

## ARTICLE

# The Blurred Boundaries of Anarchism and Punk in Vancouver, 1970–1983

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[Punk is] on our doorstep like a paper bag full of shit on fire.  
What are we going to do?

*Open Road* 14 (1982)

ON 1 JULY 1978, WHILE CROWDS across Canada gathered to celebrate the national holiday, several hundred people gathered in Vancouver's Stanley Park for an anti-Canada Day punk concert, organized by local anarchists. Although these anarchists supported punk's eclectic and energetic sounds, it was clearly understood by most that they were not of the punk community in the same way that the performers were. Generally, the activists that made up Vancouver's anarchist projects and tendencies were roughly a decade older than the bands and audiences that assembled in the park, with personal histories rooted in the student New Left, counterculture, feminist, and guerrilla movements of the long sixties, rather than in the closing years of the so-called cynical seventies associated with the rise of punk.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in a broader sense, there were often serious divides that seemed to separate the two generations, as the members of an older cohort of activists worried about the bitter, violent, and nihilistic expressions that sometimes marked punk culture while punk communities routinely dismissed these senior radicals as hopelessly naïve and out of touch with the new realities of the post-1960s.<sup>2</sup>

1. For an anarchist discussion and criticism of the cynical seventies, see "Still Crazy After All These Years," *Open Road* 1 (1976): 3.

2. "Anarchy in Canada?" *BC Blackout* 4 (1978): 1–3. David Spaner, interview with author, 14 September 2011; Brent Taylor, interview with author, 26 March 2012; Bob Sarti and Scott Parker, interview with author, 8 June 2011. Copies of the poster for the anti-Canada Day

While this oppositional binary had some cultural purchase both in Vancouver and elsewhere, the intergenerational and intercultural dynamics that shaped punk's expansion across the 1970s and 1980s were much more complicated and nuanced than this imaginary allows. As will be demonstrated here, Vancouver's anarchist community created a series of strong political, personal, and cultural connections with local punk scenes in the wake of the 1978 anti-Canada Day concert. Specifically, anarchists organized further punk performances and became involved in the musical work of specific bands while the local punk community in turn supported anarchist political projects. In addition, many Vancouver anarchists truly enjoyed the music and energy of the city's emerging punk scene. The purpose of this article is to explore why this happened. Why did anarchists turn to punk at the end of the 1970s? What was it about punk and anarchism that made their relationship meaningful to activists, and how is this collaboration significant for historians who are interested in the intersection of culture and politics in the late 20th century?

In addressing these questions, the article speaks to two overlapping historiographical concerns. First, it works to extend the disciplinary reach of anarchist studies. While historians have contributed to this dynamic and emerging field, they have, as Matthew Adams has illustrated, done so to a lesser degree than other disciplines, particularly political theory.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, an emerging body of historical work is making new inroads into anarchism's more recent past, demonstrating that it played a consistent and critical role in the shaping of postwar political radicalism.<sup>4</sup> This article contributes to this expanding

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concert, as well as commentary on the event can be found in Joe Keithley, *Talk – Action = Zero: An Illustrated History of D.O.A.* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011), 34. This article uses material from the author's interviews with individuals who participated in anarchist and punk projects in Vancouver over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. The author recorded the audio content of these conversations with the full and informed consent of the participants, and interviewees were given the opportunity to place specific requirements and specifications upon the use and dissemination of the information they provided. This oral history research follows the guidelines set by the Tri-Council Policy Statement, Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, and was approved by the Office of Research Ethics at the author's university.

3. Matthew Adams, "The Possibilities of Anarchist History: Rethinking the Canon and Writing History," *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies*, no. 1 (2013): 33–63.

4. For a sampling of the emerging historiography, see Andrew Cornell, "A New Anarchism Emerges, 1940–1954," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 5, no. 1 (2011): 105–131; *Oppose and Propose: Lessons from Movement for a New Society* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press/Washington, D.C: Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2011); Matt Adams, "Art, Education, and Revolution: Herbert Read and the Reorientation of British Anarchism," *History of European Ideas* 39, no. 5 (2013): 707–728; Lucien van der Walt & Stephen J. Hirsch, "Final Reflections: The Vicissitudes of Anarchist and Syndicalist Trajectories, 1940 to the Present," in Lucien van der Walt & Stephen J. Hirsch, eds., *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010); Michael Schmidt, *The Cartography of Revolutionary Anarchism* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2012); Abby Rolston "'A Machine for Grinding Up Lives Slowly': Prisoners, Anarchists, and Prison Abolition in 1970s British Columbia," paper presented

historical conversation by exploring the anarchist punk relationship, which was a critical part of the anarchist resurgence in Canada in the 1970s.

Second, the article demonstrates that a focus on anarchist activism can provide historians with new insights into the legacy of the long sixties. Historians have used the idea of a long sixties to refer to broad patterns of social, political, and cultural change that retain connections to the passage of time between 1960 and 1969, yet also extend beyond those years in various ways. An early articulation of this expanded periodization came from Fredrick Jameson, who sketched out a temporal framework that began in the late 1950s with decolonization and anti-imperialist movements in Africa and Latin America, and ended with the global economic crisis of the mid-1970s.<sup>5</sup> This article takes a similar approach in defining the long sixties not as a single decade, but rather as a flexible temporal field that runs from the middle years of the 1950s until the middle years of the 1970s, coalescing, as Lara Campbell and Dominique Clément have recently suggested, around ideas rooted in a broad questioning of authority, modernity, and nationhood, and a focus on the “permeability of national borders.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the article also refers to the “1960s” when a narrower framing of time is necessary. In this sense, the

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to the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario (2014). Although anarchism is not its primary point of focus, the topic does receive some important attention in Daniel Burton-Rose’s *Guerrilla USA: The George Jackson Brigade and the Anti-capitalist Underground of the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). For scholarship that lies outside of the discipline of history, yet still contributes to a historical understanding of the anarchist past since the mid-20th century, see David Graeber, “The Rebirth of Anarchism in North America, 1957–2007” *Historica Actual Online* 21 (2010): 123–131; Richard Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (London: Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press/Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005); Uri Gordon, *Anarchy Alive! Anti-authoritarian Politics from Practice to Theory* (London/Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press, 2008); and Allan Antliff, *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007). In addition to this recent literature, established and well-cited works by George Woodcock and Peter Marshall have also provided critical explorations of anarchism since the 1960s, in addition to focusing on the tradition’s earlier activity and development. See George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004); and Peter H. Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992).

5. Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” *Social Text* 9, no. 10 (Spring/Summer 1984): 178–209.

6. Lara Campbell & Dominique Clément, “Introduction: Towards a History of the Sixties,” in Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada in the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012): 6–7. For an overview of the wide range of approaches to the periodization of the sixties see, M. J. Heale, “The Sixties as History: A Review of the Political Historiography,” *Reviews in American History* 33 (2005): 133–152. For some of the more recent arguments for a long sixties see, Jeremy Varon, Michael S. Foley, & John McMillian, “Time is an Ocean: the Past and Future of the Sixties,” *The Sixties* 1, no. 1 (2008): 1–7; and Arthur Marwick, “The Cultural Revolution of the Long Sixties: Voices of Reaction, Protest, and Permeation,” *The International History Review* 27, no. 4 (December 2005): 780–806.

sixties and the 1960s are understood as complementary rather than conflicting concepts.

Although the literature on social movements, protest, and activism in the context of the long sixties is vast, we still know comparatively little about anarchism's contributions to the political, social, and cultural contours of this period and beyond.<sup>7</sup> As this article demonstrates, not only did anarchism play an important role in the polymorphous development of the New Left across the long sixties, but so too did anarchist politics, culture, and activism connect the long sixties with the social movements and activist projects of the 1970s and 1980s. A detailed exploration of anarchism's relationship to punk can provide historians with a new perspective on this shifting political and cultural landscape of the postwar era, in the long sixties and its legacies.

Bringing together these historiographical concerns, this article demonstrates that anarchists' relationship with punk during the 1970s and 1980s was an intentional effort to blur the boundaries between politics and play, and between past, present, and future, in order to further activist projects in the wake of the long sixties. More specifically, I argue that anarchists turned to punk because they saw it as politically congruent with specific ideas of revolutionary struggle, political perspectives that were increasingly popular among certain North American leftists during this period. This was particularly true in Vancouver, where a resurging anarchist politics and a thriving punk scene developed in tandem during the second half of the 1970s. Here, anarchists not only argued that punk was an important instance of popular rebellion that ought to be encouraged in its own right, but they also maintained that this rebellion could be federated and connected to other political networks. Attempting to merge political activism and popular culture, they argued that punk and anarchism had much to offer one another. Specifically, they suggested that punk offered a critical tool for direct support for and solidarity with emerging social movements while connections to radical theory and social movements could enhance the utility, significance, and meaning of punk's cultural expression. Such ideas were mobilized in the context of anarchism's and punk's intersecting relationship at the end of the 1970s; they were also the product and extension of an established pattern of cultural radicalism developed by the city's countercultural New Left at the end of the long

7. For example, see Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada in the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills, & Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2009); M. Athena Palaeologu, ed., *The Sixties in Canada: A Turbulent and Creative Decade* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2009). Bryan Palmer's recent work on the 1960s in Canada, and Barbara Epstein's classic text on direct action movements in the United States provide a number of examples of anarchism's place within the shifting political environments of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. See Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); and Barbara Epstein, *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s and 1980s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

sixties. Finally, while punk projects and communities were routinely associated with the left, both in Vancouver and elsewhere, these connections were never guaranteed. As an eclectic, diverse, and flexible cultural practice, punk's ideological and activist connections could take many forms. In this sense, anarchists also attempted to engage with punk to save it from the right – to keep its anger and rebellion in a progressive political context. In all, anarchists in Vancouver engaged with punk during the 1970s and 1980s because they saw it as awash with the potential to bridge different generations of political dissent, to promote and support emerging activist projects, and to help usher in new expressions of radical culture in the city and beyond.

### **The Revolution Must Be Popular: Vancouver and the Making of a Countercultural New Left**

AT ITS HEART, ANARCHISM'S ENGAGEMENT with punk in the 1970s was based on an older idea that political and cultural activity ought to be combined. Rejecting the idea that cultural activity would serve as a junior partner to more conventional forms of political struggle, anarchists in Vancouver insisted that popular cultural expression and performance were themselves legitimate environments within which to fight, organize, and resist. This article begins by exploring the origins and logic of that assumption. To do so, we have to return to the late long sixties in order to see how and why a range of young activists attempted to blur the boundaries between left politics and popular culture in Vancouver. Here, they argued that the revolutionary left could be better mobilized through the cultural frameworks of the counterculture while at the same time maintaining that countercultural activity could support and extend leftist political aspirations. This led to the creation of new revolutionary movements and the growth of a New Left in Vancouver during the long sixties and in turn was profoundly important in shaping both the anarchist resurgence of the 1970s and its relationship with punk.

The New Left emerged in the long sixties. While it is a highly amorphous concept, historians have generally framed the New Left as a series of broad transformations in the development, organization, and meaning of left-wing activity.<sup>8</sup> As both Ben Isitt and Ian Milligan have shown, British Columbia was a particularly important setting for the New Left in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

8. For histories of the New Left in Canada, see Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 183–191; Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 245–309; Ian Milligan, *Rebel Youth: 1960s Labour Unrest, Young Workers, and New Leftists in English Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014); and Roberta Lexier, "To Struggle Together or Fracture Apart: The Sixties Student Movements at English-Canadian Universities," in *Debating Dissent*, 81–94. While the literature on the New Left in the United States is massive, an excellent introduction can be found in Van Gosse's, *Rethinking the New Left: An Interpretive History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005).

9. Ben Isitt, *Militant Minority: British Columbia Workers and the Rise of a New Left* (Toronto:

Here, the New Left was shaped in part by a growing emphasis on the political importance of popular culture. One of the most significant movements to take on this issue – to specifically espouse the blurring of politics and culture – was the Youth International Party, affectionately known as Yippie. Although Yippie is better known for its actions south of the border, it was spatially and temporally broader than is often assumed. For example, a collection of disaffected New Leftists and radical hippies created a Yippie network in Vancouver in the spring of 1970. Calling themselves the Northern Lunatic Fringe of the Youth International Party, Vancouver Yippie lasted roughly two years before disbanding.<sup>10</sup> In the broadest sense, Yippie was made up of those activists who felt dissatisfied with aspects of both the New Left and the counterculture.

Like the New Left, the definition and meaning of “the counterculture” is multifaceted, unstable, and open to diverse historical interpretations.<sup>11</sup> As David Farber has written, historians and academics have applied the term loosely, using it to encapsulate nearly anything, from nebulous patterns of social discontent to youth fashion and aesthetics. The problem with these definitions, Farber suggests, is that they “have so broadened the meaning of the word counterculture as to make it nearly meaningless.”<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the counterculture cannot be seen as a unified force. Writing in the context of the United States, Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle have cautioned against just this, maintaining that the term counterculture “falsely reifies

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University of Toronto Press, 2011); Ian Milligan, “Coming off the Mountain: Forging an Outward Looking New Left at Simon Fraser University,” *BC Studies* 171 (2011): 69–91.

10. For two first-hand accounts of Yippie’s activity in the United States, see Jerry Rubin, *Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970); and Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial Press, 1968). For an extensive collection of Yippie materials that moves beyond the experiences of Rubin and Hoffman, see New Yippie Book Collective/Youth International Party, *Blacklisted News: Secret Histories from Chicago ’68 to 1984* (New York: Bleeker Publishers, 1985). One of the few published first-hand accounts of Yippie activity in Vancouver can be found in Larry Gambone, *Another View from Anarchist Mountain* (Nanaimo: Red Lion Press, 2012), 169–180. Michael Boudreau has written a clear and concise account of Vancouver Yippie’s involvement in the city’s infamous 1971 Gastown riot. See Boudreau, “‘The Struggle for a Different World’: The 1971 Gastown Riot in Vancouver,” in *Debating Dissent*, 117–133. For a largely unsympathetic account of Vancouver Yippie, see Lawrence Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2010), 114–124.

11. For writing on the counterculture in Canada, see Stuart Henderson, *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Marcel Martel, “‘They smell bad, have diseases, and are lazy’: RCMP Officers Reporting on Hippies in the Late Sixties,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90, 2 (2009): 215–245; Myrna Kostash, *A Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1980); and Ron Verzuh, *Underground Times: Canada’s Flower-Child Revolutionaries* (Toronto: Deneau, 1989).

12. David Farber, “Building the Counterculture, Creating Right Livelihoods: The Counterculture at Work,” *The Sixties* 6, no. 1 (2013): 1–2.

what should never properly be called a social movement.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, these authors maintain that it was an “inherently unstable collection of attitudes, tendencies, postures, gestures, ‘lifestyles,’ ideals, visions, hedonistic pleasures, moralisms, negations, and affirmations.”<sup>14</sup> Concurring with this assessment set out by Doyle and Braunstein, Farber has therefore proposed that the counterculture was “not a political movement with a clear platform or a social club with a membership roll. It was a project to which many lent a hand.”<sup>15</sup>

The definition of the counterculture as a project works well in the context of Vancouver because it reflects its constructed and contested nature. Of those involved in the making of Vancouver’s counterculture, few were as publically flamboyant and confrontational as Yippie. Although Yippies maintained that aspects of the counterculture offered a range of important ideas and practices – from the rejection of work and individualism to the celebration of leisure and communal activity – they also believed that hip communities often lacked a revolutionary sensibility that could focus and extend their political meaning. As a result, they maintained that the counterculture could gain much from the New Left’s emphasis on community organizing, anti-capitalism, and its emphasis on prefigurative and participatory practices. In return, the counterculture could offer the New Left a more relevant cultural framework through which to filter and shape its activism. As a result, Yippie, along with other like-minded groups including the Vancouver Liberation Front and Youngblood, created the basis of a countercultural New Left in Vancouver beginning in the early years of the 1970s.<sup>16</sup> This countercultural New Left was critical in developing forms of organizing that merged political activism and popular cultural practice – an activist strategy that, despite the short life of Yippie itself, laid the groundwork for, and would continue to profoundly influence, the city’s anarchist and cultural communities across the 1970s and 1980s.

For Vancouver Yippies and their allies, musical festivals were a particularly valued tactic for merging cultural and political activity. The 1972 May

13. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, “Introduction: Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s,” in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and ‘70s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 10.

14. Braunstein and Doyle, “Introduction,” 10.

15. Farber, “Building the Counterculture, Creating Right Livelihoods,” 2.

16. David Spaner, interview with author, 14 September 2011; Bob Sarti and Scott Parker, interview with author, 8 June 2011; Bev Davies, interview with author, 7 February 2012; Ken Lester, interview with author, 15 April 2011; Larry Gambone, interview with author, 9 June 2011. For perspectives on the countercultural New Left in the United States, see Doug Rossinow, “‘The Revolution Is About Our Lives’: The New Left’s Counterculture,” in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s* (New York/London: Routledge, 2001), 99–124; and Michael William Doyle, “Staging the Revolution: Guerrilla Theater as a Countercultural Practice, 1965–68,” in *Imagine Nation*, 71–97.

Day concert held in Stanley Park was a typical example of this approach. Featuring free food, free music, and free drugs, the concert also featured a range of political speakers from the alternative press, countercultural New Left collectives, and other activist projects.<sup>17</sup> Musical events were also used to generate funds for specific political events or causes, such as raising money for the legal defence of activists. At the same time, countercultural New Leftists understood that organizing musical performances and other expressions of countercultural leisure were, in and of themselves, political acts. As in other North American locales, the presence of young freaks and longhairs prompted a range of aggressive responses from city elites. In the light of civic campaigns to arrest the spread of hip activity in the city, as well as the emerging commodification of countercultural fashion, sounds, and images by “hip capitalists,” collectives such as the VLF maintained that holding free and publically accessible hip events in the city’s parks was both an act of political defiance and an instance of cultural liberation.<sup>18</sup>

### The Countercultural New Left and Vancouver’s Anarchist Resurgence

IN ADDITION TO ORGANIZING NEW FORMS of political popular culture in Vancouver, segments of the countercultural New Left were also critical in their ability to revive anarchism as a vibrant part of the city’s political community. Emerging both within and against the broader socialist canon of the 19th century, anarchism had, by the early years of the 20th century, developed into a vigorous and diverse revolutionary tradition in many parts of the world. Particularly active within labour and anti-colonial movements, anarchist activity and ideas could be found in all manner of political, social, and cultural endeavours, from movements focusing on women’s sexual and reproductive rights, to new approaches to education, music, literature, and the visual arts.<sup>19</sup>

17. Author’s personal papers, Mayday Committee, “Mayday, Saturday 6 March,” (1972), Leaflet.

18. One of the most poignant conflicts to expose debates over the commodification of hip culture emerged over the release of Michael Wadleigh’s Academy Award winning documentary, *Woodstock*. See “Woodstock! Was Free...,” *Yellow Journal* (7 May 1970): 6.

19. For anarchism’s relationship to the labour movement, see Lucien Vander Walt and Michael Schmidt, *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009); and David Berry and Constance Bantman, eds., *New Perspectives on Anarchism, Labour, and Syndicalism: The Individual, The National, and the Transnational* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010). See also Mark Leier, *Bakunin: The Creative Passion* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin’s Press, 2006); and Davide Turcato, *Making Sense of Anarchism: Errico Malatesta’s Experiments with Revolution, 1889–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Much of the recent historical literature has focused on anarchism’s transnational character. See Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880–1914: Exile and Transnationalism in the First Globalization* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Kirwin Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University of Florida



Nevertheless, the prestige of the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions, and the prominence of armed anti-colonial forces often associated with communist movements, routinely overshadowed anarchist contributions to revolutionary socialism. In addition, anarchist projects and communities were routinely arrested or effectively marginalized through state violence.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, by the middle decades of the 20th century, it could often seem like anarchism was a tradition that lived on only in memory.<sup>21</sup>

However, the status of anarchist activity during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s is a much more dynamic and complicated story than this declension narrative captures. In a range of ways, anarchism remained very much alive not only in left memory and culture but also in practice. During the 1960s, and expanding rapidly throughout the 1970s, anarchist ideas, culture, and activism increased in many parts of the world, often branching out into new directions as the New Left, student, anti-war, and women's liberation movements engaged in a fantastic process of ideological experimentation and development.<sup>22</sup> In

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Press, 2005); Tom Goynes, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); and Kenyon Zimmer, "Premature Anti-Communists?: American Anarchism, the Russian Revolution, and Left-Wing Libertarian Anti-Communism, 1917–1939," *Labor* 6, no. 2 (2009): 45–71. For studies on anarchism's relationship to anti-colonialist politics and movements, see Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London/New York: Verso, 2005). See also, van der Walt and Hirsch, ed., *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870–1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism, and Social Revolution*. For a discussion on anarchism's relationship to education, see Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Matthew Adams, "Kropotkin: Evolution, Revolutionary Change and the End of History," *Anarchist Studies* 19, no. 1 (2011): 56–81. For a wide reaching discussion on anarchism and artistic expression, see Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

20. The Haymarket affair in the United States and Bolshevik oppression of anarchists in the wake of the Russian Revolution have often come to symbolize how anarchists were subjected to the violence of both the left and the right. See Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Bruce Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870–1900* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988). For an overview of Bolshevik-anarchist conflicts in Russia, see Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 349–351. This is not to say that anarchism and Marxism were inherently antithetical to one another. For an exploration of the ways in which they mixed, merged, and became connected, see Alex Prichard, Ruth Kina, Saku Pinta, & Dave Berry, eds., *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Black and Red* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

21. See George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 7–8.

22. See, for example, Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd: Problems of Youth in the Organized System* (New York: Random House, 1960); Daniel and Gabriel Cohen-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968); Murray Bookchin, *Listen, Marxist!* (New York: Anarchos, 1969); *Post-scarcity Anarchism* (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1971); Daniel Guérin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970); Red Rosa & Black Maria, "Anarcha-Feminism: Two Statements," in Dark Star Collective, eds., *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader* (Oakland/Edinburgh: AK

Vancouver, one of the most important incubators for this anarchist resurgence was Yippie, a tendency that embraced anarchist approaches to direct democracy, community control, decentralized organization, and critiques of both capitalism and the state. Skirting what its members understood to be the staid and overly serious language of both old and new Marxist-Leninist traditions, Yippie's anarchist politics was eclectic, flexible, and rigorously non-sectarian. At the same time, while many of its most committed and active members either understood themselves as anarchists or drew from its diverse traditions, anarchism never developed a comprehensive presence within local Yippie networks.<sup>23</sup> Rather, the anarchism of Vancouver Yippie was partial and uneven, existing either as an explicit symbol for anti-hierarchical practice, or implicitly in ways that were, as the Yippie anarchist Bob Sarti has put it, "congenial" to the political and cultural liberation of the countercultural New Left.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the forms and methods through which these ideas and practices were communicated were consciously playful. As a result, it is important to take Yippie's jests, pranks, and absurd witticisms seriously since they reveal key aspects through which anarchist traditions and ideas were disseminated and promoted. Such strategies were critical in that they helped to remake anarchist politics into a significant activist force within the city's political landscape.

Yippie's decision to run a candidate for Mayor of Vancouver in 1971 was a poignant illustration of how anarchist ideas were articulated through the medium of humorous public satire, utopian speculation, and deliberate absurdity. The Yippie candidate, known only in promotional materials as Zaria, openly framed her presence in the campaign as an opportunity to "ridicule with joy" the civic administration of the incumbent candidate, Tom Campbell. While Mayor Campbell had years of formal political experience, Zaria countered by touting her qualifications as a "person, woman, mother, welfare recipient, freak, ex-convict, [and] Yippie!" Appearing on her election pamphlet with a baby in one hand and a rifle in the other, she promised that a vote for her was a vote for liberation in the broadest sense, one that brought together themes of revolutionary fun, music, communalism, and anarchy, processes that were defined as integral to acquiring control over one's own life. Moreover, Zaria promised that her electoral victory would mean a fundamental restructuring of both the city and the natural universe. The police, courts, jails, and pounds would be demolished. Schools would be turned over to students, and businesses turned over to workers. Private automobile networks would be replaced with free public transit, including a fleet of free public bicycles. The

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Press, 2012), 15–17; Lynne Farrow, "Feminism as Anarchism," in *Quiet Rumors*, 19–24; Peggy Kornegger, "Anarchism: The Feminist Connection," in *Quiet Rumors*, 25–35.

23. David Spaner, interview with author, 14 September 2011; Bev Davies, interview with author, 7 February 2012; Larry Gambone, interview with author, 9 June 2011.

24. Bob Sarti and Scott Parker, interview with author, 8 June 2011.

concrete parking lots and many of the main thoroughfares of the city would be torn up and replaced with parks and playground equipment. Industry would be non-polluting, and the beaches would be cleansed of imposed civic authority and returned to the control of the community. All stores would be free stores, acting as distribution points for products constructed and grown in the city. Every resident would be guaranteed food, clothing, and shelter, and the city would open its arms to all manner of political dissidents, exiles, and war resisters. In addition, spaces in Zaria's election platform were consciously left blank so that the reader could insert their own particular concerns. Finally, the "law of gravity" would be repealed, and all the property and assets belonging to the Hudson's Bay Company would be expropriated and returned to Aboriginal communities.<sup>25</sup>

Zaria's campaign reflected a broad pattern of countercultural resistance to the intransigence and obstruction of city officials. It did so through creating an imagined future that mixed the impossible, the unlikely, and the entirely practical. While such an imaginary was clearly meant to be funny, its humour rested on a revolutionary logic and context that espoused anarchist ideas of direct democracy, community control, decentralized organization, mutual aid, and critiques of both capitalism and the state. Such ideas were to be found woven throughout the long history of anarchism, from the 19th and early 20th century ideas of anarchist communists and syndicalists who argued for the direct control of the community and the workplace, to the emerging work of mid-20th century anarchists such as Paul Goodman, Colin Ward, and Murray Bookchin who argued for a fundamental re-imagining of the human relationship to nature and the planning and organization of urban and rural space.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Zaria's campaign helps to highlight how the resurging anarchist politics of Vancouver in the 1970s was constructed through the activity of the local countercultural New Left, as well as through a broader array of anarchist ideas that spanned the 19th and 20th centuries.

### **Beyond the City, Beyond the New Left: Anarchism, Social Movements, and the Political Economy of Postwar British Columbia**

AFTER TWO YEARS OF SUCH frenetic activity, Vancouver's Yippie collectives disbanded through a mixture of exhaustion, personal differences,

25. Author's personal papers, Northern Lunatic Fringe of the Youth International Party, "Vote Zaria," Yippie Broadsheet.

26. Peter Kropotkin, *Anarchist Communism: Its Basics and Principles* (London: Freedom Press, 1900); *The Conquest of Bread* (New York: University of New York Press, 1972); *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London: A. Lane: The Penguin Press, 1972); Rudolf Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-syndicalism* (London: Freedom Press, 1973); Paul & Percival Goodman, *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973); Bookchin, *Post-scarcity Anarchism*.

and changing political priorities.<sup>27</sup> If dissatisfaction with the New Left's Marxist-Leninist elements pushed Vancouver Yippies to explore the political applicability and cultural meaning of anarchism, then the collapse of Yippie only worked to further emphasize the need for a more focused anarchist approach. While many anarchists in Vancouver were familiar with the anarchist movements and theorists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was the pluralism, militancy, and decentralized organization of new social movements, both locally and globally, that fundamentally shaped the experiences and political aspirations of the city's emerging anarchist movements. Nothing better symbolized this perspective than the opening statement of the city's most well-known anarchist project, the periodical *Open Road*. Publishing its first issue in 1976, the collective saw itself as part of a global pattern of struggles in which "people are rejecting sectarian and authoritarian methods of organization in favor of full rank-and-file participation and direction. In many instances people have taken the initiative and successfully overruled their 'leadership' to occupy positions far to the Left of what is 'acceptable.'"<sup>28</sup>

The collective defined these developments as an organic rebuke of the overly ideological Marxist-Leninist left, a way of slapping back the "dead hand of centralist vanguard organizations which have hindered and confused serious organizing possibilities over the past few years." At the same time, the notion of an organic rebellion of social movement activism seemed to point toward new modes of revolutionary potential, patterns of radicalism that were defined not only by the topics of oppression they sought to resist but also by the methods of their struggle. At the core of this evaluation, *Open Road* saw the political and geographical diversity of social movements during the 1970s as emblematic of a new activist culture, one in which "ordinary everyday people" were organizing "in their own interests, without the need for Supermen, political bosses, or self-appointed vanguards." In this sense, the extraparliamentary activism and militancy of the Aboriginal, feminist, gay and lesbian, environmental, labour, prison abolition, anti-imperialist, cooperative, and anti-capitalist movements of the 1970s demonstrated to the collective that "social revolution was not only desirable, but possible."<sup>29</sup> First articulated by the 19th century Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, social revolution defined the role of militants as agents that would encourage popular forms of insurrection, rebellion, and social struggle without taking up the power of centralized leadership or bureaucratic control. Rather than the seizure of political power by a small

27. Larry Gambone, interview with author, 9 June 2011; David Spaner, interview with author, 14 September 2011; Bob Sarti and Scott Parker, interview with author, 8 June 2011. Yippie never completely disappeared in Vancouver. Many activists continued to be active in the broader North American Yippie network. Moreover, specific projects in Vancouver, including the anarchist paper *B.C. Blackout*, routinely proclaimed its affiliation with Yippie.

28. "Still Crazy After All These Years," *Open Road* 1 (1976): 3.

29. "Still Crazy After All These Years," *Open Road* 1 (1976): 3.

revolutionary unit or party, social revolution was based on the “spontaneous and continuous actions of the masses,” action that was directed to the creation of a new society “from the bottom up.”<sup>30</sup>

If *Open Road* framed the resurgence of anarchist politics in Vancouver as part of a global process of left-wing experimentation taking place in the second half of the 1970s, it is also critical to note that anarchist activism also reflected a broader pattern of political dissent and social dissatisfaction at the local level. In British Columbia, the contours of these political struggles were inseparable from the rise of the right-wing Social Credit Party, which ruled over the province’s parliamentary landscape, nearly uninterrupted, from the early 1950s to the early 1990s. In doing so, Social Credit created a powerful political machine rooted in the expansion of the state and extensive support for capitalist development. As Ben Isitt notes, a cornerstone of the government’s economic and political policies rested on a desire to exploit the “vast resource-rich hinterland Interior through government spending on transportation and energy infrastructure to ensure the easy flow of exportable commodities.”<sup>31</sup> Bolstered by a high demand for the province’s natural resources, these economic strategies resulted in a period of significant economic growth during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, Social Credit was never able to secure a comprehensive victory over its adversaries, such as the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (later the New Democratic Party) and the labour movement. Unionization not only expanded under Social Credit tenure, but it also retained patterns of militant rank-and-file resistance.<sup>33</sup> This was particularly the case in the forest industry where, as Gordon Hak has illustrated, workers routinely acted outside of the boundaries set by government and union bureaucrats. Over the course of the late 1960s and early 1970s, these workers participated in a range of illegal and unsanctioned job actions – wildcat strikes – as a means of challenging the authority of company and union officials alike.<sup>34</sup> Working-class dissatisfaction also manifested itself in the creation of new and renewed forms of labour activism. Here, the formation in 1972 of the Service, Office, and Retail Workers’ Union (SORWUC) created innovative instances of socialist-feminist

30. Mikhail Bakunin, “The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State,” in Robert Graham, ed., *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Ideas*, vol. 1 (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 104–105. See also, Leier, *Bakunin*.

31. Isitt, *Militant Minority*, 28.

32. Gordon Hak, *The Left in British Columbia: A History of Struggle* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2013), 114.

33. Hak, *The Left British Columbia*, 116.

34. Gordon Hak, *Capital and Labour in the British Columbia Forest Industry, 1934–1974* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 190.

organizing while other radicals, including the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), revived older socialist traditions.<sup>35</sup>

The postwar political climate was also shaped by environmental degradation caused by massive resource projects, a heightened awareness of pollution and toxicity, and the general fear of nuclear annihilation. By the mid-1970s, the province was home to growing environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and the Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (SPEC), as well as scores of smaller *ad hoc* citizen groups and temporary coalitions.<sup>36</sup> If the militarism of the Cold War shaped the environmental movement in British Columbia, it also ushered in new instances of war resistance and anti-imperialism. In particular, the aggression of the United States against Southeast Asia significantly reshaped the province. The anti-war movement energized local political activism, patterns of protest that were supported by the arrival of thousands of American war resisters seeking temporary or permanent refuge in British Columbia.<sup>37</sup> While US foreign policy helped to radicalize local activists, so too did the violence of the Canadian state. Across the long sixties, an eclectic range of activists maintained that the oppression of Québécois and Aboriginal communities reflected a long-running pattern of Canadian colonial violence.<sup>38</sup>

While the 1970s were a crucial period for social movement activism in the province, the decade was also characterized by growing patterns of economic disruption. A downturn in export markets, expanding unemployment, growth in bankruptcies, escalating inflation, and soaring global energy prices contributed to an unstable economic climate in British Columbia and beyond. Such developments reflected a global transformation in the organization of capitalism, and the economic, political, and social policies of nation-states including the United States, Great Britain, and Canada. As a result, the dominant economic ideology of the past several decades, Keynesianism – the desire for full

35. Julia Smith, "An 'Entirely Different' Kind of Union: The Service, Office, and Retail Workers' Union of Canada (SORWUC), 1972–1986," *Labour/Le Travail* 73, 1 (2014): 23–65; Larry Gambone, *Another View From Anarchist Mountain* (Nanaimo: Red Lion Press, 2012), 177–180.

36. For two accounts on the history of Greenpeace, see John-Henry Harter, "Environmental Justice for Whom? Class, New Social Movements, and the Environment: A Case Study of Greenpeace Canada, 1971–2000," *Labour/Le Travail* 54 (2004): 83–119; and Frank Zelko, *Make It a Green Peace!: The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For an analysis of SPEC, see Hak, *Capital and Labour*, 168–174.

37. Lara Campbell, "'Women United Against the War': Gender Politics, Feminism, and Vietnam Draft Resistance in Canada," *New World Coming*, 339–346; Kathleen Rodgers, *Welcome to Resisterville: American Dissidents in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2014).

38. "A Police State in Your Own Back Yard," *Yellow Journal* 1, no. 1 (April, 1970): 8; "A Police State in Your Own Back Yard," *Yellow Journal* 1, no. 1 (April, 1970): 8. See also, Dominique Clément, "The October Crisis of 1970: Human Rights Abuses Under the War Measures Act," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes* 42, no. 2 (2008): 160–186.

employment, social support networks provided by a welfare state, and a robust system of collective bargaining – was increasingly contested.<sup>39</sup> In its place, corporate leaders, business advocates, and their government allies advocated for the turn toward neoliberal capitalism. In British Columbia, the watershed moment for this neoliberal turn occurred during the early 1980s. Amidst unemployment rates that topped 14 per cent, interest rates that neared 20 per cent, rampant inflation, and widespread strike action, the Social Credit government initiated a series of measures that sought to reduce the power of the labour movement and curtail the scope of social and government programs.<sup>40</sup> Such activity was not deployed to reduce short-term government spending but instead was aimed at long-term neoliberal adjustments. As such, Social Credit sought, in the words of Ted Richmond and John Shields, to “[redraw] the public policy agenda away from social expenditures and other legitimization functions of the state toward areas that would help liberate market forces, and create a climate very favorable to capital accumulation and business investment.”<sup>41</sup> Over the summer and fall of 1983, a large and diverse bloc of opposition groups formed to contest these Social Credit policies. This was British Columbia’s “Solidarity” movement, a loose collection of union and citizen groups that organized massive rallies and protests that called on the government to withdraw its assault on workers and social services. In the end, Solidarity failed to halt the province’s emerging neoliberal turn, although it did serve as a powerful reminder of the potential for popular forms of extra-parliamentary resistance.<sup>42</sup>

These broad political, social, and economic transformations, both at the global and local levels, shaped the experiences and expectations of Vancouver’s anarchist resurgence. Growing first from the militancy of the long sixties, anarchist projects solidified during the second half of the 1970s and early 1980s, a period marked by expanding social movement activism, continued environmental transformation, and emerging instances of neoliberal economic restructuring. Between 1974 and 1978, activists in the city created a range of anarchist projects including reading groups, periodicals, and agitprop initiatives. Numerous collectives also sought to bring anarchist perspectives on revolution, intersectionality, or organizational practices into direct conversation with other political traditions including feminism, environmental activism, prison abolition, and the labour movement. The majority of this political activity was organized in ways that were open and accessible to the

39. William Carroll and R. S. Ratner, “Social Democracy, Neo-Conservatism and Hegemonic Crisis in British Columbia,” *Critical Sociology* 16, no. 1 (1989): 29–53.

40. Hak, *The Left in British Columbia*, 149–50.

41. Ted Richmond and John Shields, “Reflections on Resistance to Neoliberalism: Looking Back on Solidarity in 1983 British Columbia,” *Socialist Studies* 7, no. 1/2 (Spring/Fall, 2011): 218.

42. Hak, *The Left in British Columbia*, 150–157.

public. At the same time, there were aspects of the anarchist resurgence that sought to reflect upon, promote, and sometimes conduct clandestine forms of armed struggle. For example, anarchist periodicals including *Open Road* and *Resistance: Documents and Analysis from the Illegal Front* provided sympathetic and critical commentary on the politics and culture of armed struggle. Moreover, the city also produced its own anarchist guerrillas. Between 1980 and 1983, a number of anarchists came together to create the Direct Action collective, a clandestine group that used the tactics of industrial sabotage to attack a hydroelectric project on Vancouver Island as well as a Toronto factory that was building parts for a new generation of American nuclear weapons. Several members of Direct Action were also active in the Wimmins' Fire Brigade, a collective of feminists who firebombed a number of pornography stores in the greater Vancouver area in November 1982.<sup>43</sup>

In this engagement with armed struggle, anarchists were, once again, part of a broader pattern of New Left (and post-New Left) activity in the city. In the context of the long sixties, the development of armed revolutionary movements in Southeast Asia, the United States, and Quebec had been critically important factors in shaping the consciousness and organizing initiatives of Vancouver activists, including those anarchists within the countercultural New Left. During the 1970s and 1980s, these older debates and commitments to armed action and underground activity were folded into the expansion of anarchist politics, culture, and activism. For example, speaking to a broader pattern of radical analysis that had stretched out across the New Left since the long sixties, the activists involved with Direct Action and the Wimmins' Fire Brigade insisted that industrial sabotage could not be understood without reference to what they saw as the disruption, oppression, and violence of energy megaprojects, nuclear arms, and pornography.<sup>44</sup> However, although armed struggle played an important political and cultural role within Vancouver's anarchist resurgence, such activity should be seen in conjunction with the development of anarchism's aboveground activities, which were also understood as critical tactics for revolutionary struggle. Here, it was the politics of social revolution, rather than clandestine organizing, which informed anarchism's relationship with punk.

43. For an example of the anarchist press' exploration of armed struggle, see "Still Crazy After All These Years," *Open Road* 1 (Summer 1976): 3; "Durutti: The People Armed," *Open Road* 1 (Summer 1976): 24; "Abraham Guillen's Guerilla Strategy," *Open Road* 3 (Summer 1977): 15; Mark Brothers, "Weather Underground Explodes," *Open Road* 2 (Spring 1977): 9; "Nuclei Armata Proletari: Initial Phase of Armed Struggle in Italy," *Resistance* 2 (Spring 1982): 20–30; "Political Record of the N.A.P.," *Resistance* 2 (Spring 1982): 31–41; "Final Statement from the 2nd of June Movement," *Resistance* 3 (Spring 1982): 29–35. For an overview of the activity of Direct Action and the Wimmins' Fire Brigade see, Ann Hansen, *Direct Action*.

44. See the communiqués issued by Direct Action and the Wimmins' Fire Brigade, Hansen, *Direct Action*, 475–487.



## Rebel Culture and Social Revolution: Anarchism and the Political Possibilities of Punk in Vancouver

IF SOCIAL REVOLUTION encompassed the process through which everyday forms of conflict and tension could form the basis of wider political transformations, then punk was a particularly apt phenomenon with which to engage. Beginning in the early 1970s, the term “punk rock” was intimately tied up with a jumbled set of perceptions and concerns over the past, present, and future state of rock and roll. At the centre of punk’s relationship with rock were a series of conflicts that hinged upon categories of musicality, performance, and sound, but also upon the social meanings that were produced by and reflected in rock. As George Lipsitz has argued, a central aspect of rock and roll’s early social purchase came from its emotional and poignant critiques of work, social oppression, and middle-class respectability.<sup>45</sup> However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, the idea that rock and roll was a meaningful expression of dissent increasingly rang hollow. Instead, critics alleged that rock’s soul had been broken on the wheel of superstardom, corporate money, and influential record labels, processes that had produced a frustrating contradiction. On the one hand, capitalist structures had amplified and extended the reach of rock and roll, bringing it into the lives and senses of millions of people. On the other hand, that success had also turned rock into an item of contempt for those who no longer saw it as a relevant and engaged form of social expression. As a result, rock and roll was ripe for a dramatic transformation.<sup>46</sup>

To this end, music critics agitated for a program of rehabilitation by emphasizing a return to certain aspects of the genre’s past: psychedelia, a rawness and simplicity of form, and amateur performance. Critics imbued these musical forms and practices with the ability to transform rock back into something great, a transformation they increasingly referred to as “punk.” This rehabilitation, however, did not happen. Instead, punk and rock grew further apart. By the mid-1970s, the definition of punk had changed from referencing a loose collection of ideas over what rock ought to be, in favour of a style that was, in Steven Waksman’s words, “young, aggressive, and cynical, with music that marked a return to basics yet pushed those basic elements in extreme directions.”<sup>47</sup>

45. See George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labour and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

46. Steve Waksman, *This Ain’t the Summer of Love: Conflict and Crossover in Heavy Metal and Punk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 50–57. The connection to, and alienation from, rock is a dominant theme in the telling of punk history. In addition to Waksman, see Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002).

47. Waksman, *This Ain’t the Summer of Love*, 107.

The earliest recorded albums associated with the global expansion of punk – those by the Ramones, the Damned, and the Sex Pistols – were released over the course of 1976. By the following year, Vancouver was host to a small flowering of punk bands. In the spring of 1977, local group the Furies played the city’s first public punk performance at an art gallery in Gastown. At the end of July, a large crowd attended a show at the Japanese Hall in the east side of downtown to see a bill that included both the Furies and the Dishrags. Following a brief lull, the period between 1978 and 1979 saw an explosion of groups, including Tunnel Canary, I Braineater, the Generators, the K-Tels/Young Canadians, Active Dog, D.O.A., the Subhumans, the Modernettes, the Visitors, the Pointed Sticks, the Rabid, and many more. The sounds that came from this collection of bands were diverse, leading to a range of contested subcategories, the most common of which were “pop bands,” “art bands,” and “hardcore bands.” From this base of young performers sprang a loose and unstable network – a punk scene – made up of bands and audiences, organized public and private performances, self-produced records, and punk places such as houses, apartments, record stores, rehearsal spaces, and a shifting set of venues, as well as the streets and alleys of the city itself.<sup>48</sup> With this diversity in mind, it is important not to reify punk into something unified, static, or stable. Brian Goble, who played in both D.O.A. and the Subhumans, noted that the scene was built around “little microcosms. There really wasn’t much unity in that sense. It was united enough, in a sense, that it produced social gatherings

48. *Snot Rag*, one of the city’s earliest punk zines, provides an excellent window into the details of the scene’s development over the late 1970s. In particular see, “Interview with the Skulls,” *Snot Rag* 2 (November 1977): 2–5; “Interview with the Furies,” *Snot Rag* 3 (December 1977): 3; “Canadian New Wave,” *Snot Rag* 3 (December 1977): 5; “Interview with Victorian Pork,” *Snot Rag* 5 (January 1978): 3–6; “Editorial,” *Snot Rag* 9 (May 1978): 0; “Punks in the Park,” *Snot Rag* 10 (July 1978): 8–10; “Band Sum Ups” *Snot Rag* 13 (November 1978): 20–24. Most of the historical work on the city’s punk scene has come from its participants. For two of the most well-known pieces of autobiographical writing on the Vancouver scene, see Joe Keithley, *I, Shithead: A Life in Punk* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2003); and John Armstrong, *Guilty of Everything* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2001). Susan Tabata’s documentary film *Bloodied But Unbowed*, along with its accompanying website, provides extensive commentary on the origins and development of the scene’s early years. See Susan Tabata, *Bloodied But Unbowed: Early Vancouver Punk* (Tabata Productions/Knowledge Network, 2011); see also, [www.thepunkmovie.com](http://www.thepunkmovie.com), accessed 20 Sept 2014. The photographer and artist Bev Davies has constantly worked to capture and document the scene’s development. For a sampling of her work, see “Bev Davies Photo Essay,” parts 1–4, posted under the “webisodes” section of the *Bloodied But Unbowed* website, [thepunkmovie.com/webisodes](http://thepunkmovie.com/webisodes). Vancouver also looms large in the writing of Sam Sutherland, one of the few authors to have written a national history of punk in Canada. See Sam Sutherland, *Perfect Youth: The Birth of Canadian Punk* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2012). Through fiction and biography, Chris Walter has also contributed significantly to the telling of punk history in Canada, both on the west coast and elsewhere. For a small sampling of his work, see Chris Walter, *I Was a Punk Before You Were a Punk* (Vancouver: GFY Press, 2003); *Boozeacan* (Vancouver: GFY Press, 2004); *Argh Fuck Kill: The Story of the DayGlo Abortions* (Vancouver: GFY Press, 2010); *SNFU: What No One Else Wanted to Say* (Vancouver: GFY Press, 2012).

where anyone was welcome, but the bands themselves weren't really united together.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, it is more useful to see punk in Vancouver as a series of shifting relationships, sounds, places, practices, and material cultures, all of which changed depending on time and place, but that reflected certain shared experiences and common interests.

Individuals engaged in Vancouver's diverse punk scene were driven by conflicts with the popular musical establishment. So too were their musical interests and politics shaped by the social, political, cultural, and environmental transformations of the long sixties. Born at the end of the 1950s into a working-class home, Goble experienced Vietnam and the lingering threat of nuclear war through the glass screen of his parent's television set. At the same time, experiences with local events were also important. Alongside his future band mates Joe Keithley and Gerry Hannah, Goble lived in North Burnaby, an area just south of Burrard Inlet and close to Burnaby Mountain and Simon Fraser University. Like other areas of greater Vancouver, patterns of suburbanization and residential construction during the 1960s and 1970s created dramatic changes in Goble's immediate environment. Relishing strands of woods and pockets of bush, he watched in dismay as these "beautiful open spaces" were gradually "covered with houses."<sup>50</sup> Keithley was also deeply marked by the violence of Vietnam and the struggles of the anti-war and civil rights movements. Growing up in a working-class family with strong ties to the labour movement, he initially planned to become a lawyer like his childhood hero William Kunstler, the famed American civil rights attorney. Keithley, however, never became a lawyer. Instead, he pursued his political activism through music, an impulse that he shared with Goble, Gerry Hannah, and a range of others who would help to build the first wave of the city's punk scene.<sup>51</sup>

If the experiences of the long sixties were crucial to many in Vancouver's emerging punk scene, then so too was the shifting political and economic climate of the late 1970s. As members of the Rabid explained in an interview with *Public Enemy* in 1979, punk in Vancouver was inextricably shaped by the expanding economic crisis. Angered and exasperated after eighteen months of unemployment, one of the group's members maintained that punk was defined by a desire for social change. "We want to change things. Canada is in a mess. They're sitting there letting it all go by, like degenerates. Canada is a mess. It's like the 1930s."<sup>52</sup> Similar anxieties had been expressed the year before in the Subhumans' iconic punk anthem, "Oh Canaduh." Here, the song's lyrics,

49. Brian Goble, interview with author, 8 March 2012.

50. Brian Goble, interview with author, 8 March 2012.

51. Keithley, *I, Shithead*.

52. "Interview with the Rabid," *Public Enemy* 3 (February, 1979): 3.

composed by Gerry Hannah and sung by Brian Goble, explored a host of social problems facing the nation.

Every new day the dollar goes down  
 The sea's getting blacker, the sky's turning brown  
 You ain't got no job, you can't pay the rent  
 And now you're paying interest on all the money you've been lent

Oh Canaduh  
 What's wrong with you  
 You better wake up  
 Now what you gonna do

The big companies are milking us dry  
 Our corporation nation is soon gonna die  
 And in the capital they're sipping their tea  
 They care about their paycheques but not about you and me<sup>53</sup>

Tying together the themes of environmental degradation, poverty, economic exploitation, and governmental neglect, "Oh Canaduh" reflects the ways in which punk was shaped by, and attempted to resist, the early moments of neo-liberalism and the politics of austerity in British Columbia.

Anarchists, in Vancouver and elsewhere, both witnessed and encouraged the expansion of punk for a number of reasons. Culturally, there were elements within punk's global explosion that sounded familiar to anarchist ears. Among the more notable developments was the release of the Sex Pistol's *Anarchy in the U.K.*, a highly successful album whose dissemination spat out anarchist language around the world. On the shores of the Atlantic and the Pacific, activists argued that despite the album's stereotypical association between anarchism, chaos, and dystopia, *Anarchy in the U.K.* still worked to reference anarchism as a political tradition and, perhaps more importantly, held out the tantalizing hope that popular music and militant political practices might once again be forged into a useful revolutionary relationship. In England, this led to a very close association between anarchism and punk, so much so that explicit forms of hybridization produced a vibrant collection of anarcho-punk bands such as Crass, Conflict, Amebix, and others.<sup>54</sup> For Crass's

53. The Subhumans, "Oh, Canaduh," *Death to the Sickoids*, 7" 45rpm Single (Vancouver: n.p., 1978).

54. See Ian Glasper, *The Day The Country Died: A History of Anarcho Punk, 1980–1984* (London: Cherry Red Books, 2006); Brian Cogan, "'Do they Owe Us a Living? Of Course They Do!' Crass, Throbbing Gristle, and Anarchy and Radicalism in Early English Punk Rock," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1, no. 2 (2008):77–90; Rich Cross, "'There is No Authority But Yourself': The Individual and the Collective in British Anarcho-Punk," *Music and Politics* 2 (Summer 2010): 1–20; "The Hippies Now Wear Black: Crass and the Anarcho-Punk Movement, 1977–84," *Socialist History* 26 (2004): 25–44; George Berger, *The Story of Crass* (Oakland: PM Press, 2009).

Penny Rimbaud, the political significance of the Sex Pistols did not hinge on their philosophical sophistication so much as it did on their ability to inspire new ideas. When Pistols' vocalist Johnny Rotten remarked that there was "no future" in the current world, Rimbaud and his fellow anarchists saw it "as a challenge to our creativity – we knew that there was a future if we were prepared to work for it."<sup>55</sup>

Back in Vancouver, the Yippie anarchist Ken Lester experienced the Sex Pistols in a very similar way. Finding the band's commitment to serious political activism more than a little lacking, he was nevertheless awed by their ability to inspire new forms of creative political discussion. The band's 1977 single "Holidays in the Sun" was an acute example of this, with the album cover designed as a parody of a travel brochure. Here, tourists frolic in a range of seemingly exotic locations and activities. As they go about their leisure, they sing refrains from the album's lyrics, calling on the viewer to enjoy a "cheap holiday in other people's misery."<sup>56</sup> For Lester, these artistic expressions were valuable despite the political limitations of the band's individual members. As he explained in an interview, "I think these things were really effective because they were poetic, artistic statements that people could refer to, or would even subconsciously remain with people."<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the Pistols' more direct claims to anarchist identity, no matter how tenuous they might have been, did not hurt the growing association between punk and anarchism. For Brent Taylor, a central participant in many of Vancouver's anarchist formations, including the Anarchist Party of Canada (Groucho-Marxist) and the Direct Action collective, the Sex Pistols' songs "made the whole difference, like every anarchist in the whole world is going to pay attention to punk at least to some degree because of *Anarchy in the U.K.*"<sup>58</sup>

Although the Pistols were critical in amplifying the connections between anarchism and punk, anarchists in Vancouver engaged with punk because it also made sense to them based on their own experiences. In this sense, nothing was as important as the established perspective that popular cultural activities could be both an important site and method for political struggle. Two of the earliest anarchists to engage with punk for these reasons were Jill Bend and Brent Taylor. Close friends and political colleagues, they began attending punk shows regularly after 1977. Unlike the activists who had first helped to reignite anarchist politics in the city, Bend and Taylor had not come out of the local Yippie scene. While Taylor revered Yippie, he was too young to have directly participated in it. Graduating from high school in Victoria in

55. Penny Rimbaud, *The Last of the Hippies: An Hysterical Romance*. This short essay was included as an insert in Crass's 1982 self-produced E.P., *Christ – The Album*.

56. The Sex Pistols, *Holidays in the Sun* (Virgin Records, 1977).

57. Ken Lester, interview with author, 15 April 2011.

58. Brent Taylor, interview with author, 9 March 2012.

1974, he gained his most intensive political education by living and working with Marxist-Leninist and Maoist guerrilla groups in the San Francisco Bay area during the mid-1970s before turning to anarchism and moving back to the Canadian west coast in 1976.<sup>59</sup> A radical feminist, lesbian, and anarchist, Bend's political militancy had been shaped by her experiences in the student and women's movements at the University of Waterloo during the early years of the 1970s. Like Taylor, she arrived in Vancouver in the opening years of its anarchist resurgence.<sup>60</sup> The arrival of these two activists both reflected and contributed to a wider interest in the politics and culture of armed struggle and militant feminism in the community. Sometimes complementing and sometimes conflicting with the work of the countercultural New Left, these newer militants shared the perspective that punk was an important phenomenon with which to engage.

For Taylor, punk clearly and aggressively radiated what he saw as a "rebel culture" that reflected a legitimate sense of rage, anger, betrayal, and despair operating within youth communities at the end of 1970s.<sup>61</sup> Central to this milieu was punk's tense relationship with the city's established rock and roll community. Like in many early punk scenes across North America, punk bands in Vancouver lacked access to the cultural, economic, technological, and spatial resources that supported other rock and roll musicians in the community.<sup>62</sup> Generally speaking, the attention that most rock promoters offered to the emerging punk scene oscillated between the non-existent and the overtly hostile. Radio station producers and disc jockeys continually refused to play punk records on the radio, and established music venues were closed to those bands that wanted to organize punk performances.<sup>63</sup> As a result, punk bands were forced to develop their own methods of cultural organization through a mixture of alternative venues, recording and distribution processes, and media.<sup>64</sup>

While a heavy dose of contempt and neglect characterized punk's relationship with much of the rock scene, young punks were not entirely on their own. Sympathetic vendors such as Quintessence Records stocked the latest imported and domestic punk records and developed a short-lived record label

59. Brent Taylor, interview with author, 9 March 2012.

60. Jill Bend, interview with author, 28 February 2012.

61. Brent Taylor, interview with author, 9 March 2012.

62. See Sutherland, *Perfect Youth: The Birth of Canadian Punk*, 194–213.

63. For examples of punk's conflict with Vancouver's wider musical community, see "Editorial," *Snot Rag* 9 (May 1978): 0; "Editorial," *Snot Rag* 16 (March 1979): 0; "Lucas Gets Creamed," *Vacant Lot* 1 (January-February 1979): 2; "Let Lucas Rot," 2 *Public Enemy* (January 1979): 6; "Interview with the Rabid," *Public Enemy* 3 (February 1979): 3; "State of the art!" *Public Enemy* 4 (March 1979): 10–11; Eric Von Schlippen, "Radio is Cleaning Up the Nation," 5 *Public Enemy* (1979): 10.

64. Keithley, *I, Shithead*, 49–52.

that released a number of albums that featured Vancouver punk groups. The store also operated as an important social space where those interested in punk could peruse through the vinyl, chat with the clerks about the newest releases, or check the notice boards for upcoming shows. In addition to Quintessence, punk bands also received a good measure of support from local cable television programs *The Vancouver Show* and *Nite Dreems*, both of which used broadcasting mediums to help disseminate early punk music videos, live performances, and interviews.<sup>65</sup>

It was this cultural conflict and the development of alternative structures that anarchists such as Taylor found exciting and inspiring. Since it was seen as emerging organically among a new generation of youth, punk seemed to hold the promise of an emerging radical tradition whose significance for these anarchists was inseparable from ideas of its presumed cultural authenticity. In 1978, Taylor reflected on this point, declaring that punk was “basically the only autonomous revolutionary expression today of people too young to have consciously participated in the struggles of the late sixties and early seventies.”<sup>66</sup> At the same time, if the specific form of punk’s cultural militancy was new, then its conflicts with rock also seemed deeply familiar to an older generation of activists who had had their own struggles over the meaning and organization of their own popular cultures. This was certainly true to Taylor, who found punk’s conflict with the city’s mainstream rock community incredibly meaningful, describing it as a “cultural war” in which punk “saw all those rock-music hippies as having sold out on social change.” In this view, what had been an important expression of social rebellion and cultural militancy had been cheapened and polluted through its commodification. In this sense, punk’s political relevance to Taylor was that it screamed this fact to the rafters, boldly telling both rock and its supporters to “fuck off.”<sup>67</sup> Simultaneously new, familiar, and militant, punk seemed to confirm the existence of an emerging cultural rebellion rooted in the experiences of the mid-to-late 1970s but recognizable to older radicals – an interpretation that could be highly meaningful to multiple generations of social revolutionaries in search of popular radicalism.

Nevertheless, that radicalism was also potentially dangerous. Among leftists, the fear that punk could easily slide into unhinged individualism, or even white supremacy, was pervasive. Reflecting this concern, the Vancouver anarchist journal *Open Road* proposed that punk could indeed be a powerful social force. In particular, it pointed out the hypocrisies, failures, and betrayals of modernity in the bluntest of terms, while also incorporating these criticisms into a new youth culture that “exhibit[s] the most extreme loathing of

65. Video interviews with individuals connected to Quintessence and *Nite Dreems* can be accessed through the “webisodes” section of *Bloodied But Unbowed* website. See [www.thepunkmovie.com/webisodes](http://www.thepunkmovie.com/webisodes), accessed 20 September 2014.

66. “JJ Say,” *BC Blackout* 4 (23 June–7 July 1978): 3.

67. Brent Taylor, interview with author, 9 March 2012.

the system and the vacuous creature comforts it offers its loyal accomplices.” However, as it pointed out, the “obvious danger in unrestrained hostility is that the resolution to such emotional intensity is not necessarily progressive.” Anti-authoritarian themes were clearly present within many North American punk communities, yet “the frustrated psychological state they reflect in their fans can just as easily be the raw material of organized fascism as any indication of a more progressive trend in contemporary youth culture.” For *Open Road*, a mixture of demography and experience explained this political situation. Here, it argued that the general age of punk’s constituents – those youth between 14 and 22 years – meant that they were effectively isolated from the “social and political experiences of the Sixties.”<sup>68</sup> The result was that punk had become, to a certain extent, an indeterminate and ambiguous force whose political meaning and culture were still very much up for grabs. Therefore, *Open Road* pushed its colleagues in the North American anarchist movement to engage with punk, to channel and amplify its rebellion into an explicit revolutionary force. The alternative, it maintained, could be disastrous since a pattern of activist neglect or disinterest could “leave the field open to reactionary ideologies or general barbarism.”<sup>69</sup> In this way, punk’s political and cultural ambiguities spoke volumes about activist concerns over the legacy of the long sixties and the challenges of organizing across generational divisions.

These were not abstract fears. As Sam Sutherland has demonstrated, violence could play a prominent role in shaping punk performances, social gatherings, and culture.<sup>70</sup> Both Goble and Keithley experienced various forms of violence, either within the confines of the performance itself, or afterwards, as audiences spilled out into the street to fight with one another, and sometimes with the police. Both Vancouverites experienced this violence within the context of southern California, a punk environment that Goble described as being darker, dirtier, and more violent than northern locales such as San Francisco.<sup>71</sup> This did not mean that the San Francisco scene was somehow immune to violence. In 1978, *Public Enemy* reported that a member of the Rabid, who had travelled to San Francisco to attend a D.O.A. performance earlier that year, was embroiled in a fight outside the venue after a group of white supremacists took issue with an anti-swastika emblem worn by one of the Vancouver punks.<sup>72</sup> Punk shows in Vancouver could also draw support from the far right, including contingents of white supremacists.<sup>73</sup> In this, Vancouver was not

68. “Razor Rhythms Cut Coredome,” *Open Road* 14 (1982): 14.

69. “Razor Rhythms Cut Coredome,” *Open Road* 14 (1982): 14.

70. For example, see Sutherland’s exploration of the Toronto group, the Viletones. Sutherland, *Perfect Youth*, 32–40.

71. Brian Goble, interview with author, 8 March 2012; Keithley, *Talk – Action = 0*: 52.

72. “D.O.A.” *Public Enemy* 1 (December, 1978): n.p.

73. “Interview with Subhumans,” *Public Enemy* 2 (1979): 3.



unique. As James Ward has illustrated, punk had, from its opening salvos, a complicated relationship with the ideas and symbols of the far right.<sup>74</sup> Such instances reiterate the multifaceted nature and politics of punk scenes, both in Vancouver and elsewhere. They also help to explain why various left movements on both sides of the Atlantic saw punk as an important setting through which to contest right-wing politics and culture.<sup>75</sup> For anarchists and other revolutionary leftists, the politics of punk spoke to debates about the nature and meaning of violence – debates in which they had long been active. As a result, anarchist concerns about the potential for violence within punk did not emerge from a philosophical rejection of violence *per se*. Rather, Vancouver anarchists sought to contest and rein in violence along individualist or right-wing lines, and redirect this energy toward other political projects.

In this sense, in Vancouver, punk was never in any danger of being left alone by the left. Indeed, in some instances, punk and anarchism were living side by side under the same roof. This was particularly the case for a number of all-women communal houses on the east side of the city. Remembered by Jill Bend, who was a regular resident of these places, the houses brought together a range of radical left-wing currents, including anarchist, feminist, separatist, prison abolitionist, and environmentalist politics. They were also home to a number of punk musicians and provided rehearsal space to several all-women bands, including the Zellots, the Moral Lepers, and Industrial Waste Banned.<sup>76</sup> Anarchists also worked as managers for local bands. Ken Lester managed D.O.A., while David Spaner managed the Subhumans. For the most part, however, anarchism's relationship with punk in these years was most clearly performed in the public realm, as activists attempted to agitate, organize, and integrate punk into a host of radical political contexts. This article concludes by exploring two facets of this anarchist engagement. The first involves activists' attempts to create shared forms of identity between the emerging punk scene and an older array of progressive cultural and political traditions while the second includes forms of community organizing in which activists sought to integrate punk into the social movements in the city. Together, these tactics formed the basis through which anarchists attempted to organize punk both as a meaningful form of cultural expression and as an accessible and intergenerational expression of social revolutionary politics.

74. James J. Ward, "'This is Germany! It's 1933': Appropriations and Constructions of 'Fascism' in New York Punk/Hardcore in the 1980s," *Journal of Popular Culture* 30, no. 3 (1996): 155–184. See also Timothy Scott Brown, "Subcultures, Pop Music and Politics: Skinheads and 'Nazi Rock' in England and Germany," *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (Fall, 2004): 157–178.

75. See for example, Matthew Worley, "Shot By Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of 'Consensus,'" *Contemporary British History* 26, no. 3 (2012): 333–354; and Evan Smith, "When the Party Comes Down: The CPGB and Youth Culture, 1976–1991," *Twentieth Century Communism* 4, no. 4 (2012): 38–75.

76. Jill Bend, interviews with author, 28 February 2012, 22 March 2012, and 3 October 2012.

Anarchists in Vancouver understood that punk's precarious political existence was rooted in its physical separation from the social unrest and political activism experienced by previous generations. In light of this, it made good sense to them to try to bridge that gap by emphasizing shared patterns of political identity. In order to do so, historical narratives were particularly important tools in anarchists' efforts to make sense of punk and specifically to connect it to an older radical culture. Writing in the pages of the anarchist punk press, for example, Larry Gambone, another participant in the city's Yippie and anarchist formations, created a historical narrative that sought to provide punk with a new genealogy. Here, he maintained that punk was a manifestation of a much older spirit of youth revolt and rebellious creativity that stretched back into the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>77</sup>

In Gambone's reading, the historical origins of punk lay in the work of poets such as the Marquis De Sade who spoke strongly against the idea of established authority and morality while other writers as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Arthur Rimbaud, and Comte de Lautrémont had taken these aspects of rebellion and connected them to anarchism and other forms of collective struggle. Gambone also focused on the activity of self-identified anarchists such as Bakunin and Ravachol as well as 19th century bohemians, particularly those artists, writers, and cultural dissidents who joined in the European rebellions of 1848. Finally, it was the surrealist movements of the early 20th century that provided him with a bridge to the late 1970s. Instituting a range of radical artistic spectacles, the surrealist projects of the 1920s and 1930s developed a fundamental critique of modernist thinking and capitalist rationality. While such movements had fallen into obscurity during the 1950s and 1960s, Gambone argued that the spirit of those past projects were reborn in the guise of punk. Instead of focusing on the great differences generated by space, time, and historical context, he aimed to highlight a shared pattern of cultural rebellion and political militancy. These connections were most strongly reflected in the lives of the European bohemians, radicals that Gambone defined as the "first anti-establishment youth sub-culture."<sup>78</sup> In this interpretation, the bohemians initiated a radical family genealogy that led to the production of the Beats, the counterculture, and eventually punk. Such a narrative not only defined punk as a fundamentally radical activity, but it also redefined countercultural behaviour and the politicization of artistic production as historically grounded phenomena.

77. Larry Gambone, "19th Century Punks: A Blast from the Past," *Vacant Lot 1* (January-February 1979): 8-9.

78. Gambone, "19th Century Punks: A Blast from the Past," 8-9. For additional commentary on the relationship between anarchism and surrealism, see Alan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1998).

While Gambone traced what he saw as the very long-term historical roots of punk, David Spaner also sought to situate punk in a longer trajectory of radical culture and politics. Spaner, however, reiterated a more common perspective that punk was an elaboration and extension of countercultural youth movements that developed in the years after the Second World War. In this evaluation, the radicalism of punk culture had its historical origins in the Beat musicians, artists, and poets of the 1950s. Like punk, the Beats had developed as a reaction to the perceived social and cultural stagnation of their immediate surroundings, a context that led to the creation of a new autonomous culture. In this historical genealogy, such movements provided the basis for the “freak culture” of the mid-to-late sixties. According to Spaner, “the Hippies had many of the Beatniks’ values but they weren’t just a few small scenes in dead times. Their times were alive and the Hippies became a massive cultural upheaval that affected the entire society with their music, underground newspapers, marijuana, communalism, dress and hair, co-ops, festivals, [and] protests” as well as radical organizations such as Yippie and the Weather Underground.<sup>79</sup> For Spaner, punk’s place in the 1970s was part of this historical continuum that reached back to countercultural New Left and the Beats.

Such narratives served several purposes for Vancouver anarchists looking to connect to, and shape, the emerging punk movement in the 1970s. For one, they sought to provide punk with an older and richer sense of itself, both in the present and in the past. In this view, if punk was not alone – if it had cultural relatives in the form of older radicals – then the possibilities for collaboration might be expanded. Moreover, for activists such as Gambone and Spaner, an awareness of such “family” relations might help to keep punk anchored within the political and cultural contours of the left. At the same time, as a new form of rebellion, punk was also meaningful to the political and cultural identities of older activists. In this sense, Gambone’s and Spaner’s histories were attempts to explain and make sense of punk in ways that buttressed their own histories and experiences. As the cultural “parents” of a new generation of militants, they could take pride not only in their children but also in themselves. This political genealogy was another example of how anarchists attempted to use a variety of different methods and mediums to politicize, agitate, and organize punk by connecting it to older forms of cultural dissent. In other words, in drawing such connections between past and present, these anarchists hoped to influence radical culture and politics into the future.

In addition to proposing that punk was linked to political movements in the past, anarchists also worked to connect punk to the social movements that were developing alongside it. To do so, activists such as Ken Lester, David Spaner, Brent Taylor, Jill Bend, and others worked with local punk bands to develop a series of “Rock Against” concerts and performances that were

79. Jim Stark (David Spaner), “Beats, Hips, Yips, & Punks,” *Vacant Lot* 1 (January–February, 1979): 10.

intended to offer a moment of recreation and cultural enjoyment while also crafting forms of solidarity and support with specific political movements and projects. These initiatives drew on local and transnational activist experiences developed on both sides of the Atlantic since the late 1960s. On the one hand, the specific language of “rocking against” a given social injustice was inspired by the formation in 1976 of the Rock Against Racism movement (RAR) in the UK, a movement that attempted to use the social and cultural connections of popular music as a way of fighting against the growing political status of the British right.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, local activists, particularly those who had experiences organizing with countercultural New Left formations such as Yippie and the Vancouver Liberation Front, filtered these recent developments through nearly a decade of work fusing together popular music and political struggles in Vancouver.

The growth of specific Rock Against concerts in Vancouver emerged out of a large RAR festival held in Chicago’s Lincoln Park in 1979, an event organized by a contingent of Yippies based out of New York City. Spaner, who had heard about the Lincoln Park concert while at a Yippie conference in New York earlier in the year, arranged to get the Vancouver punk group D.O.A. to be placed on the list of artists performing in Chicago. To help raise money to pay for the trip, anarchists and punks organized the first RAR show at the Smiling Buddha Cabaret, a small rundown bar on the east side of downtown.<sup>81</sup>

In the wake of the shows at the Buddha and Lincoln Park, Vancouver anarchists were quick to expand the Rock Against model into other political areas.<sup>82</sup> In September of 1979, activists organized a large outdoor punk and reggae concert in Vancouver’s Vanier Park, billing it as a Rock Against Radiation event. In addition to reflecting general anxieties about the prospect of global annihilation, the concert was also an attempt to provide specific forms of support to local anti-nuclear projects such as the Pacific Life Community. Drawing together activists from southern British Columbia and Washington State, the Pacific Life Community was a leading force in the struggle against nuclear

80. Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Routledge, 2002); Ian Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); David Widgery, *Beating Time* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1986).

81. David Spaner, interview with author, 14 September 2011; Bev Davies, interview with author, 7 February 2012. For leaflets and handbills for the Rock Against Racism benefit in Vancouver, see Simon Fraser University, Rare Books and Special Collections, Ken Lester Collection, Unsorted Material, Handbills.

82. While anarchists were central to developing Rock Against concerts, they neither monopolized nor attempted to control the phenomenon. As a result, the punk scene was more than capable of hosting Rock Against events in which anarchists were not involved. Moreover, as the Rock Against Radiation event demonstrated, the musicality of the events were not confined to punk performances alone. Therefore, while punk, anarchism, and Rock Against concerts were routinely connected, it would be a mistake to assume that they were always entangled.

weapons on the west coast, particularly the development and deployment of Trident nuclear submarines.<sup>83</sup> Likewise, Bend and Taylor decided to hold a Rock Against Prisons show at the Ukrainian Hall in July of 1979 in order to raise awareness over the brutal conditions that inmates faced inside Canadian prisons. A 1981 Rock Against Reagan concert at the Teamsters Hall was organized as a benefit for militants and revolutionaries in El Salvador and among North America's Aboriginal communities, two groups who were seen to have suffered particularly harsh treatment at the hands of American imperialism.<sup>84</sup> In order to communicate the political themes of the event, organizers ensured that musical performances also included some form of oral commentary on the given political theme, as well as setting up tables and booths to disseminate radical literature and political information.<sup>85</sup>

Conceptually, anarchists understood the Rock Against shows as an attempt to bridge the social and cultural dynamics of the local punk scene with the political life of contemporary social movements.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, punk performances also provided an important basis of material support to many of the city's social movements. Shows that supported particular political events and campaigns offered activists publicity and public exposure, not only through the performance itself but also through leaflets and posters that were disseminated throughout the city in advance of the event. Musical performances associated with Rock Against and other "benefit shows" generated financial resources for community-based political projects, many of which were entirely dependent on voluntary donations. This was certainly true for Jill Bend and her colleagues in the prison abolition movement who used these punk performances as the primary source of funding for projects such as Prison Justice Day, the Native Prisoner Support Group, and Women Against Prisons.<sup>87</sup>

Anarchists also used benefit shows to help offset the cost of expensive legal bills and court fees of specific political trials. When well-known anti-prison activists Betsy Wood and Gay Hoon were charged with attempting to abet the escape of prisoners at the BC Penitentiary in 1978, Jill Bend, Marian Lydbrook, Bob Sarti, Ken Lester, and other Vancouver anarchists worked to develop various forms of community support for the two imprisoned activists, including a series of benefit concerts.<sup>88</sup> For Marian Lydbrooke, who played in

83. David Spaner, interview with author, 14 September 2011; Bev Davies, interview with author, 7 February 2012.

84. For information on the Rock Against Prisons and Rock Against Reagan shows see, SFU RBSC, Ken Lester Collection, Unsorted Materials, Handbills.

85. Brent Taylor, interview with author, 26 March 2012; Jill Bend, interview with author, 28 February 2012.

86. Ken Lester, "Rock Against Racism: Rebel Music," *Public Enemy* 6 (May 1979): 7–8.

87. Jill Bend, interview with author, 22 March 2012.

88. Marian Lydbrook, interview with author, 3 June 2012; Jill Bend, interview with author, 22

**Rock against Radiation Poster  
(facing page).**

Simon Fraser University Special Collections  
and Rare Books. MSC109-Posters-0423

both The Visitors and the Moral Lepers, performing benefit shows for activists such as Gay and Hoon was one of the main ways of connecting her musical and political interests into a meaningful form of participation that blurred the lines between punk as a cultural activity and as a form of political activism, solidarity, and support.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, when five Vancouver anarchists were arrested in the winter of 1983 for their participation in a number of political bombings that had taken place over the previous year, activists, anarchists, and segments of the punk community worked together to publicize the need for a fair trial and to help generate funds for the legal defence of those accused. Of the five activists that were charged, three – Brent Taylor, Gerry Hannah, and Juliet Belmas – had strong connections to the city’s local punk community. Taylor, as already noted, was a staunch supporter of punk while Hannah and Belmas were both punk musicians in their own right. In light of their arrest, their friends and colleagues organized for the production and sale of an “emergency” punk record, *Right to be Wild*. This record featured D.O.A., who performed their anti-prison track “Burn it down” as well as a cover of the Subhumans’ iconic anthem “Fuck you” – a song that had been written by Gerry Hannah when he was a member of the band. Like the oral commentaries that accompanied Rock Against shows, *Right to Be Wild* also came with two written documents that served to elaborate on the cause and the underlying political beliefs of the benefit album: an introduction to the politics of the trial by David Spaner, and a letter from Gerry Hannah who was incarcerated in Oakalla prison and awaiting the forthcoming trial of the “Vancouver Five.”<sup>90</sup> Taken as a whole, the album was one of the clearest examples of the political, cultural, and social merging of punk and anarchist scenes in Vancouver. As a form of musical expression, an act of solidarity and material support, and as an instance of political communication, *Right to be Wild* demonstrated the long-standing process through which activists in the city had developed strategies that effectively blurred the boundary between political and cultural activity.

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March 2012; Bob Sarti and Scott Parker, interview with author, 8 June 2011.

89. Marian Lydbrook, interview with author, 3 June 2012. The connections between punk and prison politics would continue in the years to come. The following year, Lydbrook and the Visitors joined with local punk group the K-Tels to perform live at Matsqui prison as gesture of solidarity. See Marian X (Lydbrook), “About Playing Prisons...” *Public Enemy* 6 (May 1979): 3. For a review of the Matsqui show by one of the inmates who helped to organize the performance, see Brian Boyko, “Live at Matsqui Prison,” *Public Enemy* 6 (May 1979): 3.

90. D.O.A., *Right to be Wild* (Vancouver: Sudden Death Records, 1983).

# FREE CONCERT

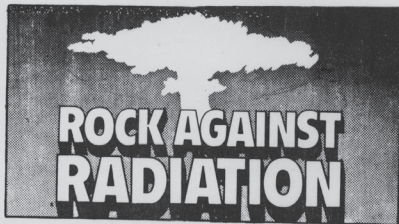
**POINTED STICKS**

**D.O.A.**

**K-TELS**

**SUBHUMANS**

**RECONSTRUCTION**



**12 PM Saturday Sept. 8**

**Vanier Park  
next to Planetarium**

**An ANTI-NUCLEAR Event**

Through Rock Against and benefit shows, and benefit albums such as *Right to be Wild*, activists within Vancouver's anarchist scene attempted to shape and radicalize what they saw as the political rebellion of punk in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They did so not only by claiming long genealogies of cultural politics in the anarchist press; they also organized events and albums that aimed specifically to connect punk – and its audiences – to various social movements and activist currents in the city. As the Rock Against Prisons show demonstrated, this process was often done in ways that connected punk to anarchism in two overlapping ways. Here, not only were the shows organized by anarchists, they were also orientated toward activist projects in which anarchists played a major role. Punk organizers like Lester, Bend, and Taylor were heavily involved in anti-prison projects that drew in a broader array of anarchists. The organization of Prison Justice Day, alongside specific legal support work for the trial of Betsy Wood and Gay Hoon, and the trials against American Indian Movement activists Leonard Peltier, and Dino and Gary Butler, were all heavily marked by the participation of activists connected to the city's various anarchist collectives – and their specific interests in punk.<sup>91</sup> In this way, anarchists attempted to radicalize punk by creating events that were both culturally and politically meaningful while simultaneously trying to use cultural events as part of a broader approach to community organizing and social movement activism that could bridge supposedly distinct generations of culture and politics in Vancouver.

The degree to which these activists were able to impact the political identity of the city's punk scene is hard to judge. Bands such as D.O.A. and the Subhumans certainly helped to amplify and popularize anarchist politics and culture in the city, and both bands worked closely with anarchists such as Ken Lester, David Spaner, Brent Taylor, Jill Bend, and others over this period. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these militants gave the punk scene its politics in any totalizing sense. Anarchist politics, ideas, and culture had their place within the scene, but they never expanded to the extent that they encompassed the community as a whole. Furthermore, there were also many instances in which there was no firm separation between the categories of anarchism and punk since the scene produced, and was produced by, musicians who were themselves self-identified anarchists, individuals such as Brian Goble, Gerry Hannah, Nathan Holiday, Juliet Belmas, and Marian Lydbrook. With these points in mind, it is important to see these political currents in punk as the product of ongoing personal and social relationships – relationships that were based on specific instances of political exchange, conflict, negotiation, and individual agency.

Nonetheless, even if the boundaries between anarchism and punk remained blurred, this relationship offers us critical insights into anarchists' efforts to

91. Jill Bend, interview with author, 28 February 2012; Brent Taylor, interview with author, 26 March 2012.



remake radical politics and culture in the so-called cynical 1970s. This article has explored how and why these political and cultural traditions first became entangled in the closing years of the 1970s. Anarchist activists in Vancouver saw the 1970s as ripe with revolutionary possibilities, but they were also concerned with what they perceived as the distinct challenges to those possibilities: punk's very real potential for swinging to the far right, generational and cultural divisions, and a lack of activist experience in the younger generations. To overcome these, anarchists sought to remake punk through activist strategies drawn from a diverse range of experiences drawn across the long sixties, particularly in the relationship between politics and play. By claiming new historical genealogies, organizing benefit concerts, and aiding in the release of punk albums, anarchists in the Vancouver "scene" sought to influence and attract potential activists in the younger generation. For these anarchists, punk was both new and familiar – a critical and useful tool that could be imbued with the power to refigure a longer genealogy of radical politics and play, and that in turn, could refigure the future of radical Vancouver.

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