holding a baby to her breast while singing a lullaby as she gazed at her child.

Tattooed and dreadlocked, and dressed in tie-dyed clothes, she was swallowed up in the charge but afterwards I saw her laughing.

She looked furious when I asked her why she had brought her baby here to a place where violence hung in the air.

She swore and said: "Why shouldn't I? She's got every right to be here, we all have. It's those bastards who shouldn't be here."

But Trafalgar Square yesterday afternoon was no place for a child. Or any other peace-abiding citizen.

Each time the police mounted a charge against the baying mob I pressed myself against the walls of the buildings lining the square, desperately hoping I wouldn't be dragged along with them.

dragged along with them.

All around me broken bottles fell sending shards of glass flying.

As the lines of riot police pushed forwards, tactically closing in on us, there was nowhere to hide.

It was a bizarre scene and for an objective observer impossible to fathom what the protesters hoped to achieve by this mindless violence.

## **Bizarre**

One minute they were singing and laughing, strumming guitars and playing drums. Next they were hurling missiles at police - which landed indiscriminately.

Alongside the militants I saw smartly dressed, middle-aged people handing out leaflets for more moderate causes and groups like the Green Party and genetically modified foods.

"We are here to highlight the fact that we can't go on abusing our planet," said Teresa Arnold. "We don't condone violence but people feel strongly."

I watched sickened as Trafalgar Square, usually bustling with tourists, buses and taxis, became a forum for destruction.

Littered with beer cans, smashed bottles and paint and covered in graffiti. Women squatted in the streets to relieve themselves while men turned doorways into urinals.

I had been in the riots last November and I knew what these people were capable of.

The violence of mob rule is unlike anything I have experienced.

While the young and the old, the skinheads, the smartly dressed and the students muttered about their beliefs, their causes seemed to disappear in the mood of hatred which descended across the crowd.

By the time the square had become embroiled in the ugliness of violence, the only thing they had in common was their determination to damage the great landmark and hurt the police.

Those of us caught between the mob and the riot squad were at the mercy of them both.

We were pushed back by the officers to find a similar solid black line behind us.

It was a terrifying experience.

Figure F7.9 A Typical Press Account of Mayday ( Davies 2000: 4 ).

Typical newspaper narratives stated "Carnival fun then the mobs took over" ( *Metro* 2.5.2000; *Sun* 2.5.2000; Lee & Peachey 2000: 3; Woodward, Kelso & Vidal 2000: 1; Harris 2000: 4-5 ), and the common press story stated that the soft 'non-confrontational' police response had failed ( Hall 2000 ), that the demonstrators had stepped over the line and the police had to be given extra support so it could never happen again ( White & Woodward 2000 ). The government and police used the property damage and scenes of street fighting to depict the activists as terrorists in the media ( *Schnews* 2001: 43; cf Cohen 2000 ). This was ironic when the day was preceded by the anti-terrorism 'A30' photo shoot, and may be seen to reinforce the dilemma noted by several commentators on protest: "Be violent, and you get noticed. Be peaceful, and be patronised or ignored" ( Young 2000; cf *Guardian* 2001b; *Nonviolent Action* No.11 2000: 1 ). Comments on the Mayday 2000 email list cited the McDonalds episode as a case of police entrapment, considered the problem with conveying substantive messages at such an event, and held a tactical ( not moral ) debate over property damage and fighting police. Overall, it was perceived to have failed as an effective and inspirational piece of EDA.

The ( actually limited ) violence was said to have alienated middle England ( *Sunday Herald* 7.5.2000 ), although the newsletter *Nonviolent Action* recorded the day as mostly peaceful ( No.12 2000 ). Commentators argued that the Mayday protests failed to convey any message: "If their purpose was to highlight any issues at all, they failed" and that the protest backfired: "the only winner was the very



system that they purported to oppose” ( Goldsmith 2000; cf *Times* 2000; Young 2000 ). It served to close off “avenues for political dissent, as the police and government clamp down on mass action and peaceful people keep away” ( Monbiot 2000b; cf *GA* 2000; Hall 2000 ). Commentators attacked “their hopeless way of taking on the system” ( Hall 2000; cf Monbiot 2000b ) and used the event to valorise democratic process above extra-parliamentary protest ( Toynbee 2000; cf Ridley 2000; Freedland 2001: 15; McNeil 2001: 3; Monbiot 2001a ).

Ken Livingstone, facing a negative ‘cenotaph effect’ on his electoral bid to become Mayor of London ( Travis 2000; Steven Norris quoted in Baldwin , Eden & Pook 2000: 1 ), followed Tony Blair ( White & Woodward 2000 ) in expressing “contempt for those who defiled the monument to those who gave their lives for our liberty” ( Livingstone 2000; cf Livingstone 2001a; Jasper 2001 ). He was even led to praise Winston Churchill ( White & Woodward 2000 ), a position blasted by protesters such as James Matthews ( prosecuted for painting blood on the mouth of Churchill’s statue ), who distinguished ordinary soldiers from Churchill, “an exponent of capitalism and imperialism and anti-semitism. A Tory reactionary vehemently opposed to the emancipation of women and to independence in India” ( quoted in Gillan 2000; cf MayDay email list ). The RTS press statement refused to celebrate the generals and ruling classes who ran the war ( RTS 2000d: 23; cf White & Woodward 2000 ), and repeated the anti-militarist opposition to all war ( RTS 2000d: 32-3; cf OOW 2000 ). We are returned to the anarchist view of violence established in section 6.3.3, and many anarchists responded to the media condemnations of violence by simply condemning the media in return ( Bradley 2001b; *Schnews* 2001 No.303; Revolt 2001 ): “They talk about violence when they have blood on their hands” ( AAWR 2000 ).

I am not, however, going to leave our consideration of this event at this point, with an articulation of anarchist arguments in response to press and political criticism. The issue is more significant, in that even sympathisers with EDA and the aims of Mayday, and many participants, were somewhat dismayed by the result. My own notes lament that “There didn’t seem to be any particular point to it ... and no-one – not even the organisers - seemed convinced that it would achieve anything. ... There didn’t seem to be much happening, ... When the open mics came out I realised that this was probably where the guerrilla gardening event was going to take place after all. I felt disappointed : we’d all expected the flags to appear, and then move off to some great spot chosen by the geniuses in RTS London. This was not to be” ( My notes, May 2001 ). Albert Beale, one of the editors of *Nonviolent Action*, bemoaned the violence and media portrayal of what started out as a peaceful, positive action, and concludes that “This movement is not as well-organised as it ought to be” ( 2000; cf Brown 2000: 1; *Do or Die* 2000: 75-76; Young 2000 ). Even amongst anarchists with no objections to street-fighting or property damage ( see 6.3.3 ), Mayday was criticised as a strategically faulty model ( *Do or Die* 2000: 75-6; ).

Newspapers suggested that “The violent nature of the protests has sparked infighting among rival groups. RTS is furious that anarchists disrupted a peaceful day of action by attacking the Cenotaph and vandalising a statue of Winston Churchill” ( Thompson & Aldridge 2000 ). When it quotes John Jordan ( who had appeared as the public face of RTS ) to thus state that “It was an act of stupidity which damaged our image”, and “We want to stop the nutters from taking over”, we may note that the journalists effortlessly translated ‘nutters’ into ‘anarchists’ ( Thompson & Aldridge 2000 ). RTS’s anti-authoritarian refusal to negotiate with police and media was translated into anarchism’s traditional association with violence ( Peter Mandelson quoted in *Guardian* 2001a: 4; Taylor 2001: 6; Rosser & Davenport 2001: 10 ). The blame for the violence was laid on anarchist organisational weakness: “The price of eschewing hierarchy is to make violence more likely” ( Waddington 2000; cf Goldsmith 2000; Monbiot 2000b; Alex Robertson, letter *Guardian* 3.5.2000; Milne 2001 ). I do not accept these criticisms of anarchism in the general terms by which they are advanced. Instead, I will look at the problems of Mayday from the perspective of those EDA activists who are opposed to democratic process and authority, in order to find a more revealing understanding of Mayday’s limitations. It is the location and the form of protest that many in EDA identified as being the main flaws in the plan. EFlers had previously worried that the place would “would turn into some sort of street confrontation” and *Do or Die* suggest that “An important lesson to learn from this is that you have to be prepared for big actions in London to kick off” ( *Do or Die* 2000: 72-79 ). The inherent trickiness of making big events work ( PSMB 2000: 2 ) was allied to the choice of location, in a place where no lasting EDA contribution could be made ( no destruction stopped, no homes built ), and in which the opponents of the event had clear advantages of resources and preparation.



Of equal significance for EDA, wounding attacks came from prominent commentators on EDA using their outlets in the mainstream media to condemn RTS as “a threat to the environment and social justice movements” ( Monbiot 2000b ). Zac Goldsmith, editor of the *Ecologist*, and George Monbiot, until that point perhaps EDA’s most visible advocate, both argued that the environmental movement and the anarchists involved in it were incompatible ( Goldsmith 2000 ).<sup>195</sup> In opposition to the Mayday protests, Monbiot presents a quintessentially liberal conception of direct action, “not a direct attempt to change the world through physical action, but a graphic and symbolic means of drawing attention to neglected issues, capturing hearts and minds through political theatre.” He argues that such direct action must be peaceful, have clear, achievable aims, and that this can only succeed as part of a wider democratic process ( 2000b ).

While Monbiot’s specific criticisms of the event were also freely expressed within the movement, his liberal perspective was rejected, and he provoked a fierce backlash for his rhetoric of condemnation, explicitly intended to cause a rift between RTS and ‘acceptable’ environmentalism’.<sup>196</sup> When he responded to these attacks under the title ‘Does RTS believe in Free Speech?’ ( Monbiot 2000c ) he drew yet more criticism, which attacked the notion of abstract ‘free speech’ as “a classic liberal fiction that serves to hide massive inequalities in wealth and power, and thus access to communication”, which “consistently ignores, marginalises and censors certain groups and their speech while privileging others” ( RTS 2000e ). Monbiot staked his claim for being able to speak on the recognition of a ‘diversity of opinions’, yet it was pointed out that those opinions followed remarkably closely the same line as the rest of media.<sup>197</sup>

“RTS and the wider direct action movement have been on the receiving end of much of what you call ‘political process’ over the years, from ‘babies thrown under diggers’, to ‘stockpiling stun guns’ and ‘riot scum’. So your continual equation of the daily bile of the corporate mass media with ‘public debate’ or ‘opinion’, with you as the public’s voice of criticism, is self-serving and ultimately hollow” ( RTS 2000d ).

With Livingstone and Blair both making statements to distinguish legitimate, acceptable protest from the ‘criminal violence’ of Mayday ( Livingstone 2001a: 6; Livingstone 2001b; Blair quoted in Vidal 2001: 1; White 2000b; Heffer 2000: 6 ). Monbiot was accused of confusing media representations with the event itself, and for recognising only liberal and not anarchist dimensions of direct action. More pertinently, he was accused of attempting to divide the movement: “To split the spikies from the fluffies, the NGOs from the direct action groups, middle England from street folk ... so that disunited, we affect nothing” ( *Schnews & Squall* 2001: 50-51; cf *Do or Die* 2000: 79 ). One response lauded RTS’s “unity in diversity” as “one of its strengths”, but stated that “Our emphasis on direct action is even more crucial. So is criticism: but the moment anyone joins with the establishment in condemning one group, they weaken this diversity” ( Witcop in RTS 2000d: 30 ). Where Monbiot condemned RTS for endangering Ken Livingstone’s election chances, RTS responded that they did not buy into the ‘political process’ but opposed it both in its media and parliamentary democracy forms ( RTS 2000e ). In contrast, Monbiot criticises the direct action movement’s ‘myth of consensus’ as an alternative and improved method of democracy, and he argues that the non-hierarchical structures of the direct action movement are illusory: “Reclaim the Streets is less accountable than many of the institutions it seeks to overthrow” ( 2000b; cf Secrett 2000; Livingstone 2001a ). RTS of course never sought to be ‘accountable’ in the style of Genetix Snowball, but instead gave as much of the responsibility for decisions and leadership on the day, onto the crowd who turned up.

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<sup>195</sup> Here we encounter the old equation used to dismiss anarchism: Mindless + Violence = Anarchists. Goldsmith’s article, carried by the right-wing *Telegraph* and sandwiched between a society column and an article praising zero tolerance policing in New York, was accompanied by a cartoon of an anarchist punk spray-painting and smashing up a globe. Goldsmith equated anarchism with Stalinism, and promoted instead the typically right-wing themes of “community, family, tradition” ( 2000 ).

<sup>196</sup> In TAPP the following comments were made: “Who the fuck does George Monbiot think he is? We don’t need him... We don’t need people like him speaking for the movement... George Monbiot can fuck off.” “He’s made some alright points, but they way he did it is out of order... he could have written them to, y’know, the movement. Not the fucking *Guardian*, and put like that” ( My Notes, May 2000 ). As well as reaffirming the textual rebuttals and condemnations of Monbiot, these comments underline the wounding reach of his comments.

<sup>197</sup> In contrast, it was stated that there was no ‘corporate’ RTS response because “it contains such a huge diversity of views” ( RTS hack 1.6.2000 ): the quote I here attribute as RTS thus represents one expression, but not a binding or necessarily representative one. RTS was invited to publish a response to Monbiot’s article in *The Guardian*, which as a diversity of individuals they felt unable to do. It is interesting that it was an academic – Graeme Chesters, connected to ‘Lancaster RTS’ – who ultimately produced the piece for this ( 2000a ).



The issue of Mayday violence not only revealed the gulf between the anarchist views of RTS and those of liberal commentators otherwise sympathetic to EDA, but was also extended into an anarchist critique of media, including the unquestioned assumptions of 'acceptable' militaristic violence, and the dangerous and powerful role of commentators. However, I feel it is too simplistic to view this as a correct drawing of 'sides' ( anarchist versus liberal ), partly perhaps because I share the view that, tactically, most of the property damage on Mayday was counterproductive. Instead, I wish to refer back to the point in 6.3.5 that it is the contextual basis rather than set principle which can justify sabotage: this was demonstrated with the study, in 6.4, of anti-GM direct action. In this context, there were no clear gains from property damage and graffiti, either direct or symbolic ( *Guardian* 2000b ). I argue that the city location was the reason that the tactic was at fault. In doing so I hope to indicate how it is possible to remain an anarchist yet oppose the use of sabotage or street-fighting on occasion. I might even suggest that the difference between an activist and an ideological anarchism is that the former is able to make practical judgements with less clumsiness.

There is one last point to make before I look at the context and place of Mayday. Some used the events of Mayday to condemn the abstraction of the ideological anarchists. EDA activists charged that in contradiction to the symbolism of the combined colours, the event was not green ( *Do or Die* 2000: 77 ), and that "black-flag anarchism took priority" ( Brown 2000: 1 ). Self-declared Twyford veteran Jem Bendell, for example, attacked the "Anarchist and Revolutionary Marxist ... tendency to argue for all-or-nothing solutions encourage either apathy, on the one hand, or aggression, on the other" ( 2000; Chris Turnbull quoted in Vidal & Hopkins 2001 ), and Chris Stone suggested that RTS had been "taken over by some out-of-touch anarchist faction more intent upon self-promotion than in actually dealing with the very real issues that face us" ( 2000; cf Brown 2000 ).<sup>198</sup> It is possible that the move by London RTS ( and other sections of EDA ) toward an ever more abstract 'anticapitalism', encouraged the abstraction of their Guerrilla Gardening event: a lack of feel for context and situation that has negative effects on the impact and experience of the action.

My view is that this sense of 'generalism' did contribute to the problems of Mayday and the Guerrilla Gardening action, and that abstraction stands in opposition to the emotional, intuitive and grounded impulse to eco-activism. Activist anarchism is by its nature connected, intimately, to the lives and surroundings of the people engaged with it: when this connection is severed, when the practice does not speak to the theory, or when experience does not inform an anarchist sensibility, then the foundations of activist anarchism are eroded. The innovation and contextual sensitivity displayed in EDA, whether through the architecture and landscape-specific layout of anti-road camps ( *Do or Die* 2003: 15 ), or through the use of sabotage in co-operation with the seasons and the elements, is lost when a formula gets repeated too many times. As *Do or Die* put it, "RTS quickly became victims of their own success. They became trapped into repeating this formula indefinitely, and any attempts to break from this merely ended up in not-quite-so-good street parties ( 2000: 74; cf IE 2005: 12 ). While the idea of street parties spread successfully around the world, therefore, London RTS were left in a corrosive war of attrition with the London authorities, and with the architecture of the city working against their desires to create participatory and inspirational moments out of mass action. Once they had successfully reclaimed the M41 motorway, where else could they go?

The chief problem with the Mayday protests was not the abstract or utopian rhetoric but the place: the city of London is not a good venue for empowering and effective EDA, as my notes indicate at the time:

"I hate London, I hate the size of it, the smell, the black snot you get, the way that if you disappeared, no-one would notice, the way that no matter how powerful, heroic or amazing the things you might do there, next day the crowds will come, swarm over the remains and obliterate your memory: the city forgets, you don't matter there. And I don't belong there" ( My Notes, May 2000 ).

I would like to develop this point by returning to the origins and characteristics of the earlier wave of nineties EDA, and emphasising the ecological centrality of 'place'. It is perhaps ironic that early RTS

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<sup>198</sup> Where Stone states that "RTS seems to have lost its roots" ( 2000 ), however, we might note that Dave Morris provides a response that is both fully ideologically anarchist, and also fully 'rooted': "each and all of us set up residents' mutual aid and solidarity groups/networks in every street/estate/locality, and also anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist activists' groups/networks in every borough/village/town" ( *Mayday2000* egroup 2.5.2000 ). This suggestion is coherent and consistent with anarchist theory, but it was considered dull and not acted upon by the majority of Mayday participants.



propaganda suggested it was dedicated, in opposition to the fragmentation caused by car use, to “rediscovering place” ( RTS c1997 ).

I believe the connection to place is one of the core strengths of EDA, whether that means EF! and CAAT taking the struggle to the offices of quarry companies and arms manufacturers, or the attempts to build a little piece of ecotopia in a communal back garden or action camp. By re-centring action in the centre of London – a tactic that with J18 had worked to some degree ( *Do or Die* 1999: 1-34 ) – the Mayday protests lost the specific significance of landscape and community. They also took the protests onto the ‘home ground’ of the Metropolitan police, and with a limited repertoire they were relatively easily outflanked by those with greater resources and the experience of containing countless demonstrations there. The Mayday organisers banked on a centralised gathering, to get a mass of anarchists together, but this proved a tactic of diminishing returns, and the location of the city served to make small-scale actions ( such as were encouraged at each Mayday protest ) ineffectual.

Franks notes ( in line with a common anarchist criticism of the anti-globalisation movement ) that “The move away from multiple sites of struggle towards a strategy aimed at global meetings of the IMF and so on acts as a constraint on the wider disruptive possibilities of direct action based on local protests” ( 2003: 31 ). I concur, and every group seeking to mobilise ‘effective’ mass protest at such events must grapple with the knowledge of superior police numbers, weaponry and other resources: it can be very hard to take advantage of surprise, small group flexibility and the unpredictable development of direct action ( hard to be spontaneous when the adversary operates with a fixed, intelligent strategy to contain all space for experimentation ). There are those who seek to advance autonomous small-group action at anticapitalist events, arguing “It can be more efficient for small groups of individuals to pick their own targets and act with surprise on their side than to protest in areas already entirely controlled by security forces”( *AntiG8* 2004: 3; cf *SRA* 2001: 15 ). At June 18<sup>th</sup> and DSEi 2003, for example, it was felt that dispersed small groups acting autonomously worked successfully ( *Do or Die* 1999 1-24; *EF!AU* No.90 2003: 3 ).

In 2001, the Mayday organisers responded to the results of Mayday 2000 with the theme of Mayday Monopoly ( *EF!AU* No.75 2001: 2-3 ), presented not as one mass event but as “lots of autonomous actions, separate yet interconnected, which express our opposition to the monopoly that capitalism has over our lives”( *Mayday Monopoly* 2001a ). The condemnations from police, press and politicians again came early, with alleged bomb threats, rubber bullets and a ‘mass looting’ scare ( Rosser 2001; Jeffreys 2001: 8; Taylor & Atik 2001: 9; Clark 2001 ), and Tony Blair, George Monbiot and Ken Livingstone all made statements condemning the oncoming violence ( Vidal 2001: 1; Monbiot 2001b; Livingstone 2001a; Livingstone 2001b; Jasper 2001<sup>199</sup> ). Yet the riot never came ( Apple & Rai 2001 ), attendance was down, the crowd was effectively contained in a pen ( Hopkins, Dodd & Allison 2001; Hopkins 2001 ), and the event was considered a damp squib: even a “McProtest” ( Klein 2001 ). The only successes that protesters claimed for the event were giving the lie to the press and politicians, and costing businesses some money, because they closed for the day, expecting trouble ( *Sheffield Mayday* 2001 ).

The sense of diminishing returns from mass London protest encouraged 2002’s ‘Mayday Festival of Alternatives’ ( *Hate Mail* 1.5.2002 ) to focus on the ideas of anarchism more than the action ( *EF!AU* No.81 2002: 3; No.82 2002: 1; *Schnews* 2003: 15-16 ). In 2003 the war theme dominated, with a map targeting “companies that feed the war machine” ( *OurMayday* 2003 ). The day was also quiet, and effectively reverted to the traditional trade union march ( Vidal & Allison 2003 ). As the title of one report phrases it, ‘Let’s face it it was a bit crap really wasn’t it’ ( PLH 2003 ). Most significantly, in 2004 an open invitation was put out to organise Mayday events, but lack of response meant that Mayday was effectively ‘cancelled’ in London, with even the Wombles ( who had been central to the 2001 events ( *EF!AU* No.75 2001: 2-3 ) ) leaving to take part in antiwar protests in Dublin ( *Wombles* 2004a ). 2005 had limited protests against Tesco, but their location was forced to remain secret, revealed only at the last minute by mobile text-messaging, “because of police tactics on previous Maydays” ( *Euromayday* 2005: 1 ). When planning for the 2005 G8 summit at Gleneagles, one comment made several times in *Dissent!* meetings was that “we don’t want another Mayday”. This case study therefore concludes with a stigma attached to the Mayday events that had, at least in some anarchists’ eyes, initially held out such promise of extending the best parts of EDA.

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<sup>199</sup> Livingstone’s condemnation is revealing: “on 1 May we are faced not with an attempt to exercise the peaceful right to protest but by a deliberate attempt by small groups of people to promote violence and destruction of property in London” ( Livingstone 2001a ).



## Reclaim the Streets: Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focussed on the EDA form most avowedly anarchist, and considered by both activist- and traditional ideological anarchists to hold most promise in taking environmental protest into a truly anti-authoritarian challenge to the powers that be. Some ambitious RTS literature even sought to map the street party tactic onto traditional anarchist conceptualisations of full-scale revolution, experienced as carnivals and organised into a commune of communes ( street party of street parties ). It was therefore no surprise that street parties were extended into explicitly anticapitalist mobilisations that were not merely symbolic and identity-affirming, but also physically attacked summits or sought to shut down 'centres' of capitalism.

However, while I found the anarchism of practice truly embedded in the street party form ( and also in the lesser critical mass cycle rides ), and I noted that the ideological expressions of London RTS had a thought-provoking and inspirational effect within EDA networks and beyond, I found that both the grander claims of London RTS, and also the larger ambitions of anticapitalist demonstrations, encountered problems which, perhaps, remain irresolvable. A sense of festivity is hard to sustain against violent responses, a sense of the carnivalesque does not in itself constitute revolution, and attempts to ally with more substantive struggles or co-operative experiments are awkward and of limited success. London RTS's dedication to the Guerrilla Gardening aspect of Mayday 2000 was an interesting and logical outgrowth of their identification with workers' struggles and traditional left-anarchist concerns, but it reached a dead end in terms of expressing green practice and extending the project of radical green change. Although I do not wish to dismiss all contributions of London RTS, I did conclude negatively by raising the possibility that the problems of London Maydays might indicate fundamental tensions between the anarchist project of total change, and the actual, small-scale, empowering practice of EDA.

My own view is that EDA has proved most inspirational and effective when it has taken place in unexpected places, by individuals bound not by ideology but by immediate practical concerns and an urge to action. However, I am aware that on occasions it has been my distance from the originating sources of these inspirational and influential moments that has led me to consider them as such 'successful' actions. It is hard for those outside the originating group to judge 'success' fairly, and nobody knows what is possible to achieve with EDA until it is attempted. But it is possible to compare the impact of the Mayday event with the impacts of previous EDA mobilisations, such as the No M11 campaign in which RTS organisers had earlier cut their teeth. There, although the protesters squatting in the way of the road were eventually evicted, "It was an experience that changed hundreds of people" ( *Do or Die* 2003: 19; cf *Do or Die* 1994: 22; *EF!AU* No.10 1994: 3; McLeish 1996: 40 ). It was such experiences of collective, autonomous direct action, usually on a much smaller and more personal scale, contributed to the radicalisation of so many people. The second factor missing from the Mayday events is the inestimable importance of "Belonging / connection ... love of the land" ( *EEV* 1997; Jasper 1999: 12; Heller 1999 [C]: 142-143; Eldrum 1993: 15 ). In abandoning the connection to specific, loved sites, Mayday lost much of what tied EDA protesters together.

In conclusion, the loss of 'place', the generalisation of opposition away from specific targets, and the substitution of ideological rather than deeds-based ties, undermined the foundations of ( anarchist ) success that EDA built on. Mayday confrontations were not offering an empowering, or even a 'real' experience. They could not therefore sustain the infusion of activists that had come into the city for J18 and Mayday 2000. These activists ( and passionate 'ordinary people' who did not see themselves primarily as activists ) had arrived at anarchist sentiments through their experience of struggles over particular places, often beloved to them and frequently becoming, through the experience of struggle, a site of strong emotional and collective ties. Such people came to recognise state and capital as their enemy: they recognised all issues were multiply linked and they followed the trail of money and corporate power to the city. But once they were there, they did not discover a site where they could bring their activism effectively to bear on the problem at hand, and they were not persuaded of the



benefits of gathering annually in London on Mayday. The anarchist criteria for success were not achieved, and the anarchist ethics of direct action were not fulfilled.



## Chapter 8

### Overall Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I summarise the core arguments made in each chapter, and highlight the most significant parts of those for our understanding of an anarchism that lives: an anarchism, that is, which does not sit still and static in a book, but which is practised, talked, tested and reflected upon in the actual context of struggle. I shall begin with my main premise and aim for this research project, and then move through the chapters in turn.

In this thesis I have used several sites of environmental protest, organisation and dialogue, to explore the interrelationship between anarchism ( as theory ) and ecological direct action ( as a site of struggle and experience ). I have pursued the argument that EDA is anarchist, and that anarchism is constituted by activist debate, and then, pursuing a reflexive, grounded and open-ended methodology, I have sought out specific manifestations of this activist anarchist discourse. During my thesis research, the debate undertaken between activists proved most important and influential on my own understanding of the anarchism of EDA. It demonstrated the vitality of anarchism in non-traditional settings, underlined the primacy of grounded discourse over purely theoretical reflection, and revealed to me the sheer range and acuity of collective activist intelligence.

In Chapter 1, I introduce my research project into the notion that environmental direct action is anarchist, and that anarchism may be located in the dialogue of activists talking to each other. I argue that many efforts at allying anarchism and environmentalism have tended to abstraction, reductionism and bowdlerisation. These unfortunate limitations have had more to do with the format and approach used to discuss the relationship, than with the authors' grasp of the subject, which is often more nuanced than is expressed. Some, including sympathetic green commentators, have presented an inadequately in-depth or critical analysis of the anarchism of green activists, while others from the eco-anarchist and activist milieus have committed the opposite error of over-criticality, losing what is most valuable in the anarchist tradition even as they harness anarchist tools to critique the forms handed down to them. I present my own attempt to explore the links between anarchism and environmentalism in the light of the faults identified in these limited approaches, and I characterise the anarchism of this thesis as one composed of the diverse and contested interplay of positions that arise from, and are grounded in, specific contexts. The elaboration of eco-anarchism in this thesis, therefore, is not a static mapping or structure-building, and it is not a neat, all-encompassing synthesis, because eco-anarchism is fundamentally diverse, many-voiced and dynamic. In keeping with this view, I chose to look, not solely at the works of green 'experts' or thought-specialists, but at the practices of activists on the ground, and to learn from the way that they, the living breathing eco-anarchists, reflect upon and manifest their beliefs.

In Chapter 2, I argue that an anarchism that avoids being confused with specific historical or codified manifestations - one that is recognised as fluid, fractured, contextual and *lived* - is one that can legitimately be applied to EDA. This anarchism can be found, not in a 'canon' that is untouchable and dusty, but in sites of communal practice; of confrontational struggle; of extra-institutional community; of horizontal, non-hierarchical and non-domineering practice; and of free individuality and creativity. It is crucial for our understanding of, and the continued vibrancy of, anarchism, that we recognise that anarchism is not only the historical movement, nor is it the 'coherent' or explicit anarchist movement ( which is often miniscule and rarely the site of the most exciting and progressive activism ). I maintain that real anarchism is found in practice as much as it is in text, and in the interplay of partial dialogues as well as in a beautifully constructed, intricate and harmonious ( but dead ) model. By demonstrating this, we can look at anarchism anew.

To facilitate the study of this grassroots, practised, activist anarchism, I examine key tenets from the realm of anarchist 'theory', in order to then apply them and re-ground them in the situations of activist eco-anarchism. First, I record the key, defining tenets of anarchism as ( 1 ) opposition to authority ( in all its forms, and in all its practices ); ( 2 ) a commitment to a real, social freedom ( not the individualism of a few 'over-empowered' personalities ); ( 3 ) rebellion, as a commitment to higher ideals than are possible within the current systems of exploitation, domination and; ( 4 ) a faith in our collective ability, and a refusal to accept a world that constrains and corrupts human potential; ( 5 ) a



recognition that power corrupts us, and a consequent commitment to developing only non-dominating and non-acquiescing forms of collective practice. The critiques that, later in the section I apply to ENGOs, Green Parties, Leninist-Trotskyists and 'elitist' forms of practice are all rooted in these base principles, and the experiments with free, radically challenging forms of lifestyle and politics practised at anti-road camps, EF! gatherings and street parties may all be grounded in, and critically examined on these grounds. Does one form of activism rely upon state support? Does another express a freedom that actually diminishes others'? If so, it is subject to anarchist critique.

I have probably said enough about the nature and existence of anarchism as I see it, but the core arguments advanced in the second part of Chapter 2 were for anarchism's flexibility ( not rigidity ); its existence as an ideal beyond and behind each historical manifestation; its continuity, supported by a conception of history as a neverending struggle between liberation and domination; its diversity - but a conflictual diversity of many robust and mutually critical strands; its commitment to reason but its refutation of dogma; its passion, its generous feelings of love and its carefully-remembered rage; diversity, and the growing that arises from the mutual exchange of ideas, criticism, and experimentation; and its commitment to practice. Most of all, I see anarchism as an ideology that supports action! All the principles listed above only come into their own, and become relevant, through their application to practice. Only then can we see what they actually *mean*.

I argue that the practice of environmental direct action not only fits the requirements of my reading of anarchism, but also that it demonstrates the continued vitality and relevance of anarchism as a living, breathing current of life. Anarchism is lived in the practices of horizontal exchange and communal endeavour created at Earth First! gatherings and anti-road camps; it is expressed in coherent and symbolically powerful challenges to the dominant norms of society, and in physical attempts to shut down the most environmentally destructive arms of capital; it is spoken by activists discussing strategy in the anti-genetics movement; and it is recorded in the rants, newsletters and discussion documents self-produced for activist debate. This thesis, therefore, has not only adopted anarchism as its framework for analysis of EDA, but has also endeavoured to 'rediscover' and 'recreate' anarchism through an examination of the ideas and practices of EDA. I believe that it is in this constant process of rediscovery and recreation that the life of anarchism is to be found.

In Chapter 3, I apply elements of anarchist critique and of anarchist ethics to my own practice of research. I do not stand outside the process of research as some distant observer, but as an active, enquiring agent on the same footing as the activists with whom I am engaged. I use anarchist, activist and feminist understandings to reject orthodox academic notions of objectivity, neutrality and the researcher-subject relationship on the grounds that these are bound up in state-centrism, and that they reproduce a hierarchical paradigm of power. My examination of the notion of 'activism' utilised in this thesis brings me to focus on the specific, local example of Tyneside Action for People and Planet ( TAPP ). Specifically, I consider the impact of 'being researched' on this group, and use this experience to clarify the perspectives on 'researching activism' which I advocate and have sought to employ. As eco-anarchism is grounded in local, particular sites, so in this thesis I have utilised examples from TAPP to support my more general arguments.

A key part of what I consider to be an anarchist approach to researching activists is to recognise them as autonomous and able individuals - not treating them as mere passive research 'subjects' - and I seek to include their voices in a critical dialogue with this thesis, for example by the inclusion of movement texts, newsletters and debate. These are not presented statically, as if they were stamps in a stamp album, but are situated within the dynamic debates and specific contexts that I explore. Never do I present the anarchist views recorded in this thesis as a monolithic truth - as 'this is the way it is' - but always as a part of a broader scene, in an often conflictual dialogue with other voices. It is a regrettable necessity that, due to size and the constraints of a thesis format, I must cut most divergent voices short. The voices, debates and sites of struggle considered in this thesis have all been selected for inclusion at the expense of a myriad others, and the simplifying effect this has, in enabling our understanding of the relevant arguments and our pursuit of selected ideas, should not lead the reader to conclude that 'this is all there is' - that this is the conclusive, authoritative story. Rather, activism and activist debate is still ongoing, and this thesis presents no 'synthesis' that puts a lid on the perspectives cited. At the local level, for example, the TAPP group may have ended, but most of the individuals involved are still committed to the practical contestation of power and an engagement with higher, more anarchist ideals. The details of this current practice have been deliberately left absent from the thesis, in order to avoid an intrusion of academia into the present. Perhaps the most significant of my applications of anarchist



critique to the practice of research, I would conclude, is that academic enquiry, while not without worth, is a *limited* form of investigation, and should not exercise a tyrannical hold over its subject. In order to avoid the worst impacts of this I have sought to utilise ethics from anarchist tradition, to act as check and defence.

In Chapter 4 I interrogate the place of anarchism within the green movement, asking what eco-anarchism was constituted from and exploring the interface of green with anarchist ideas. I begin with Andrew Dobson's definition of ecologism as a radical, political, all-or-nothing challenge to the status quo, in comparison to which any non-radical presentations of environmentalism stand revealed as nothing at all but evasions and prevarications. In comparison to Dobson's definition, other permutations on the definition of green radicality vary according to the emphasis given to 'pure' green outgrowths of eco-centrism, and toward radical ( left ) politics. Anarchism and the EDA activists of my thesis count as fully radical in all these definitions.

Green anarchism – most clearly in the form of EDA – is not a logical working out of political radicalism from ecological principles but rather an active, contested part of green thought – and of green practice also – some of whose practical manifestations have constituted the body of this thesis. This makes the influence of anarchists in the green field all the more impressive – things that have been *achieved, demonstrated, agreed* to be so, are much more valid than things that have dribbled down from on high, been forced on us, or exist as automatic, unexamined assumptions.

The exploration of 'essential' ( contested ) or theoretical ( idle ) compatibilities of anarchism and ecologism is not the topic of my study, but I do consider anarchism's place within the field of green politics. This is marked ( as in other fields ) by its committed opposition to authority: not just antagonistic to right-wing greens but also to left-wing authoritarians or to any of the myriad middle ways that fail to adequately challenge the institutions of state and capital ( and all the proto-states and other forms of social domination that may arise ). In healthy contradiction to the case made in the first part of the chapter for green plurality and heterogeneity, in the later part of this chapter I launch uncompromising strategic arguments from the anarchist heritage of critique, revolutionary endeavour and ethical practice. Most simply viewed as opposition to state and capital, I apply these strategic injunctions to the majority of green strategies for change: from state-dependent projects of reform, to militant but doomed attempts at wilderness defence. I emphasise the systematic approach that anarchists insist must be made against the sources of environmental destruction: against militarism as well as against 'bad' corporations, and against capital as well as against unethical consumerism. This leads me to consider what anarchists consider to be the *right* ingredients for meaningful change and for anarchist revolutionary practice, which I characterise according to the terms of non-reformist ( but also non-purist ) direct action. Direct action may be viewed by anarchists as 'revolution in the quiet times', and on this basis I consider that the traditional anarchist attention paid to revolutionary ethics can legitimately be brought to bear against the use of direct action in the here-and-now. The central anarchist concepts here are means-ends congruity, and the necessity for action to both express and support freedom.

I argue that the anarchist approach to our understanding of direct action is not only accurate and useful, but also that it resembles the view of EDA practitioners themselves. In Chapter 5 I turn to the actual practice of UK environmentalists, and I reveal the anarchism manifested and articulated in the nineties eco-activist scene. First, I characterise the institutionalisation of the conventional environmentalist opposition, noting the anarchist conceptualisation of the processes by which state-dependent or bureaucratic organisations ultimately neutralise the radical challenge. In contrast to this realm of pacification and state-like specialisation, in which 'supporters' are encouraged to remain passive and governments and corporations are viewed as partners in the management of environmental problems, I characterise extra-institutional protest in the anarchist terms of active human agency and the will to struggle. Most importantly, the experience of this form of protest can develop processes of radicalisation ( exactly contrary to the institutionalisation thesis ), in which an experiential anarchism can develop. Through the experience of ecological struggle, individuals and communities in the 1990s became alienated from authority and the conventional processes of liberal democracy, and they developed broader critiques of power - of causal forces of domination in society. In compensation for this alienation, extra-institutional protest and mobilisation can also generate a power and a sense of empowerment that impacts not just on individuals but on communities and wider society also.



Anarchists recognised the merit of these radicalising tendencies in the movements of environmental defence, and the defence of civil liberties ( diverse freedoms ), which arose in the early nineties. But these were not traditional arenas of workplace struggle and some anarchists fretted that they did not have class or the traditional anarchist badges of identity at their centre. I argue, however, that the party-and-protest culture of DIY, and the cross-class defensive mobilisations that snowballed around the UK state's road-building programme, were just as significant for anarchism as conventional labour disputes or historical insurrections. Theorists of anarchism, and its advocates, should take on board from these movements that anarchism can exist in a form that genuinely embraces diversity and difference at its heart: it can do this when the anarchism of practice, rather than one set ideological dogma, is placed at its centre. Of course this will not be a purist or strictly orthodox expression of anarchism, but it may nonetheless engender strong expressions of anarchism, in ways that reach beyond the narrow ideological anarchist scene and into unexpectedly broad and energetic communities. I examine what the actual articulation of this activist anarchism looks like in the main part of Chapter 5, by examining the practices, debates and expressions of organisational identity in Earth First!, the most explicit and perhaps the most articulate of the UK's eco-anarchist networks.

Earth First! played a frontline role not just in the anti-roads movement, but also in the other sites of radical EDA looked at in this thesis, such as genetics, peat, traffic and transport, and anti-globalisation. EF! is the closest thing there has been to a central coordinating network for anarchistic EDA. I frame its organisational formation ( in both the US and UK ) in terms of an anarchist reaction to institutionalised, inadequate ENGOS. I trace the anarchist characteristics, both individual and communitarian, of EF!'s organisation – particularly through my experience of the Action Update, the Summer Gathering and the Winter Moot, 1999. I use the latter event to crystallise the streams of anarchism present and at work within EF! activism, as they were forced into some polarisation and competition, in the form of articulated proposals for how EF! should develop and how it should be identified. Yet I do not champion one successful proposal or version of eco-anarchism here, as the 'most coherent' or winning formulation. Rather, I emphasise that all these different forms and flows of anarchism coexist within EF!, and other eco-anarchist groupings, and that it is the interplay of these that demonstrate the particular powers of activist anarchism. By considering the radical power contained in EF!'s multi-issue ( but not over-generalised ) approach to politics; its ecological holism; its negation of the institutionalisation thesis through no-compromise principles; its innovative geographical use of direct action; and in its incorporation of many different tactics and strategies, we also discover the character and power of an eco-anarchism applicable to current times.

Through my examination of EF! practice and debate, Chapter 5 re-embeds anarchism into a particular place and time, in a particular milieu, in a way that gives anarchism a reality missing from the theoretical discussion of the earlier chapters. In Chapter 6, I do the same with two new contexts - the anti-GM movement and peatlands defence – but I also introduce new theoretical issues of importance to any understanding of anarchism. These are the issues of what constitutes genuine, non-elitist and non-reformist direct action, and what is the impact and importance of violence within militant strategies for change.

I begin in 6.2 by distinguishing anarchist direct action from state-dependent or reformist versions of direct action, and tracing the common qualities that tie the EDA extant at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century together with syndicalist forms of direct action more common at the century's beginning. In 6.3, by contrast, I emphasise that within the anarchist field there are many, often conflicting, formats, traditions and potentialities. For example, civil disobedience discourse conflicts with the method of insurrectionary anarchism, and syndicalists operate under a vastly different justificatory framework from eco-saboteurs, yet all of these tendencies and traditions may accurately be viewed as a part of the diverse and dynamic field of anarchist direct action. The EDA of this thesis may take elements from each of these traditions, and reject elements from each, without causing a serious rupture to our understanding of anarchist direct action. This is because the value of anarchism lies in the applicability of its arguments and the coherence of its ethical, attitudinal approach to practice: I seek to demonstrate this by applying the ethics of participation, mean-ends congruity and freedom-based/freedom-expressing practice to the tactics of militant, effective direct action in these two settings.

In the sections of 6.4, I consider the anti-GM movement, which followed the decline of the anti-roads movement as the most widespread and effective focus of EDA. I also move from the identification of anarchism in practice and organisation, and the debates over identity ( considered in Chapter 5 ), to consider how the breadth and acuity of eco-anarchism can also be expressed through *strategic* debate.



Here, the covert-overt debate serves as the point of polarisation, in which the differing strategic and ethical frameworks of CD discourse, animal rights strategy and others, are thrown into contrast in a series of disagreements that nonetheless serve to demonstrate the overall strength and validation of anarchism. They do this by grounding the divergent views in shared anarchist themes of empowerment, autonomy, anti-authoritarianism and accessibility. Antagonism revealed common values, and diversity demonstrated an underlying unity, and I argue that the only viewpoints at fault in such a debate are those which take their own position too literally, too rigidly, and too tyrannically.

I continue this examination of the interactions of anarchism's ethical and strategic discourses within the context of ecological activism in 6.5, Peat and the ELF. Here, I consider how the use of sabotage, elaborated in theoretical terms in 6.3.5, became subject to anarchist critique when it advanced into a vanguardist and quasi-militaristic discourse of 'effectiveness', and was embodied by the organisational form of the 'Earth Liberation Front'. As a corrective to this tendency, I consider the UK campaign against peat milling and highlight the coexistence and fluid interaction between sabotage and other repertoires, presenting this recent form of UK EDA as a more grounded and sustainable model for future environmental practice. The case of peat provides a useful example because, coming later than the anti-roads battles I consider, and intimately connected to the history and narrative of EF!, it allowed a re-expression of EF! activists' commitment to ecological principles, and provided a re-flowering of geographically-mobile and inclusive direct action, targeted at the source of production/destruction and operating not only on economic, but also on ecological and on political levels. Many of the strengths that I, and many participants, found in nineties EDA may be identified in the post-millennium peat campaign. These include a sound ecological motivation combined with persuasive, seemingly achievable aims ( and these were not requests for government action, but no-compromise efforts to close one particular site of destruction down ); a sensitivity to place and a connection both to the seasons and to past histories of rebellion; a decentralised and dispersed dynamic of activism, combined with moments of collective confrontation that created a sense of purpose and of strength; a grounded use of tactics, that were accessible, uncompromising and direct ( sabotage included ), and which could be varied and adapted loosely and at will; a specific and non-grandiose network of organisation, that supported but did not lead the campaign; a timeline, a sense of urgency and purpose, and a satisfying end result. These perceived strengths were notable by their absence from the final case considered in this thesis.

In Chapter 7, Reclaim the Streets and the Limits of Activist Anarchism, I consider Reclaim the Streets as the furthest point EDA went in expressing a generalised anticapitalism. I look at its origins, its organisation, the anarchism of its practice and the diverse elements in its anarchist ideology. I then look at the protests on Mayday 2000 as a crossover between ideological and activist anarchism that was not ultimately considered to be successful.

I begin by noting the origins of RTS in EF! and the anti-roads movement, and charting the successful expansion of the urban 'street party' tactic. Here I provide examples of Newcastle's street parties and critical masses to support an assessment of the anarchist character embodied by a street party event, as premised upon crowd solidarity, free festivity, and the autonomous 'we're in control, not the authorities' attitude. A resonance with the original key tenets of anarchism made in Chapter 2 should be clear. The fact that the anarchism of critical masses and street parties was demonstrated in practice, as well as in rhetoric, demonstrates that a solely textual analysis of the history and impact of street parties would, furthermore, have created an inaccurate account: as with the other case studies, I maintain that an approach in which participation is triangulated by accounts from others or from movement texts, and in which experience and feelings are valued as a source of judgement, is much better able to reveal the essence of activist anarchism. For example, in this case it revealed the nature of the relationship between local autonomy and 'national' influence in the organisation and diffusion of street parties, and it provides the only route to understanding how the quasi-situationist and celebratory rhetoric of RTS translates into reality.

In addition to its practice, RTS used ( recontextualised and revitalised ) different elements from anarchist ideology, including a social critique of individualism, an ecological critique of capitalism, and an anarchist critique of politics, to create a distinctive 'brand' of rhetoric that laid emphasis on individual empowerment, the opposition of festivity to authoritarian control, and a homage to the carnivalesque history of revolution ( albeit in temporary form ). The case of RTS thus demonstrates the heterogeneity of anarchist influence, which includes situationist, feminist, non-violent, insurrectionary, communal and individual streams, capable of innumerable combinations and hybridisations. In



comparison to the other EDA of this thesis, however, RTS's articulate rhetoric was perhaps over-done: it was easily abstracted from reality, quickly became repetitive, and was so idealistic that it couldn't help but be used against RTS, to criticise the gulf between their rhetoric and the reality. With Mayday 2000, some in EDA used this abstract rhetoric as part of an attack on ideological anarchism.

There was a tension in RTS between organisational openness ( according with the anarchist ideal ), and the pressure to become secretive and closed ( due to conflict with the authorities ). At times this tension could be expressed creatively, positively, by tactics that subverted expectations or responded to criticism. Thus the attempt at assembly-style organisation at Guerrilla Gardening, for example, responded to critique of 'spectators' at street parties. The alliance with striking dockers and tube-workers also answered accusations of hedonism, shallowness or inadequacy in political depth. The street party tactic could, furthermore, be taken on by any organising group, which is what happened against the G8 in Birmingham, in Newcastle, and in London against the DSEI arms fair. Tensions also had negative impacts, however, with individuals targeted for punishment by the authorities, the fracturing of open meeting processes, and the festivity, considered essential to a successful party, corroded by both authorities and by some participants.

RTS was the highest-profile carrier of generalised anticapitalism and ideological anarchism into the EDA milieu. I use the case of Mayday 2000 to indicate both the integration of, and tensions between, ecological and ideological anarchist themes on the field of activism. This may be viewed in terms of the problem of how to fit direct action into a 'general issue', and I consider, as its constituent parts, problems encountered in RTS in extending their ideals of diverse participation into a central London setting; tensions between egalitarian relations and the security and 'herding' necessitated by large-scale urban street parties; and the friction generated between different 'radical' tactics. In this case, the property damage and unproductive street fighting of Mayday encouraged non-anarchist sympathisers of EDA to mount condemnations of anarchistic direct action and celebrations of liberal direct action as the preferred alternative ( triggering further articulations of anarchist refutation and argument ). I argue that the abstract generalisation of struggle under an 'anticapitalist' umbrella provides only half of the necessary equation for activist anarchist success: strong local sites are needed too, no matter how small they may appear beside the national spectacles. Most significantly, I argue that connection to place – ecologically and emotionally - is one of the strengths of EDA and the city of London proved a hindering rather than a facilitating venue for radical EDA: particularly when allied to a sense of repetitiveness in the tactic, and an unsympathetic political climate.

I will not now present a list of suggested avenues for further research, or predictions of the future of EDA and anarchism. Instead I will simply urge that future research, especially, but not solely, when dealing with an anarchistic movement such as EDA, takes on board a more anarchist approach to research, in terms of both ethics and criticality, and also in terms of practice. I hope to have demonstrated the critical strength and contextualised relevance of practised anarchism. I have argued that anarchist lessons should be learnt by the green movement, and that an anarchism of plural diversity and open-ended, fractured dialogue is stronger and more accurate than any reductionist narrowing-down of what constitutes 'legitimate' anarchism. I have presented an understanding of direct action not just as the moment of conflict, but as the whole ethos and defining nature of the movement: as expressed in organisation, in strategy, in tactics and in ideological statements. The power of environmental direct action, furthermore, is something beyond what can be expressed in theory or in ideological rhetoric. The clearest way to understand the anarchism of ecological direct action is to experience it.



## Bibliography

An unavoidable problem with the ephemeral literature I have drawn upon is its difficulty to date, to place, and to accredit. I make no apology for using this ephemeral literature, indeed I have taken pains to place it on an equal footing with the more authoritative and library-held texts ( I often provide a reference from one source of each type ). It has necessitated certain omissions and adaptations to this bibliography, however.

I have placed a 'c' for those items whose date I have had to estimate. When the text has been reprinted, I date the version I have used, i.e. the reprint, as it may have been edited and repaginated during its journey from the original source. None of the dates for ephemeral and re-distributed texts are fully 'authoritative' – they represent the point that I became aware of the pamphlet, often at a gathering, meeting, bookfair, or by email. Where possible, I updated internet references for September 2005. These are provided only when a print version is hard to trace, or when my own reading of the text has been via the internet: many of the other texts are also quickly found by an internet search. For unpaginated texts my own system of pagination has taken the first number from the first page with substantial text – often the front page of newsletters such as the EF!AU or TGAL. Internet-only or single page texts have not been paginated.

In order to avoid having an unfeasibly long list of 'Anons', I have listed anonymous discussion documents by a sequence of letters from the title, so for example, "Earth First! What Are Our Philosophies?" becomes EFWP (1998). Dates for these are taken from the time of my reading of them, and I have overridden the date-of-writing in favour of the date-of-printing and circulation at, for example, the 1999 Earth First! Winter Moot. This is also the case for the Schnews newsletters, which may have been distributed in one year, but collated in a book format the year following: in the case of Schnews, when the book is unpaginated I have combined the book's date with the newsletter number. If the title is in quotation marks instead of being underlined, it is not a published book, magazine, or substantial pamphlet but a more ephemeral piece such as a leaflet or discussion document. For a few edited collections ( see Freedom Press ) I have used the publishing name as the author, because that name constituted the group that initiated the project.

Most articles in *Do or Die*, *Schnews*, *EF!AU*, *TGAL* etc are not accredited to individual authors, so I have included authors' names in the bibliography only when they were clearly attributed. I have not been able to include page numbers for all newspaper reports and articles: this is partly due to my 'inheritance' of collections of clippings from other TAPP members, which did not feature all the publishing information. Places of publication are not always obvious. I have been unable to provide dates and issue numbers for the ( now-defunct ) Greenline magazine, for example, as my collection of clippings was not adequately labelled. There are occasional other instances where this has been the case ( eg. *Subversion*, French c1993 ). Other idiosyncracies in the referencing may be explained by referring to the title in the bibliography: *Calendar* (c2002: 8<sup>th</sup> November ), for example, is an anonymously produced diary, not specific to any year, with no page numbers but with dates instead. Much of this ephemeral literature will pass away with the relevance of the context that triggered it, but new and equally incisive examples will replace it.

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# TAPP: how we talked about what we did...

## What this is:

This is not my analysis of TAPP, and it's not a history of what TAPP did. It's a kind of history of what TAPP has said about itself. It's written from the various things that TAPP folk have written, and that TAPP people have said to me. Some things may be out of date or unrepresentative. Others are not dealt with much, simply because I haven't found much written down about them. I've done it as a reminder of the group that has gone, and to provoke thought about what we want to come.



## 1. Basic Values

### Deeds not Words

"TAPP is a direct action group"

(Act Locally, Issue 14, Summer 1998)

In Spring 2001, the North Guide reported that "Increasingly there is a culture of DIY protest in the UK as people decide that politicians cannot be relied upon to bring about change. As a result direct action is spreading". It went on to advertise the existence of a group called TAPP that believed in doing something more radical than "sending off an annual membership fee to Friends of the Earth".

TAPP was thus promoted as a group that believes in 'Deeds, not Words'. Taking action was prioritised over being just another 'talk-shop', and the group's meetings were pretty much all focussed on thinking up, and then organising, various forms of political action. One ex-TAPPer even stated that "TAPP... have an obsessive direct action thing, and there's a rejection of theory: let's not talk about politics in meetings because we'll just do it" (Interview, February 2002). Compared to other political and campaigning groups in Tyneside, the list of TAPP's activities was huge: a testament to its attitude of 'deeds not words'.



STOP  
THE  
CHOP!

July and Aug  
Chop ...



## The 'Do – it – Yourself' ethos

TAPP's DIY spirit is shown in its attitude to media. Throughout its life, TAPP produced the monthly newsletter of actions and local issues, 'Think Globally, Act Locally'. The editorship of this newsletter was passed around the different members of the group, so that most TAPPers took the editorial control for at least one issue. One down-side of this democratic DIY spirit is that the quality of the newsletter sometimes suffered: professional production this was not!

TAPP also researched and produced many fliers for particular events, like protests against Shell, or GM promotions. The most ambitious of these was the spoof newspaper 'the Chronic', produced for May-Day 2002 and handed out for free in its thousands. Backing up such publicity and propaganda have been fund-raising gigs, cake-stalls, and café's ( although some no-strings funding was also accepted ).



### NORTHUMBRIA POLICE

Northumbria Police are aware of illegal activities taking place in this area.

Individuals should be aware that if complaints from the public are received this may result in the Police prosecuting offenders.

In a wider sense, too, TAPP 'did it ourselves' in the many actions and events we organised. There are few forms of DIY action that TAPP has not had a bash at doing: from supermarket blockades on the GM issue, to its very own Reclaim the Streets and, the following year, the first political squat to be seen on Tyneside for over a decade. Each of these events have involved the learning of new skills, and the sharing of those skills around the group: these range from putting up a tripod, using a camcorder, and editing the newsletter.



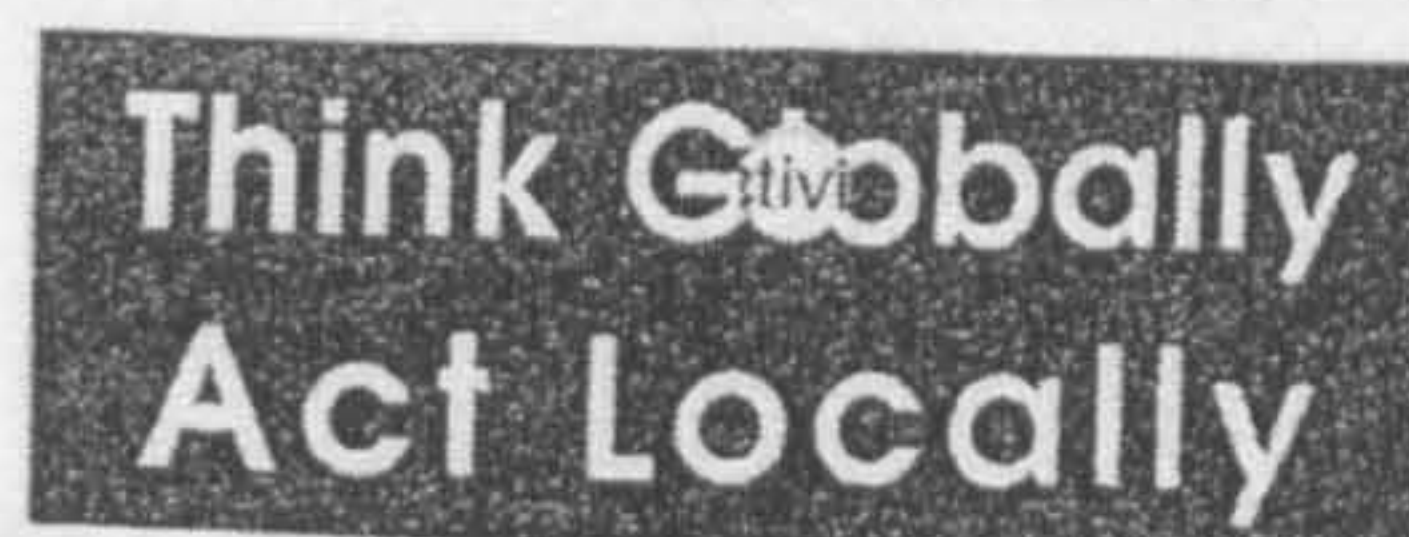
## Co-operation and Diversity

The North Guide advertisement for TAPP went on to talk of the group's 'non-violent direct action': (non) violence is one of the many issues that TAPP's members never fully agreed on. TAPP members never had to sign up to a set of beliefs or norms: individuals' different opinions didn't matter so long as they could agree to work together (there's that emphasis on 'action' again). I think this was one of TAPP's main strengths, others may disagree...

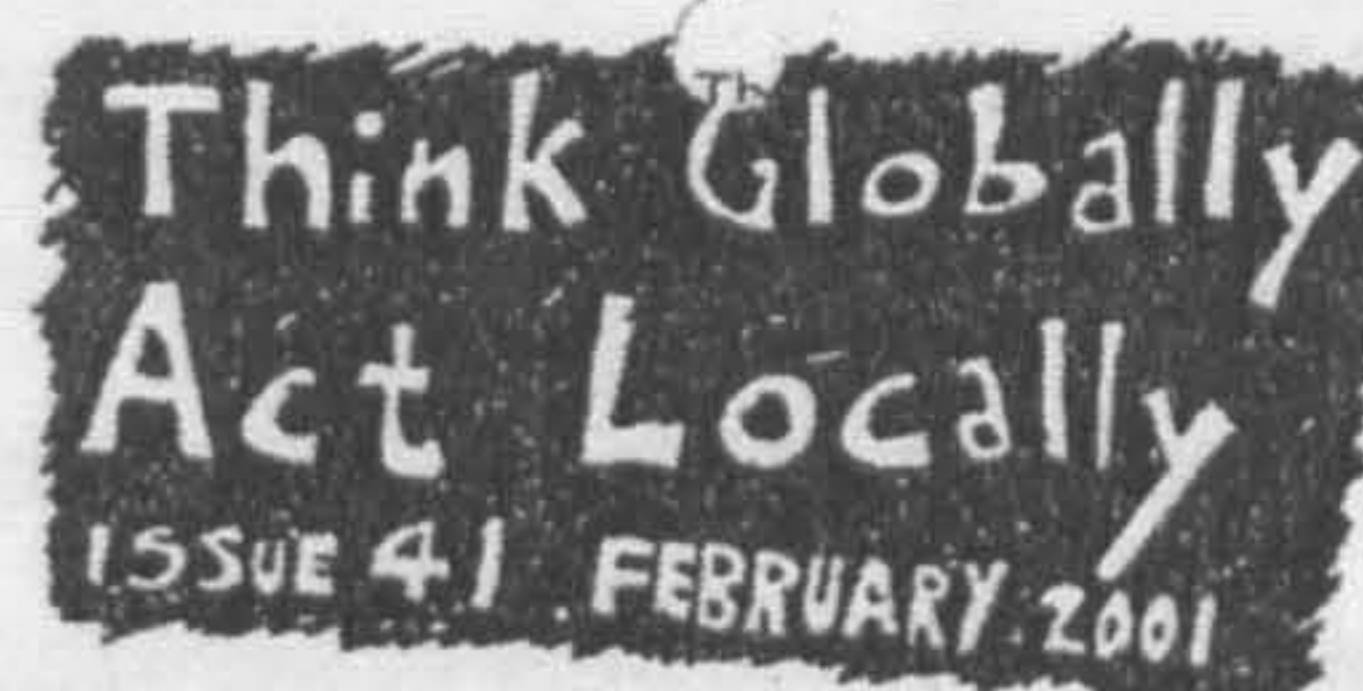
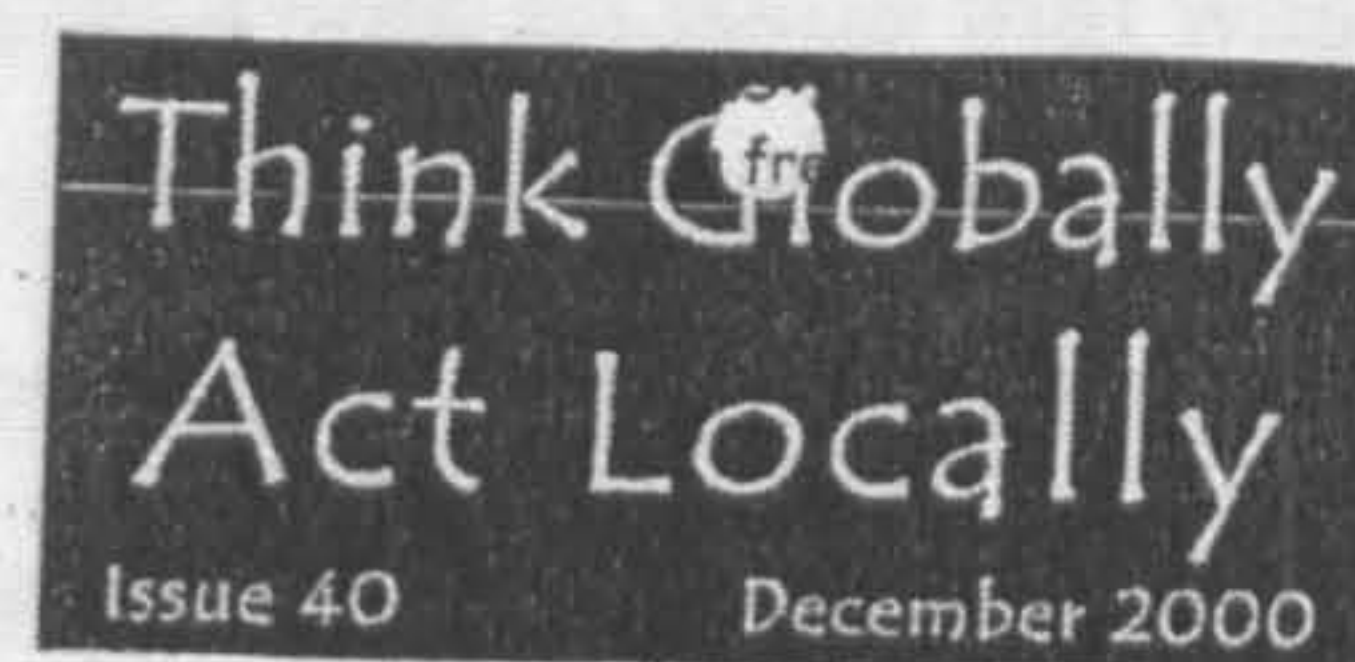
In one of the group's early statements, TAPP described its methods as "Peaceful demonstrations" and "Accountable non violent direct action". It also set limits on the methods used, namely "Respect for individuals, No physical violence" and "No harm to people and planet" (TAPP's aims, methods and limits, produced for the meeting room's managers, Autumn 1999). This statement had no real meaning for the group, however: in fact most participants seem to have forgotten its ever being drafted.

An interesting outward sign of the differences in outlook on the (non) violence issue can be seen with the banner for 'think globally act locally'. The image that quickly became the standard logo features a crowd throwing rocks (although one TAPP-ista insists that he always thought they were cakes and buns!). These rocks were tipped out by one of the newsletter's editors, and alternative logo's used by others, partly in order to avoid the 'violent' image.

In general, though, the image endured, and was even used as the TAPP logo on a leaflet co-produced with other environmental groups (even though TAPP never had an 'official' symbol).



**DANCE FOR PEACE AND SOLIDARITY**  
The mid-december Dance for Peace event was a stomping success. Thanks to everyone who attended and lets look forward to the next one!



## 2. Social Issues

### Gender

The added skirts on the figures above brings us to the next subject. For most of its lifespan, TAPP had a roughly equal mix of male and female participants. In early 2001, when it found itself almost entirely male, the group panicked slightly and discussed why it had lost its female half. Amongst the potential reasons identified were a "bloke-ish atmosphere" in some meetings, lack of childcare facilities and the nature of 'boring' politics. The actual reasons for women withdrawing from TAPP, however, seemed to be more career- or outside-world related. When TAPP folded itself, the gender balance had become more healthy again.



In comparison with TAG ( Tyneside Anarchist Group ), which had existed before TAPP, I think TAPP fared well on the gender issue ( ie. for a group of its type<sup>1</sup> ). A ( male ) ex-TAG member characterised TAG as “much more in your face. Very much more ideological, as well, although, some people weren’t particularly ideological and just liked fighting and drinking... Very male as well.” Another ( female ) TAPPer in the room then commented “That accounts for the fighting and drinking, then.” ( Group interview, 1999 ).

It is interesting, however, that certain group roles were taken on more by the women in TAPP: sitting on stalls, making banners and, most noticeably, baking cakes as a fundraiser ( the ‘fairy cake collective’ was all female ). Apart from one dominant woman in its first year, furthermore, I think it’s fair to say that the biggest and loudest talkers in meetings were all men.

I would like to think that TAPP had a healthy attitude to issues of homophobia, bisexuality etc.. but that was never expressed through its campaigns ( unlike feminism, race and disability )



<sup>1</sup> Politics generally is dominated by men, including left-wing and anarchist politics. Statistically, environmentalism has a majority of women involved, but in certain sectors, eg. high-paid jobs, and confrontational protest, men predominate.

I walked back along Northumberland st about 2ish when I met 4 or 5 other folks giving out anti-mcdonalds leaflets. I explained about the free tatties earlier and they were chuffed but also thought it explained the hostile reaction from the mcd’s security guard that they’d got. [ oct 2001 ]

## Race / Class

The composition of TAPP itself was predominantly white, although its participants did work with non-white campaigners on such issues as anti-racism and asylum rights.

Class was an issue that was mentioned more than race ( anti-racism tended to be taken for granted as a background assumption ). One TAPPer wrote a university essay problematising class and DIY politics. The ex-TAG member above suggested that TAG was superior to TAPP in being “a lot more working class than TAPP is... most had left school at 16” and ( related to this ) “people were motivated more by, what I’d term sort of social issues” as opposed to such things as genetics.

Another ex-TAPPer phrased the problem in this way: “Lots of people have a lot of doors open to them in the future, and a lot of people ( it’s myself I’m talking about ) have a lot of doors shut... It’s not in the present, with money or whatever, it’s in the future. There are structured inequalities that are repeated in the group, and nothing can be done about them” ( Interview, Feb 2002 ).

TAPP had a high degree of university-based or ex-university members and this was commented upon as a problem by several people. The previous interviewee argued that “it can be a barrier for people coming in. It can feel like a university milieu, undergraduate, postgraduate or whatever, and I think that... can feel cliquey, or exclusive” ( Interview, Feb 2002 ). As one of the university-based TAPPers I also wrote in May 2001 that “Maybe the most defining point of the ‘group’ is that we’re overloaded with academics or pseudo-academics.”



Tension with the amount of research done by students on TAPP is also demonstrated, for example with a recent spoof Phd proposal:

*"Why is it that so many people think that a very small group of people organising things over such a small length of time warrant so much fucking attention?"*

## Disability

Direct action groups have been criticised for privileging an elite of able-bodied, young activists. I would like to think that TAPP is not elitist in this way, but it is true that none of the group's regular participants were 'disabled'.

In choosing to campaign against the human genetics showcase, the International Centre for Life (ICFL), TAPP came onto common ground with local disability activists from the now-defunct DANE group, (Disability Action North East). In a TAPP-DANE meeting in August '98, the DANE activists contrasted the medical model of disability with the social model: "the medical model of disability ... atomizes the individual, homing in on one characteristic and reducing the human being to that. Hence the blindfold of 'disability' rather than seeing the social barriers... It is society which impairs us, through this individualization...

disablement is socially constructed". Without going into the detail of the discussion and the ICFL, I think it's fair to say that TAPP accepted the point that "To escape the oppressive point of view, the medical viewpoint must be countered. By the social one, holistically. Disability is the experience of barriers in society that are caused by society, like negative cultural stereotypes." This thinking was then reflected in TAPP's campaign to expose and embarrass the ICFL and in its support of the 'Freedom March' of DAN (Direct Action Network) in May 2000.

DON'T  
BELIEVE  
THE  
GREENWASH

Blood  
on  
their  
Hands



## Being Green

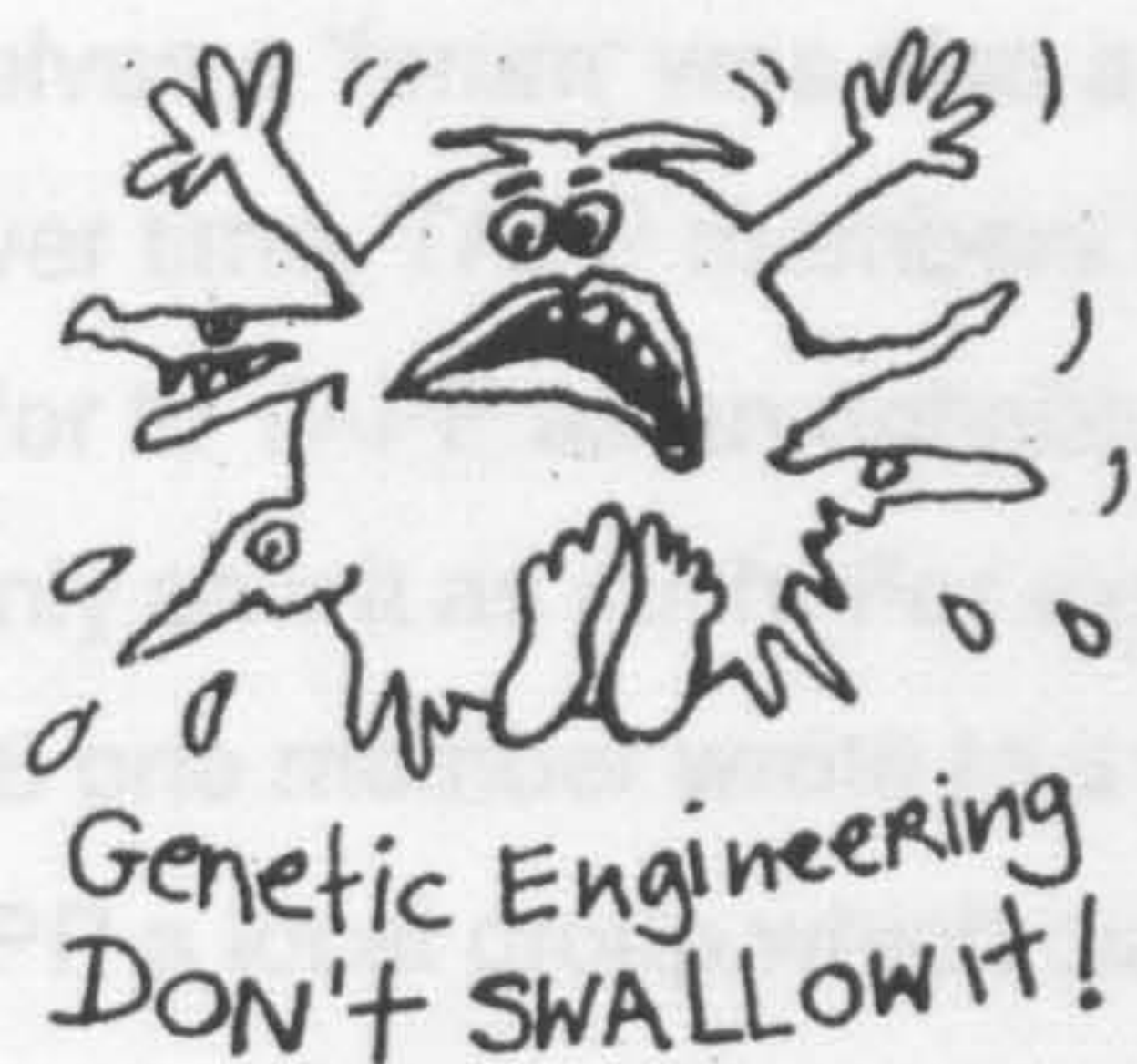
Many of TAPP's campaigns were centred around environmental issues, and I just want to note here that this environmental consciousness was reflected in TAPPers' own private lives. Members tended to be low-consumers and re-used materials such as placards: it was common to find that, when the slogan on your placard started to come off, you'd find the slogan from a previous, unrelated demo beginning to come through from underneath! Several TAPPers also took on allotments, composted, did courses on Permaculture, held a strictly ethical, organic or vegan diet, and undertook conservation or environmental education activities. Although some did own petrol-driven vehicles, these were outnumbered by the bikes.

## 3. Political Positions

### Differences and Common Ground

The individuals involved in TAPP came from different traditions. In the years before TAPP formed, they were variously involved in the Cradlewell bypass anti-road camp, Alleycat Radical Books Co-op, Tyneside Anarchist Group, Newcastle Animal Rights Coalition, Newcastle University's Peace Action Society and Green Society, and North East Green Party. On the group's first collective action, in solidarity with the Magnet strikers, 'Think globally' reported that anarchists, socialists and greens took part.





In a "discussion of priorities" in June '98, a majority of people in the meeting said that genetics was a priority for them, but everyone had their own issues. While one person wanted to do solidarity actions with striking workers, and campaigning on the New Deal, another in the meeting said she was "Less concerned with working rights. Although I recognise they're important, my heart's not in it. Coz it's part of the system I hate so much". This launched the discussion onto a debate about our various attitudes to work ( eg. "we should do [ a campaign ] on 'the Right not to work'" ). This was typical of the spectrum of opinions in the group on all kinds of political and social issues.

Despite these differences, however, the general basis of agreement in the group was stated by another person at this meeting:

*"Everyone's up for supporting each other's campaigns, but a long-term campaign is different".*

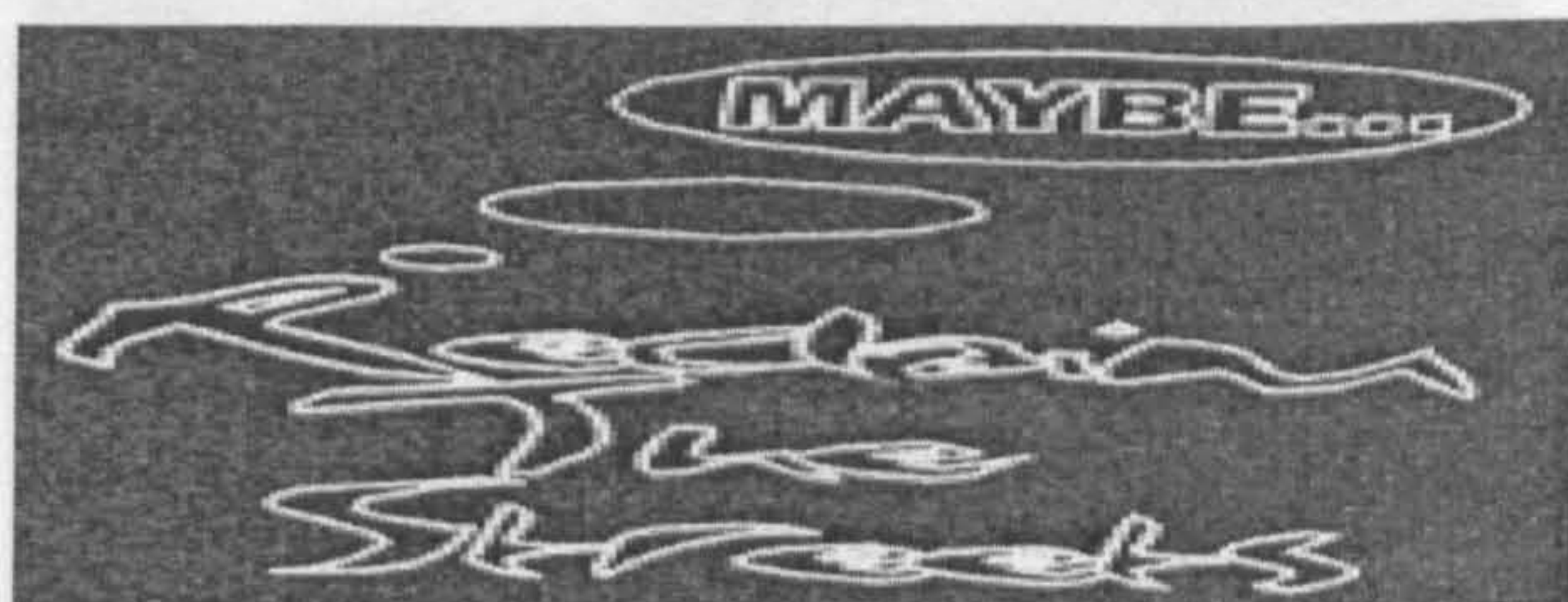
The next 4 years proved this statement right: the group as a whole never took on a long-term campaign as its priority ( genetics included ). Instead, individuals in the group would make personal commitments to long-term campaigns and issues, like the Byker incinerator, Faslane nuclear sub base, anti-racist organising etc.. These individuals would keep the group informed of their issues, and the other members of the group would then get involved at times when they felt it useful. When they didn't feel that campaign was a priority, then they simply wouldn't get

involved. As one interviewee said in 1999, "I know well over half the people in TAPP think the critical masses are a stupid idea but... not one person in TAPP has said, ever to me, that they don't think we should do it, but I know that most people think it's not worth it coz they don't turn up... I like that... coz it means you don't feel embarrassed to suggest a really silly action. People don't shout you down, they just don't come".

One implication of this is that TAPP, being a group involved in many issues, did not become fully involved in any. As one ex-TAPPer put it: "It's either a long-term community campaign, or it's free-floating, dipping in here, dipping in there, don't have to be responsible to a local residents group or local community group" ( Interview, Feb 2002 ). Another TAPPer criticised that "Every week we touch upon numerous issues, we plan actions on numerous issues, seemingly moving every week from one thing to the next. This means there isn't a focus... It would be wonderful to target something big and win." ( email, May 2002 )

TAPP has made various group statements, of **'who we are'**. The most representative of these was, I think, that in 'the Agitator' directory of "autonomous, non-hierarchical groups", in 2000:

*"TAPP is really a forum allowing people with different political views but with a belief in direct action to come together over certain issues. Whilst there is no single ideology for the group ( there are socialists, anarchists and greens in it ) it does operate in an anarchist way ( no hierarchy, collective decision-making etc etc. )"*





Calling ourselves a 'forum' was also a common thing<sup>2</sup>, but over time, TAPP members came to habitually refer to TAPP as an definite group, and others certainly saw it as such. For example, in October 1998 one member wrote to a fur shop "on behalf of TAPP a local group which campaigns on issues of environmental and social concern".

Another member wrote on behalf of TAPP as an 'anti-capitalist' group, once the phrase became common currency after Seattle.

At a TAPP meeting in May 2001, one person argued ( against me ) that the people in TAPP "shared a lot of **common ground** and thought in a similar way... Direct action, libertarian, anti-capitalist" ( my notes ). That this common ground does exist in the group is demonstrated by the 'Think globally' edition for MayDay 2001 ( issue 44 )

*"On this month's front cover we have translated 'think globally, act locally!' into a number of languages to represent the international nature of struggles which May day represents. We have also coloured them red ( for socialism ), green ( for ecologism ) and black ( for anarchism ) to represent what we are working towards – a unity of diverse struggles which connects a concern for the environment and the welfare of people with the need to organise our own lives, Be realistic. Demand the impossible!"*

There was no criticism or controversy over this front page ( incidentally, the sentiment was already familiar from national MayDay literature )

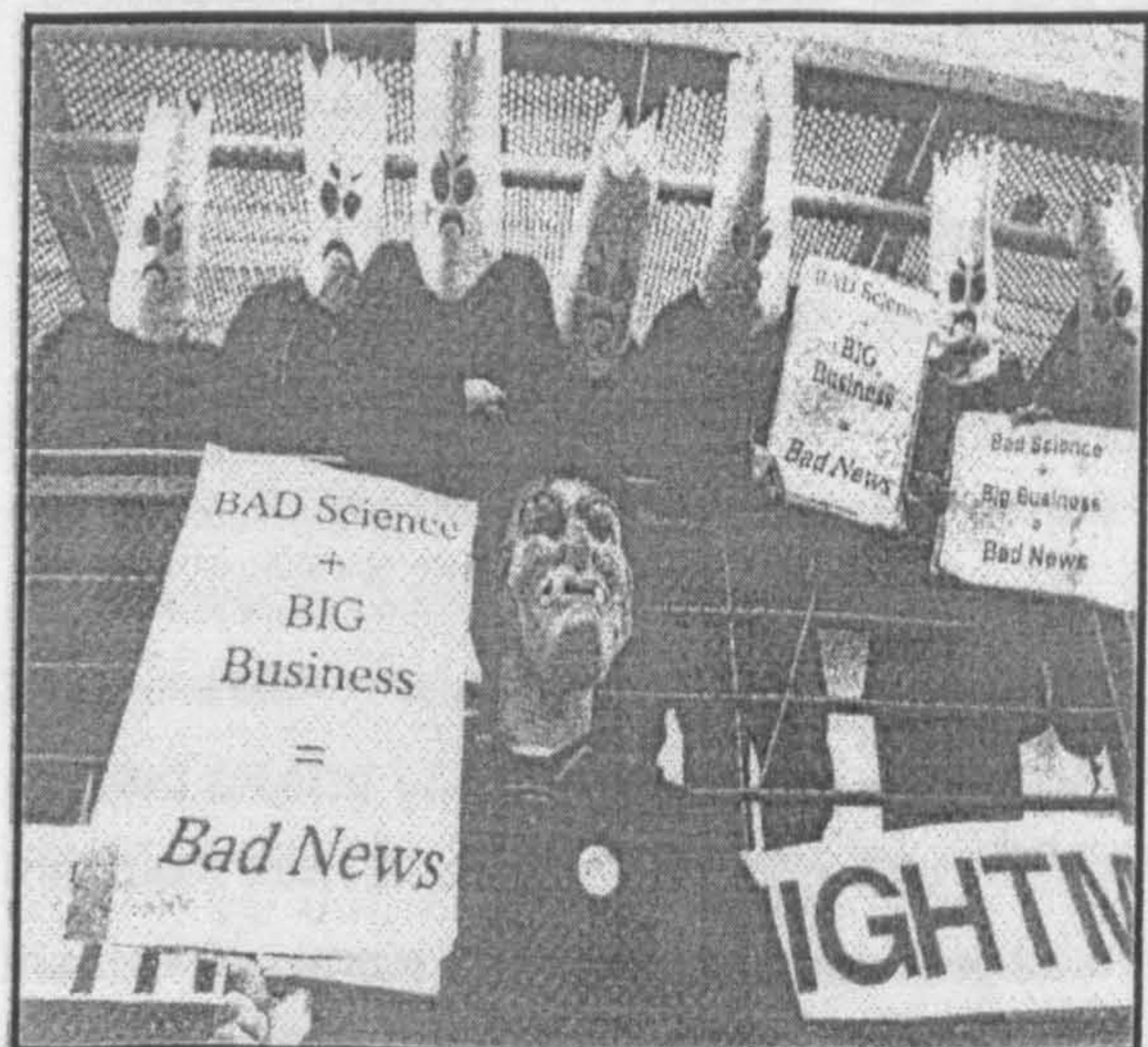
A sense of being part of a radical tradition was demonstrated with 'Wor Story', the pamphlet TAPP members produced on radical Tyneside history, and also with leaflets on North East volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, etc...

<sup>2</sup> The website, for example, states that "TAPP is a forum for the various Direct Action and other campaigning groups in the North East. <http://www.sandyford.techie.org.uk/>

## TAPP's relationship to other Green and Left groups

We have already noted the North Guide positioning TAPP as "more effective" than such NGO's as Friends of the Earth ( FoE ). Although TAPP did work with local branches of FoE on shared issues ( eg. the proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> Tyne Tunnel ), it distinguished itself as being both more radical ( anarchistic ), and more socially-committed: TAPP was never a solely environmental group, indeed for some of its members the environmental causes were the least important.

This helps to explain why TAPP did not call itself an **Earth First!** group, although I personally consider other EF! groups in the UK to be very similar to TAPP. For the EF! journal, Do or Die, I wrote in June 99 that we called ourselves TAPP as "a more inclusive name without the macho connotations... A handful of members had previously done EF! stuff but others didn't even know what EF! do and we basically formed outside that network." ( 'It All Began on May-Day, Do or Die 7 ). The majority of TAPP members did at some point take part in national Earth First! events and gatherings of one sort or another, but this was only one network that TAPP was hooked into ( others included, for example, Trident Ploughshares, Green Party and Women Speak Out ).





"it is now a forlorn scene of ugly bamboo fences and dead native plants".



We are calling for you to Boycott 'The Beach'

Stereotypes of what Earth First! represented were mentioned in a couple of interviews, but these were less strongly worded than the criticism directed at various Trotskyite groups. No member of TAPP was, during its existence, a member of a Trotskyite group, although some were members of the Green Party, and one briefly joined Labour to 'subvert from within'? Several members of TAPP had several years *previously* been involved in Trotskyite groups like Militant and the SWP, however: they had taken from this experience a critical attitude to such organisations.

In a group interview, Militant were first criticised for "talking as if they'd sort of, y'know, run the whole campaign [ against the JSA ]." Later the conversation moved onto the SWP and I asked **"why do we have a problem with the SWP?"**

The answers were:

"Because they work in a hierarchical system, they don't seem to think for themselves very much, and they're always trying to sell papers and gain membership, but rather than provoke people to think, or provoke people to want to do something, they want people so they can think what they're supposed to think and then do what they say."

"My problem with them is the way they have their name on all the posters they put up, y'know at the top instead of the issue, so it'll always look like an SWP demo... And they always say there's one line on every issue – like choosing a side to support in the war. They always say there's one answer and they know it. So that's sort of fundamentalism, y'know – that dogmatism that overrides any sort of situation."

"Plus the fact that they don't say what they think, they have these fucking ways of saying stuff... They think we have to lead, we have to encourage these people to go up the wrong path in order for them to turn round and turn to you when they're disillusioned or whatever. It's extremely patronising... If you believe something you say it, say it straight out, and, that's what I hate about the whole Trotskyist – cos it's obviously not just the SWP, of course the SWP happens to be the biggest one but they're all pretty much about the same thing."

Their success at **recruitment** was noted, and then the previous interviewee summed up the issue:

"It's okay if you recruit people to actively partake and actively participate in something rather than sign petitions or trot out whatever they're told to trot out. I know loads of people who were angry about issues and joined the SWP, experienced it for a few months and left, and haven't gone back to anything, and the reason they haven't gone back is cos they've found out that they're just like the other bastards, y'know. If the British state or whatever wanted to have a good way of disillusioning angry people they couldn't have chosen one better."



TAPP members continued to work alongside Trotskyite groups such as the SWP despite their misgivings, but occasionally the tensions would come out. During the coalition work against the Afghan war in October 2001, for example, an internal memo from the SWP was leaked and emailed around TAPP members. It commanded its members that "Every SWP member has to throw themselves whole-heartedly into opposing this war" and "Where we are building a Stop the War



group there should be a SWP group in the locality, the workplace, school or college organising [ paper ] sales.” The memo was thus all about recruitment and building their organisation, just as the Schnews critique of Globalise Resistance had recently exposed.

The TAPPer who sent the memo echoed the sentiment of that critique, and repeated its concluding question: “How easy is it for somebody new to your town to find out about your group?” This TAPPer then continued: “The [ Radical ] Film Festival will be good for this, but we need to do other things that are public, so interested people don’t just get hoovered up by the SWP/Globalise Resistance/ANL.” ( email, October 2001 ).

One of TAPP’s rare email flurries followed this, with one participant arguing that “The swappies aren’t taking over the anti-war movement in Newcastle, they are ‘creating’ it... I suggest getting involved in the anti-war movement before slagging off one of the major driving forces behind it.”

A reply to this, from a ( quietly ) Quaker member of TAPP, jokingly proposed “a minor correction, it was the Quakers that set up the first meeting... And after losing ground in the first week, we’ve re-established our stamp on the coalition by enforcing silence on the Saturday afternoon vigils... Now what else shall we plan? A Quaker Film Festival, to recruit some more people into our own ideological little grouping, perhaps?”

The final comment came from another TAPPer: “anyway, more importantly, Harold on Neighbours is chained to a fence outside a vivisection lab, and the police are about to arrest him – what shall we do?” ( emails, October 2001 ).

Recruitment, it is clear, was not always taken terribly seriously by TAPP ( what were they being recruited to, after all? Individuals disagreed on

many points, and we didn’t have one clear issue, like animal welfare, from which to launch a recruitment drive ). One member suggested that lack of attention to recruitment was one of the reasons that TAPP declined, and therefore folded ( I disagreed ).

As for the criticism of the SWP and other Trotskyite groups, this was rarely made public. When one article in ‘Act Locally’ did criticise the group ( amongst others ), a letter of complaint stated that “One of the refreshing aspects of Act Locally has been the lack of stereo-typical in-fighting and back-stabbing which is common to the Left... people with different ideologies and from different backgrounds can and do work together around specific issues which unite them”. The article’s author responded by laying out the basis of his criticism: “individual SWP members were not attacked, the target was the politics of the organisation: a legitimate target.” ( Letters to the Editor, ‘Act Locally’ )

Most criticism was cheeky. When, for example, the poster for a combined TAPP/Leninist benefit gig was discovered by TAPPers to feature Lenin, it was amended so that Lenin was hanging from a noose, and the slogan read “Death to all dictators?” This poster was put up around the venue of the benefit gig but not otherwise commented on.

Again, when a contributor to ‘Act Locally’ asked for the ‘Living Marxism’ conference to be advertised, he commented that he hoped his advert wouldn’t be trimmed down into illegibility, as previous ones had been. The ‘Act Locally’ editor of that month edited the advert in the following way ( adding no words, just splicing it together ): “Marxism. Ring 020 7538 2707 to join this annual week with the SWP, 7 – 14 July. It promises to be... a week of left wing meetings but if past experience tells you not to hold your breath, then please don’t tell everyone why” ( Act Locally, Issue 35 ).



## Differences that mattered

Amongst the many things that TAPPers disagreed on are the following:

free speech for all	vs	no platform for fascists
close down lap-dancing	vs	do-as-thou-wilt and anti-censorship
supporting cuba	vs	anarchist critique of cuba-as-state
prioritising one issue	vs	all kinds of issues
more laws	vs	less laws,
eg.		
calls to regulate gm and ban hunting	vs	desire to dismantle government
don't vote	vs	vote green / socialist

This last contradiction was perhaps the strongest in the group, and was brought to a head in the run-up to the May 2001 general election. Some people in TAPP wished to run a 'Vote for Nobody' campaign, in emulation of the campaign in Bristol at the time. Others, in the Green Party, were themselves standing for election and exhausted from their campaigning work. I produced an 'Act Locally' election supplement with an anti-electoral bias.



## Election Special

"If our own people are forming part of parliament, the instruments of the enemy, they are helping to make the very laws we will not obey. Where is the enemy then? What are we to do to attack him?"  
William Morris, 1887

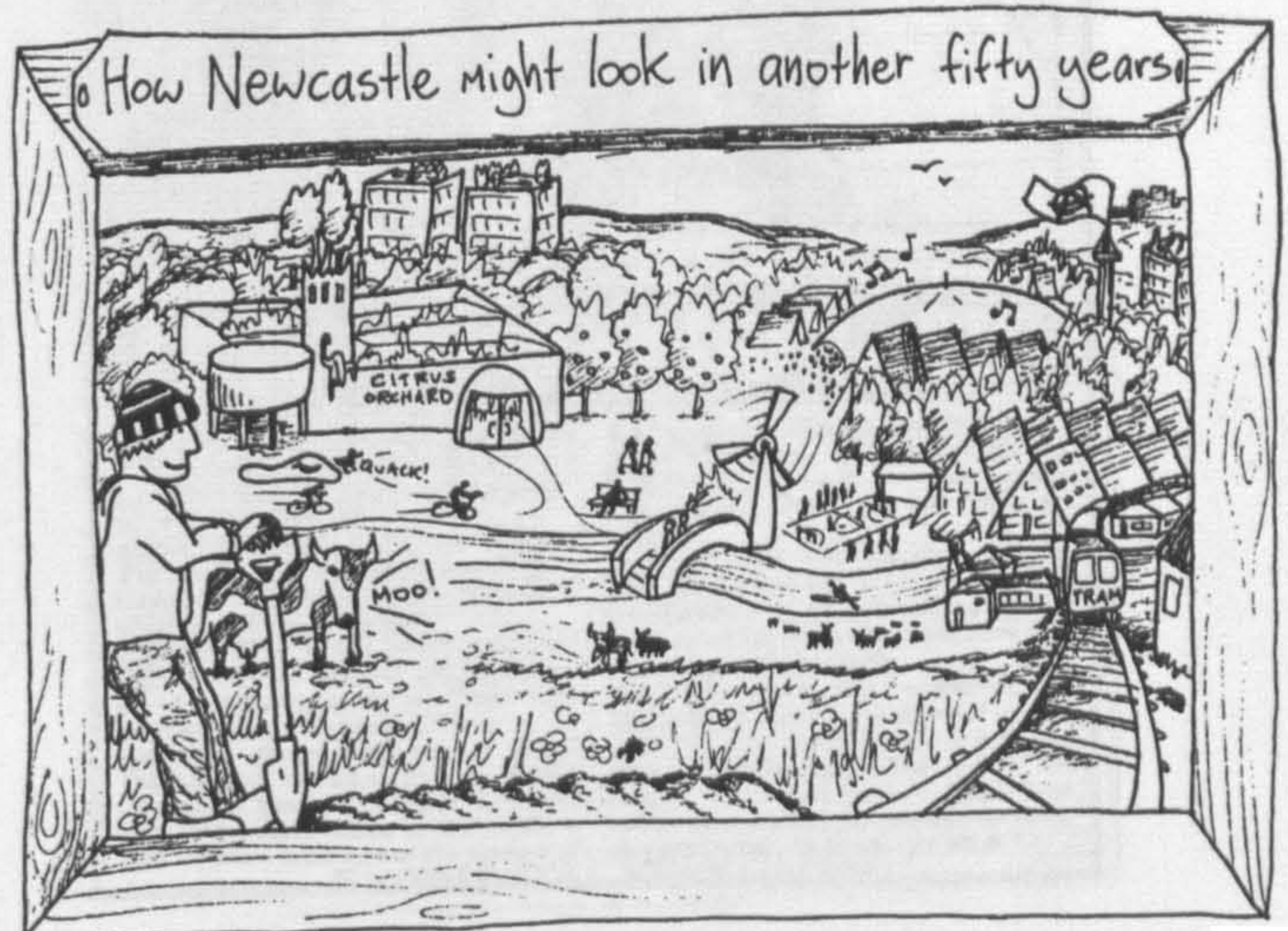
### Excited by the Election? Want some more democracy?

Then why not enter our 'What's Your Favourite Anti-election Slogan' Competition! Put Your Cross next to your favourite traditional saying and exercise your democratic right!

Don't Vote – it only encourages them	
Use your Cross Wisely, Crucify a Politician	
XXXXXX XXXXXX XXXXXX Your Life-time's Supply of Democracy	
If Voting Changed Anything, They'd Abolish It	
Whoever you vote for, the Government gets in!	

One ( fair ) criticism of this came from a TAPPer who stated that "I am somewhat at a loss to understand why the Socialist Alliance comes in for so much criticism and the SPGB, Green Party ( of which I am a member ) and Monster Raving Loony Party gets none" ( email, May 2001 ).

Another possible problem was that the positive alternatives we pushed looked a bit weak compared to the things we were opposed to.





# 4. Conclusion

It's up to you to provide the conclusion.

## Debate and Reflection

*"Practical, everyday ways of working with each other to get things done... bring with them their own experience of making our own decisions... Learning how to take charge of your own life, and helping others to do the same, is where the real power lies" ( Election Special, may 2001 ).*

When TAPP was most together ( when we had time, when we felt like a group, when we made ourselves busy ) we got together to talk about our activities. The weekly meeting was one place to do this, but that was mainly about sharing information and planning future events. Our peak time of collective group-analysis therefore came with big events, like stories of June 18<sup>th</sup> or the booklet on human genetics, and also with occasional reviews like the Berwick away-day. Self-criticism was something we were honest and realistic about, even when we didn't have perfect answers to the problems we came up with. The squat swot is one good example.

### SQUAT SWOT

#### STRENGTHS

- Brought lots of new people together
- Enjoyable
- Social, communal centre
- Amazing free space
- Fantastic events
- Great building
- Made new friends
- Did what set out to do
- Political building
- Diversity of activities, energy
- New opportunities for tapp, not just banners
- People inspired by space, presenting alternatives
- New people wanting to be involved
- Support from people on street

#### WEAKNESSES

- Not enough people, same few doing lot of work
- No effective means of communication
- Treatment & acceptance of new group
- Dealing with press
- People stuck with kitchen duties
- Maintenance of day to day running, so many roles
- Sustainability of that sort of commitment
- Turning people away

#### HOMELESSNESS

## Free travel was hoax

**METRO** passengers tricked by hoaxers into believing they could travel free were let off by inspectors.

Posters and flyers told travellers free transport was available on the train system as part of European Car-Free Day.

A Metro spokeswoman said: "We were tipped off that somebody had put up posters on Newcastle City Council headed paper saying Metro travel would be free." Inspectors were lenient - they just sold single tickets to people who had been tricked.

Chronicle 23.11.00

I hope that this piece about what TAPP said about what we did, will be useful in helping us remember what was valuable, and what was not ideal, about the group. Obviously it's pretty biased to what I think is important - so have a think what's missed out and what's wrong. Write it down or talk about it, and let's have some collective analysis.



MAKE WAY . . . an anti-traffic protester is arrested by police yesterday.

## Let's be avenue, sir

**A MAN** who hung 20ft (7m) above a city centre street for three hours yesterday was arrested during a peaceful protest against cars.

**ABOUT 200** protesters brought traffic to a halt in Newcastle yesterday as they danced in the street, blew whistles and banged drums.

**TROUBLE** flared briefly as police dismantled a sound system pumping out music to the crowd. Two others were arrested for minor offences.

**AND** there was only a small amount of disruption to traffic after police blocked off approach roads.

**THE** strong police presence drew criticism from one of the leaders of

the Reclaim the Streets demonstration. **THE** woman, calling herself Les Roads, claimed: "It was totally unnecessary. That's the last thing we wanted."

**THE** man who dangled from a quickly erected scaffolding frame was believed to be called Mike Palais. He was arrested as the protesters dispersed at 4.30pm exactly.

**THE** demo was organised to highlight urban problems of traffic, pollution and social decay. Les Roads added: "This carnival is free and for the people. They can have a good time rather than wander around like zombies, as most people do in today's cities."

SKADAY 3VA JUNE 13, 1999