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DON'T LET THE WORLD ROT:
ANARCHISM, HARDCORE, AND COUNTERCULTURE

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 2013

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

Hardcore music is intrinsically anarchistic. The hardcore music scene represents a radical departure from contemporary society. Rejecting the materialism, militarism, and hedonism of the mainstream music scene—and, by extension, modern culture—hardcore music presents an alternative lifestyle rooted in solidarity, equality, and liberty. Indeed, the culture of the hardcore scene approaches a transitive, nomadic model of an anarchistic commune built on resistance as a way of life. In this study, I identified the ways music and lyrics craft attitudes and environments for revolt and rebellion, cultivating critical thinking and disobedience in equal measures. In order to understand the hardcore community, I conducted interviews, studied political theory, analyzed the lyrics of hardcore bands, and synthesized the data to draw connections between major thematic elements of this community. I've found that hardcore music has created a countercultural ethos that subverts and defies political apathy and instigates direct action in order to revolutionize the political process and erect spaces of anarchic solidarity.

Keywords: anarchy, hardcore, music, politics, counterculture

For Barrett Brown, Jeremy Hammond, Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, and the countless other journalists, dissidents, academics, and anarchists arrested, exiled, and executed by the State for crimes of conscience—may we follow your example and engage in protest, rebellion, direct action, and insurrection with songs of resistance on our lips.

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CHAPTER ONE: THIS IS HARDCORE - A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COUNTERCULTURAL MOVEMENT

By its very nature, hardcore music resists codification. While one could reasonably chalk up a list of qualities that make a song “hardcore,” to do so would inevitably prove a lesson in futility, since hardcore is as much defined by its versatility as its experimentation. This is due, in no small part, to the creativity and innovation displayed by hardcore musicians and those who are involved in the scene—whether as promoters, venue organizers, or simple fans. In short, this creative element is bolstered by the countercultural resistance of those in the hardcore scene, which frequently expresses itself in the radical politics of anarchism.

But how does that resistance exist in a way that defies commodification? Where do musicians tour and how do they support their rigorous schedules of playing shows, recording new albums, and doing press? Why is the hardcore community a “counterculture” and not a “subculture”? Perhaps most importantly, how does hardcore—unlike punk, which paved the way for the genre in so many ways—refuse to become a part of mainstream culture and, in so doing, model a radical departure from sociocultural apathy?

I argue that hardcore’s culture-building process, which instigates an engaging, inclusive, diverse, and revolutionary alternative to contemporary society, is arguably hardcore’s greatest contribution to modern culture. In studying how and why hardcore operates under its ethos of solidarity, equality, and liberty and by understanding the anarchistic politics at the heart of this countercultural movement, we can begin to challenge and interrogate the political antipathy in mainstream music and society, at large. Hardcore music challenges the popular notion that anarchy “does not work” or “isn’t practical” by putting anarchistic philosophy into practice.

Hardcore has its roots in the late 70's and early 80's music scene, organically evolving from a fusion of punk and hip-hop. They called it hardcore. From punk, hardcore borrowed the anti-authoritarian, chaotic, "fuck you" attitude. Hardcore inherited its groove, girth, and rhythm from hip-hop. It was more than just a musical subgenre, though. Hardcore, with its incessantly rebellious nature, was not apolitical or socially reclusive in the way punk had been in the 70's. Indeed, music historian Steven Blush wrote in *American Hardcore* that the genre itself was "the suburban American response to the late-70's Punk-revolution" (17). Hardcore wanted to do more than just write about the world's horrors. It became a challenge to the status quo of violence, apathy, and nationalism, adopting a counter-cultural ethos of communal solidarity, radical equality, and unparalleled liberty.

The hardcore scene has its roots in Southern California, but spontaneously erupted in DC, Jersey, and Long Island, as well. Hardcore itself began with a revolt: a rejection of the hippie scene that promoted a primitivist retreat from society. Rather than using drugs for escapism and entertainment, straight-edge culture—which began with hardcore juggernauts Minor Threat—began to infuse the hardcore scene. Furthermore, hardcore bands saw how the music industry was manipulating and capitalizing off punk music. As hardcore musicians in the '80's watched punk betray its DIY roots, they resolved to never follow in their predecessors' footsteps. The result was a slew of independent record labels, self-booked (and self-promoted) tours, and the creation of a revolutionary work ethic that saw bands touring 300+ days a year. Rather than playing sold-out arena shows, hardcore bands played in the basements of their fans' homes. Instead of selling their souls to record labels, hardcore musicians created their own music, recording songs in their bedroom and paying out-of-pocket to burn CDs or press EPs (which often featured multiple bands on one record, commonly referred to as "splits.")

Hardcore, of course, didn't remain in basements. In order to spread their messages to a wider audience, hardcore bands began to play in larger venues. Today, one can attend an Architects show in the historic Rock Am Arena in the UK or spy A Day To Remember playing at the UCF arena. However, this does not, in truth, detract from the message or ethos of hardcore music. While bands might rarely attend mammoth festivals or play these larger shows, they habitually invite their fans up onto the stage—to jump back off, to share the mic, and simply thrive in such an explosive atmosphere in unison.

Furthermore, the bands who have a large enough fan-base to play big arena shows make a habit of playing smaller venues as often as possible, both to support the local scenes and to allow for more crowd-participation. In doing so, they often end up losing out on the potential for profit. But this is why you can see bands playing Arena Shows and House Shows in the same week—because they love the inclusion of hardcore and value its participatory mechanisms. Beartooth, for instance, recently embarked on a full-U.S. tour where they exclusively played house shows, despite the fact that they could've have easily booked a full-U.S. tour at significantly larger venues (and make a handsome sum in the process.)

Hardcore bands often play at festivals made by fans—like Jacksonville's Southeast Beast fest, for example. Often, the bands attending these massive get-togethers play after-show parties in people's living rooms until 4:00am. Hardcore thus radically reimagines shows. Through their music, they provide radical messages of resistance. They use that talent to play free shows in people's homes, then crash on their couches by way of compensation. Bands routinely create barter economies, simply trading merchandise (shirts, CDs, vinyl records) for medicine, necessities, or a place to crash for the evening. I've had more than one band sleep over at my house—and have made fast friends in the process.

While punk came to be defined by its aesthetic, hardcore music has remained stalwart in its ethos of countercultural resistance. This is why hardcore has failed to be absorbed into mainstream culture: hardcore is too radical. Integrity is at the forefront of the hardcore mentality. Sell-outs are anathema. Since hardcore defies commodification, the corporate state cannot neuter its message and rob the hardcore music scene of its revolutionary mentality.

Hardcore music has its own sonic style. In an article published in *Uncut* magazine titled “Move Over My Chemical Romance: The Dynamic Beginnings of U.S. Punk,” Steven Blush observes how “the Sex Pistols were still rock’n’roll...Hardcore was a radical departure from that. It wasn’t verse-chorus rock. It dispelled any notion of what songwriting is supposed to be. It’s its own form.” Whether it was at Long Island, NY house shows, in Washington, DC basements, or at dingy venues in Orange County, CA, hardcore music had one rule: there are no rules. The resulting experimentation in musicianship catalyzed a technicality that borrowed from a plethora of genres, all while remaining reluctant to conform to any particular sonic soundscape. ‘

Guitar riffs in hardcore can be simple alternations of power chords or be frantic, complex, and aggressive riffs. Classic rock and metal are hallmarked by the solo. Most hardcore guitarists reject solos, focusing instead on creating a symbiosis between all the instruments. Basslines were often thick and sludgy. Bassists usually used picks in order to play more rapid licks on their instruments. Percussion, a huge focus in hardcore, embraces rhythm and attack simultaneously. Hardcore drummers may have simple beats at one moment to allow the other instruments or vocals to shine, but could just as easily alternate to an off-tempo polyrhythmic beat if the situation calls for more percussive expression. The vocals in hardcore music are rough, often screamed or shouted and accompanied by gang vocals or anthemic chants.

There were several bands that pioneered the scene for up-and-comers. The legendary Black Flag had a knack for wreaking havoc throughout California. Suicidal Tendencies, Cro-mags, and Negative Approach all started out in the mid '80's, followed shortly thereafter by Bad Brains, the Beastie Boys, and Agnostic Front. Straight-edge bands included 7 Seconds, Youth of Today, Gorilla Biscuits, and Chain of Strength. The '90's saw hardcore bands really come into their element. As a slew of subgenres spawned, bands like Converge, the Dillinger Escape Plan, Fugazi, Fucked Up, Hatebreed, Earth Crisis, and H₂O gained a foothold in the scene.

In the wake of the tragic events of 9/11 and the ensuing wars that were justified in its aftermath, hardcore became even more politicized. Bands like Rise Against took up the cause of anti-militarism and environmentalism, disturbed by the way the Bush Administration fought terror with terror. Hardcore music's anarchic roots had grown into branches, which splayed wide an array of issues: capitalism, wealth inequality, war, poverty, animal rights, etc. 9/11 illustrated that interventionism and endless war had become the focal point of American foreign policy. Those who dissented against this chaos were ridiculed, maligned, and deemed "unpatriotic."

Determined not to be associated with the neoliberalism of American politics, hardcore artists emerged as outspoken critics of the depravity to which the U.S. would sink to ensure its Gospel of Freedom and Justice was carried to the furthest reaches of the globe. Foucault asserts that a fundamental aspect of power dynamics is that dominance necessarily engenders resistance. Politics have always been potent in hardcore and punk, but they rose to a fever pitch with the tumult of global warfare.

Hardcore is tied, intrinsically, to anarchistic political philosophy. It promotes ostensibly oxymoronic principles like unhampered individuality meshed with communal responsibility. Shows appear to many outsiders unaffiliated with the hardcore scene to be brutal and violent,

when nothing could be further from the case. People hear the word “hardcore” and think of anger, aggression, and chaos (and likely think the same when they hear the word “anarchy.”) However, when one takes the time to invest in the hardcore scene and truly understand the ethos it invites listeners to embrace, it becomes quickly apparent that the focus is on liberty, equality, and solidarity—the three pillars about which anarchist political philosophy has historically been situated.

Erroneous stereotypes surround hardcore music. However, on closer inspection, these straw-man critiques of the genre—and its corresponding ethos—can be quickly dismantled. For instance, hardcore music is often associated with violence. People see images from a show and conclude that the general attitude of hardcore is centered on expressions of anger and aggression. While this much is certainly accurate, that outrage is almost always directed towards a world bent on misanthropy, propagating programs of oppression. Shows are undoubtedly wrought with havoc. Kids jump onto each other’s shoulders, piling onto each other to get a chance to shout into the microphone. Others run across the stage and dive off the edge or crowd-surf up to the front. Even more fans push open a space at the center of the venue to dance.

There are the rare few who come to shows to commit acts of violence. Crews, often bedecked in matching jean-jackets, will “crowd-kill” while they’re in the pit, intentionally smashing bystanders who are simply trying to watch the band. However, these jocular fellows (for they’re almost always hyper-masculine young men who clearly misunderstand the ethos of hardcore and refuse to abide by universally-accepted etiquette) are vocally detested and bands often speak out—both on stage and in their songs—against this toxicity.

At their heart, shows are not violent affairs. Rather, they’re a safe place where the dispossessed and disenfranchised can come together and share their love for music as they watch

incredible bands play. Generally, those in the pit are quite respectful of other attendees. Dancers make a point to keep their distance from others while they groove and often apologize for stray blows if (and when) they occur. These wild, frenetic moves—typically referred to as “hardcore dancing”—are vastly different from mosh pits at metal shows where drunken buffoons swing their fists with the intention of meeting flesh or else jump into one another in gleeful abandon. At hardcore shows, the expression of anger is channeled through spontaneous movement in tandem to the music, not unlike lyrical ballet (although, admittedly, far edgier and less choreographed.) Dispelling these erroneous notions about hardcore music and advancing a more intimate understanding of the scene is one part of the work I will be doing in this thesis.

With a slew of subgenres, hardcore has become a musical genre that sadly breeds some degree of elitism amongst listeners who’ve nothing to contribute to the scene, save their negative opinions and inane iterations of what a hardcore band *ought* to sound like. Rather than waste time delineating what a hardcore band “sounds” like, I opt to regard hardcore as an attitude rather than a specific musical genre. This ethos of solidarity, individuality, and anti-authoritarianism expresses itself both in the culture of the hardcore scene and within the lyrics of hardcore bands. Thus, while those familiar with the scene might regard certain bands included in this analysis as “post-hardcore,” “metalcore,” “hardcore/punk,” etc., I simply regard them all under the umbrella term “hardcore” because they each reflect the anarchic catalyst that instigates heavy, aggressive, politically-aware music.

Hardcore provides a countercultural model that challenges modern society. Because of this, hardcore music seeks to expose injustice, oppression, and hatred and then offer solutions to the tribulations which inundate humankind. The hardcore ethos harnesses anger to contest these iterations of power. At its best, hardcore even refuses to give in to hatred and instead recognizes

that power is not concentrated in the hands of men and women so much as it is invested in institutions that proliferate the status quo. As such, hardcore music—with its dedication to radical freedom, elevation of community, and contempt for authority—is an anarchist movement in and of itself. It is a loose, leaderless group of rebels desperately trying to depose the despots of the globe.

This is why the hardcore community is not a “subculture.” As Patrick Williams and Erik Hannerz point out, countercultures are not content to simply build their own spaces, like subcultures. Instead, countercultures occupy popular culture and reclaim space through direct action and a process called “culture-jamming,” a practice that involves interrupting and disrupting normativity and exposing mainstream cultural practices as corrosive and corrupting. Marilyn Frankenstein discusses culture-jamming in the classroom, illustrating the way certain pedagogical practices can instigate countercultural moments (35). Hardcore does the exact same in venues and on records. Just as anarchism prizes direct action, hardcore music is predicated on confrontation. Refusing to shy away from a fight, no matter the odds, the hardcore community stands up for its principles and reclaims space (even if this reclamation is only temporary.)

In his moving treatise *Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt*, Chris Hedges suggests, “To rebel against insurmountable odds is an act of faith, without which the rebel is doomed” (20). This strange faith in humanity is not intrinsically humanist or religious. Rather, this faith is motivated by a deep-seated integrity which rests in compulsive perseverance: to endure, despite the likelihood of failure, like Sisyphus rolling his stone up the mountain. In their 2010 record *Keepers of the Faith*, Scott Vogel of Terror intonates on the title-track, “Keepers of the faith, I will defend your name. / Only true believers remain. / The blood and sweat we gave, through all my joys and pains. / You can’t deny the keepers of the faith.” A track that could be

interpreted multiple ways, “Keepers of the Faith” is at once a love song, an anthem of fraternity between bandmates, and a call to stick tight to the core principles of the hardcore ethos.

There is, ultimately, a sort of compassion which eludes the base and depraved attempts of capitalism by refusing to be coopted and this compassion is the cornerstone upon which hardcore stakes its black flag. A “strange kind of love” that Camus suggests is at the heart of all rebellious struggles, without which all revolutionary movements would inevitably fail (*The Rebel* 304). An affection that endures not due to the promise of an after-life, but one which seeks to not take for granted the only life we are guaranteed. Camus said that the artist was fundamentally a rebel, whose “task will not only be to create a world, or to exalt beauty for its own sake, but also to define an attitude. Thus, the artist becomes a model and offers himself as an example: art is his ethic” (*The Rebel* 271). As the old labor limerick and anarchist adage goes, those in the hardcore community seek “to build a new world in the shell of the old.” Hardcore musicians are artists who model a new ethic for the world: anarchic resistance, solidarity in community, and radical independence.

However, before we can properly investigate the prevailing themes of the hardcore music scene as they relate to anarchism, it would be prudent to first examine what it is the word “anarchy” means. Shrouded in controversy, this divisive, trisyllabic word often conjures up images of masked men hurling Molotov cocktails into the sides of buildings. Admittedly, this is certainly one dimension of anarchism, but it’s wise to investigate the implications anarchistic ideology and the political philosophy on anti-political politics—which often relies on nonviolent resistance, civil disobedience, and direct action to challenge the authority of the State and to subvert, and where possible, destroy its influence over the natural world and those who share the planet.

CHAPTER TWO: EMBRACE THOUGHT AND NEVER OBEY – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ANARCHISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Ask the typical person what the word “anarchy” means and they’ll likely give you an answer that utilizes the word “chaos” at one point or another. Noam Chomsky discusses this phenomenon in *Understanding Power*, saying that, while “chaos” is certainly a definition of the word “anarchy,” it’s “not a meaning that has any relevance to social thought.” The linguist argues that “anarchists have typically believed in a highly organized society, just one that’s organized democratically from below” (Chomsky 28). Nevertheless, detractors and critics will define anarchy as disharmony—a disorganized system of violent criminals, where selfishness and greed become the greatest inhibitors to peace and justice. While many anarchists might suggest the aforementioned definition bears striking resemblance to the current political order, it is worthwhile to highlight the evolution of anarchist political philosophy in order to understand its revolutionary potential.

By defamiliarizing the term “anarchy,” which those in power have purposefully tried to malign in order to preserve the status quo, anarchists can give the word a more sophisticated connotation. Chomsky remarks that the U.S. government may have been “harsh on socialists” during the McCarthy era, “but they murdered anarchists. They were the really bad news. See, the idea that people could be free is extremely frightening to anybody with power” (*Understanding Power* 29). When one considers the abundant variety of contemporary and classical anarchist texts—from Proudhon to Goldman to Newman—it becomes evident that anarchism’s amorphous quality is one of its strongest assets.

The word “anarchy” is Greek in origin. The prefix “an-” means “without” while the suffix “-archy” refers to “authority/ruler.” In short, anarchy simply means “without authority” or

“without a ruler.” To understand anarchism, we might first examine its two most popular symbols. After all, when one thinks of the United States, the first thought is of the star-spangled banner and what it supposedly represents. Anarchist symbols are rich in their imagery and are purposefully evocative.

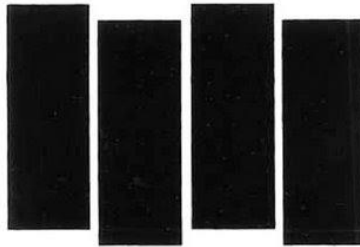


Figure 1: The black flag, a symbol of anarchistic resistance.

The black flag has been identified with liberty for centuries. Blackness has been associated with anarchism since the nineteenth century, at least, though one might argue that this was only the first time it was recognized theoretically. Many pirates sailed under a black flag, recognizing no god or government. Unlike the colorful flags of many other countries, the black flag is uniform and whole. It doesn't represent a state, but the lack thereof. In his critical political analysis *Reinventing Anarchy, Again*, Howard Ehrlich points out “black is a shade of negation. The black flag is the negation of all flags. It is a negation of nationhood which puts the human race against itself and denies the unity of all humankind. Black is a mood of anger and outrage at all the hideous crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of allegiance to one State or another. It is anger and outrage at the insult to human intelligence implied in the pretenses, hypocrisies, and cheap chicaneries of governments” (17).

In short, the black flag doesn't stand for one nation, but humanity as a whole. Additionally, while a white flag has typically implied surrender, the black flag is a call to defiant

resistance. One might also note that the symbol was adopted by the hardcore punk band Black Flag. It appears prominently in their shirts and on the cover art of their records—often alongside sensationalizing images such as a cop getting his head blown off or a nun spanking a child.



Figure 2: The “anarchist A” or “Circle-A,” another popular anarchist symbol.

The second is the “anarchist A.” Better known as the “Circle-A,” this symbol is the most readily identifiable symbol of anarchism. To many, it heralds memories of the anarcho-punk movement—a big, red A surrounded by a huge circle. But it long predates hardcore punk music. It is a monogram of “A” for “anarchism” and “O” for “order.” The anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon coined the phrase “Anarchy is the mother of Order,” which has since been simplified to the more straightforward “Anarchy is Order” (Marshall 558).

What do these symbols begin to suggest about anarchism? Chiefly, that anarchism is not a fundamentally chaotic political system. Rather, it is one that is organized democratically with respect for all human beings. Anarchists recognize that, contrary to popular belief, the State is actually detrimental to social order. Kirkpatrick Sale argues in his essay, *The “Necessity” of the State*, that anthropological evidence supports the fact that “humans lived for the first million years without a state, and most of them for the next 8,000 years without one...experiments with the nation-state...are only a few hundred years old” (54). Anarchists’ chosen course of action is

predicated, therefore, on subjecting the State—and the infamous Social Contract—to rigorous intellectual inquiry.

To provide some sort of clemency to this fundamental misunderstanding of anarchism, we turn to the quintessential anarchist philosopher, Mikhail Bakunin. Undoubtedly, this prolific Russian author was an activist, academician, and revolutionary, but we might permit the man a moment to self-identify. In the closing remarks of *La Commune de Paris at la notion de l'état*, by Mikhail Bakunin explains:

I am a fanatic lover of liberty, considering it as the unique condition under which intelligence, dignity, and human happiness can develop and grow; not the purely formal liberty conceded, measured out, and regulated by the State...No, I mean the only kind of liberty that is worthy of the name, liberty that consists in the full development of all of the material, intellectual, and moral powers that are latent in each person (17).

This does not sound like the errant jingoism of a criminal madman. On the contrary, its inspiring tone cuts to the quick of the very heart Bakunin alludes to: those “material, intellectual, and moral powers” that exist within each of us, due to the natural and inherent order of human evolution. Anarchism does not dwell on violence and selfishness, but it fosters the best of humankind in the valiant effort to make the world a better place.

As Chomsky puts it, “For the anarchist, freedom is not an abstract philosophical concept, but the vital, concrete possibility for every human being to bring into full development all the powers, capacities, and talent with which nature has endowed him and turn them to social account” (*On Anarchism* 2). This, then, is the aspiration of anarchistic philosophy. Saul Newman words it similarly, positing that anarchism “forms the ultimate horizon of democracy itself” (20).

Anarchism is the quintessential form of democracy. A sociopolitical environment where every man, woman, and child is afforded the opportunity to effect real change directly through action and through having his or her own voice in policy-making.

Essentially, anarchism's aspiration is an independent society where government (at least, insofar as it is formally recognized today) ceases to exist. To many, this is seen as the most radical element of anarchism. How could we, as human beings, possibly live without a government? Since the dawn of humankind, it's suggested, there have been hierarchal institutions of governance.

The answer, historically, suggests this train of thought is incorrect. In his seminal work, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Society*, Jared Diamond suggests that a variety of factors lead to hegemony—the willingness to commit wonton violence chief among them (15). As nation-states and civilization arose, human beings tended to organize systemically into clans, tribes, and communities which (especially in European and so-called “Western” countries) typically hoisted some patriarch to the top. This has been mirrored for the centuries that followed, particularly in Europe. As European colonialism spread throughout the globe, more and more continents saw the attractive nature of these hierarchical structures, which could viably protect capital (Sale 45). The powerful viewed it as a way to amass wealth and status. Minorities, lackluster individuals, and peasants whose means of subservience barely supported their families and could not possibly begin to nurture a radical politics, saw it as an impossible inevitability.

But to suggest that it was always this way is not only misleading, it's willfully naive. Native Americans, for example, created radically democratic societies throughout South, Central, and Northern America. Native American communities, especially the League of the Iroquois,

which included “the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas...[were] bound together by a common Iroquois language” (Zinn 19).

The noted historian, Howard Zinn, explores Native American culture in *A People's History of the United States* at great length. Zinn writes that “In the villages of the Iroquois, land was owned in common and worked in common. Hunting was done together, and the catch was divided among the members of the village. Houses were considered common property and shared by several families. The concept of private ownership and land was foreign to the Iroquois” (20).

Zinn explains that “Children in Iroquois society, while taught the cultural heritage of their people and solidarity with the tribe, were also taught to be independent, not to submit to overbearing authority” (20). Native Americans organized democratically in a culture divorced from capitalism and imperialism, devoted instead to principles that treasured nature. John Collier, a scholar who lived among Native Americans in the 1920s and 30s, said of their culture, “Could we make it our own, there would be an eternally inexhaustible earth and a forever lasting peace” (121). While admittedly fantastical, Collier’s reflections underscore the invaluable disposition of Native Americans, which Zinn illustrates is diametrically opposed to the religious zealotry of the European colonials who came to the Americas in the seventeenth century.

Native American Iroquois are not the only example of radical harmony in history. Indeed, there are arguably more democratic examples. One might look at the Quaker movement, the socialist movement, even (dare I say) the Occupy movement, to see how human beings work together mutually and have continued to do so, even in a society like modern America, which so enthusiastically supports the concept of rugged individualism at the expense of community values. In *Human Scale*, Sale provides an exhaustive list of societies organized in this manner,

from North Africa and Sudan, Kalahari, Polynesia, the South Pacific, in “patrilineal as well as matrilineal societies...occurring in such variety and profusion that it comes to seem from the anthropological evidence that this is indeed the basic natural organization of human societies” (456).

Hence, for a critic to disparage anarchism as impossible due to the necessity of government is, as I said, ignorant in the extreme. Even those who might suggest that Chieftains were the leaders of the tribe misunderstand Native American culture. Chieftains were challenged regularly by the people, who were the truly powerful in Native American societies. Indeed, as Howard Zinn suggests, our biases often limit our understanding of alternative cultures. Zinn’s explanation of a historian’s inaccuracy can similarly reflect those of us who’re less studied in any particular subject; our biases influence our perspectives. “A historian’s distortion is more than technical,” Zinn admits, “it is ideological; it is released into a world of contending interests, where any chosen emphasis supports...some kind of interest, whether economic or political or racial or national or sexual” (8).

Similarly, accusations that anarchism may work only in primitive societies and not in the complex modern world also fly hopelessly wide of the mark. One of things that incensed people about Occupy Wall Street was its negligence to offer a list of demands or compromise with the government. But this misunderstands the importance of the Occupy Movement. It wasn’t about using the broken system to change the system, it was about revealing how colossally the system had failed the common man.

OWS didn’t create a fully-fledged anarchistic commune, sure. But what they did create, quite brilliantly, was a Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ.) Anarchists aren’t concerned with a global revolution—not yet, anyway. They desire direct action and, ideally, the creation of

communities where anarchists can participate in free acts of association, unimpeded by the State. As Saul Newman outlines, anarchists most recently have utilized “not only mass protests and creative forms of civil disobedience and non-violent confrontation, but also sabotage, the occupation of spaces (Temporary Autonomous Zones) and other forms of subversion—rather than formal political representation (180).

Furthermore, in the last two centuries in which anarchist philosophy has truly gained a foothold, one can note several historic landmarks in which anarchists created radical spaces of freedom and community. Francisco Ferrer, who was murdered by the Spanish State after the Tragic Week of 1909, created the *Escuela Moderna* (Modern School) which rejected the authoritarianism of traditional academic hegemony. The Paris Commune, which endured in Paris from March 18 to May 28, 1871, was eventually crushed by the French army. There are even modern examples of anarchist communities. One notable example would be the Zapatista Movement. Though they had their roots in decidedly Marxist revolutionary politics, recently the Zapatista movement has shifted to forming egalitarian, leaderless communities that practice mutual aid. The hacktivist group Anonymous could also be seen as a leaderless community practicing anarchistic values.

Anarchists recognize the historical fact that human beings have worked together for mutual betterment in the distant and near past and continue to do so contemporarily. In an anarchistic commune—which would be a TAZ of greater longevity—a culture would be developed and continually nurtured to improve quality of life for both the self as an individual and the community as a whole. Men and women and children would foster voluntary social relations, from each according to his ability, to each according to his need; a society in which one man or woman’s freedom does not impinge upon another’s, but enhances and purifies it.

This is the concept of equal-liberty Newman coins. Equal-liberty “is simply the idea that liberty and equality are inextricably linked. That one cannot be had without the other” (Newman 28). He echoes Bakunin, who wrote that “I am free only when all human beings surrounding me—men and women alike—are equally free. The freedom of others, far from limiting or negating my liberty, is, on the contrary, its necessary condition (Maximoff 267).

It is this notion that leads Newman to write that “anarchists do not seek a democracy but, rather, an *aristocracy of all*, where the liberty and autonomy of each is fully and equally respected.” In short, there is a moment where democracy can infringe upon one’s liberty and majoritarianism can create a “tyranny of the majority.” While Newman eventually concedes that “democracy, radically conceived, *is* anarchy” he suggests caution and advocates equal-liberty as the central ethics of anarchistic anti-political politics (38). Like many anarchist theorists, Newman relies on the power of paradox to defamiliarize readers’ conceptions. By undermining the word “politics” with “anti-political,” Newman suggests that this anarchist ethic is fundamentally divergent from the conventional political process.

While classical anarchism leans heavily on the admirable aspects of the human condition, I would submit that this is entirely necessary for those committed to building a better society. If we do not hope and dream of a better tomorrow, how can we ever begin to bring it to fruition? Postanarchism bridges the gap. As Newman explains in *The Politics of Postanarchism*, the “post” prefix in the word “postanarchism” is not to mean that it “follows after or steps away from” classical anarchism. On the contrary, in the same way that post-modernism builds upon the cornerstone of modernism or poststructuralism upon structuralism, postanarchism embraces the anarchism that originated during the Enlightenment and instead accepts the challenges many critics hurl at anarchism as it retorts its pundits. Postanarchism *is* anarchism, influenced and

enhanced by post-structuralism and post-modernism. It rests in this neutral zone, understanding that humanity already is the change it wants to see. What remains to be seen, of course, is which way the scales will tip.

Newman puts it like this: “There is the idea of a moral and rational basis to social relations, a natural foundation that is obscured by the workings of power and religion, yet which can be revealed through scientific enquiry” (54). Newman explains how what he considers to be “classical anarchism” emerged from Enlightenment principles of rationality. However, he is not content with this understanding of anarchy. Newman assaults the ontological foundations of anarchism, daringly asking the questions many of us have in a post-Nietzschian society. He demonstrates how morality is central to anti-authoritarian acts of rebellion. That it demands a responsibility to both the self and others. Here, Newman provides a fascinating idea:

Freedom is thinkable only through the freedom of others. Freedom is relational and communal—it is not something jealously guarded by the individual against other individuals, but shared freely and revealed in...It is a kind of generous excess that spills over the edge of individual self-interest (62).

In essence, personal freedom is dependent upon the freedom of those around us. In order to become free, we must seek the emancipation of our oppressed brothers and sisters. This, according to Newman, is the quintessential moral act—to vie for the liberty of the self and others. This ethic of equal-liberty provides the first cobblestone in the long road to liberate ourselves from the bondage of governance.

Anarchism understands that there is a constant threat of social dominance. That even when the current order is overthrown, we might unwittingly trade one master for another. The poor farmers in the colonies traded a King for a President and Representatives. The French revolutionaries beheaded Kings and Queens and got an Emperor instead. Anarchists see that “the

State is not established through a rational agreement, but through war and violence” (Newman 69).

To put it simply, the social contract is not a voluntary agreement, as Hobbesian enthusiasts suggest. On the contrary, the State maintains its power through the steadfast manipulation, indoctrination, and domination of the masses. It is through warping the minds of its Subjects that the State has maintained its archaic purposes of authority. But these systems of dominance are not as overt as they appear in *Brave New World* or some comparable dystopian work of fiction. They are far more subtle, twisted, and hideous—especially when one realizes just how ingenious and effective they are.

When men and women of conscience like Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning rise up to combat injustice and immorality by breaking inane laws that safeguard government corruption and war crimes, they are branded traitors by their own political institutions and are locked away in jail for ridiculous sentences or else exiled permanently from the nation of their birth. In the eyes of the State, they are considered traitors. One of the State’s chief function is to have an enemy. If the State cannot find an enemy, it will manufacture one (*à la 1984*.)

Of course, this is exactly what the State wants—to rob its Subjects of their individuality and independence, even as it foists ambiguous ideologies of “freedom” and “patriotism” and “courage” onto the masses. For those who acquiesce in apathy serve no hindrance to the military-industrial complex. If its Subjects defend its (supposed) inerrancy, the State wins. It does not have to use violence when its citizens cheer for it and demean those who seek to critique it.

Anarchism realizes that power corrupts. For humanity to endure the chaos of governance, we must realize that power does not lie with the wealthy elites who purchase politicians in white houses like kids buying sugary snacks in candy shops. Instead, we must work to destroy relations

of involuntary dominance and create new, consensual systems that are undertaken without the threat of coercion but with a scientific understanding of the natural symbiosis of all life-forms on this Earth.

Newman admits that power is an inevitability in life. “In whatever social relationships we develop—even anarchist ones—there will always be power at some level, Newman admits, “yet, here power relations would (presumably) be more fluid, reciprocal, and egalitarian. What we must watch out for is the risk of domination emerging, something that is always possible due to the instability and uncertainty of power relations” (69). In *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault is also concerned the dichotomy between dominance and subservience. Power provides agency and autonomy, whereas dominance hoards and manipulates power.

For example, as the parlance goes, knowledge is power. If someone knows a complex mathematical equation and we’re attempting to solve an engineering issue together, that individual has more power than I do. However, in an anarchistic society, we would be encouraged to share this information. Because as we disseminate power, we become more powerful ourselves. The same would be true if an engineer came to me with a question about literature or creative writing. Rather than basking in the egotistical glow of knowledge and using that to dominate or control others, anarchists seek to spread as much knowledge as possible, thus equipping and (em)powering one another.

Humanity has evolved beyond this petty need for hegemony. Technology, our intelligence, our history, and our dreams for the future all suggest that we must detach ourselves from forms of authority and oppression and take a giant step forward in human progress. This is the quintessential dream of anarchism—to shed the hierarchical structures that relegate our lives. This is what the oligarchic elite fear most: that the people might come to realize we don’t *need*

them. Equipped with a basic understanding of anarchism, we can continue on to the task-at-hand: namely, understanding how anarchistic philosophy functions within the hardcore community and revolutionizes political activity so that power might once more be exercised by the people and freedom and justice could ring in rhythm with down-tuned guitars and pile-driving percussion.

CHAPTER THREE: I AM ANTI – DEFINITION IN NEGATION

When one understands that very term “anarchy” implies negation (“no ruler,”) it becomes easier to interpret and understand the antiauthoritarian impetus of hardcore/punk which is predicated on anarchist principles. The anthropologist and anarchist Jesse Cohn, in his important work, *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848-2011* wrote at length about the type of philosophy that defined anarchistic communities. Cohn explained:

To be an anarchist, in a place and time that is like any part of the world in the twentieth century, is to deny the legitimacy of almost every feature of that world: its nations states, its religions, its pretense of representational government, its organization of production and consumption, its patriarchal customs, its warped ideals, etc. ...there is almost no end to the things one is “against,” to the point that one continually risks slipping into an entirely negative and reactive self-definition (anti-capitalist, anti-sexists...). When an “entire society,” i.e., almost every around you, seemingly to the smallest detail, reflects assumptions contrary to your most deeply held convictions about what the world is and can be—namely, the assumption that hierarchy, domination, violence, and injustice are the natural, necessary, and permanent characters of existence—than merely to persevere in imagining and acting on the assumption of the possibility of another kind of world is, in itself, a monumental and continual effort of resistance (14).

Davey Havok, vocalist for the legendary hardcore/punk act AFI, wrote a song for his straight-edge side-project XTRMST that focused upon this same premise. In “Social Deathplay,” Havok intonates, “Raise up your god to drown everyone. If this is social, I’m the antisocial...So, self-destruction is social. Selfishness is social. I am anti.” Again and again, this refrain of symbolic delineation through aversion appears in the lyrics of hardcore music. It is a sort of

definition *in absentia*, a self-prescribed departure from the minutia of the normative. Normalcy is regarded as conformist, subservient, and opiated. Thus, a culture of resistance arises.

In other words, a good way to examine themes of anarchism in hardcore music would be to identify several anarchistic notions and show how attitudes, actions, and lyrics produced in the hardcore scene emulate these political ideologies. Anti-authoritarianism may be cliché in punk music, but it's a staple of the music scene just as much as it is reflective of anarchists' philosophy. Anarchism is decidedly anti-war (if not always non-violent) in that it categorically rejects the fear and violence by which the State maintains its rule. Socialism is wedded to anarchy as well, hence it would be no surprise to find a rejection of materialism and even capitalism itself in hardcore music. Anarchism is explicitly anti-statist and these identities of world citizenship—not to be confused with the neoliberal notion of globalization—crop up again and again in the hardcore scene. Ultimately, protest music is foregrounded in the hardcore/punk scene, just as direct action and political protest are the main tools by which anarchists exert their influence over the State. When one pieces together these five themes, they become like fingers to a fist clenched in defiance of a degenerative and authoritarian State.

Bow To No Man

Noam Chomsky asserts that every position of authority must justify itself as rational and positive for both the individual adopting a role of authority and the individual who is subjugated to that authority. The common example, which he also provides, is the relationships of parents and their children. Parents adopt a role of authority for children to protect them from running into the street or putting their hand on a hot stove. This is, after all, the classic justification for government: the State exists to protect the people—from the environment, from the State's enemies, and (ultimately) from themselves.

The social contract itself was built upon this principle. It is the classic way that most modern governments—at least, those governments which masquerade beneath the pretense of democracy—function and justify their power over the lives of their people. Thomas Hobbes outlines the two chief laws of nature (at least, as he perceives them) in the *Leviathan*, which are essentially 1) human beings have a natural inclination to self-preservation 2) subjects grant the state certain rights over their persons “and be contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself” (121). In short, liberty is sacrificed for the preservation of security and safety.

This philosophy, though ground-breaking for its time, was shared by many of the classic enlightenment thinkers. Though his philosophy may have varied slightly from Hobbes, John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* essentially reiterates the same principle: that human beings, who must defend themselves from others, will give deference to the State rather than live in fear of foreign aggressors. Thus, private property, civil society, and labor are all guaranteed safety beneath the State. Jean-Jacques Rousseau pushed the theory even further, positing that the social contract “can be reduced to the following terms: Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will; and in a body we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole” (Howe 139).

Anarchists, however, challenge this notion. They recognize that the illusion of safety leads invariably to the State’s consolidation of power and that security cannot be provided as a justification for the suppression of the individual. Instead, society must strive towards establishing a balance between the collective community and the individual in order to ensure that the erasure of personal liberties does not occur.

Joseph-Pierre Proudhon, the French anarchist thinker, asserted an altogether different version of the social contract. In his iteration, which marks a distinct departure from Rousseau's original treatise, the individual does not surrender his or her liberty to the sovereign state. Instead, the individual maintains his/her own liberty in tandem with others. In this manner, all retain their liberty while refraining from coercing or governing one another. "What really is the Social Contract," Proudhon ponders, "in its highest significance, the act by which man and man declare themselves essentially producers, and abdicate all pretension to govern each other" (16). It is not enough to refuse to be slave. One must also refuse to be a master.

The social contract, as understood by Enlightenment thinkers, is subsequently revealed as a scam. In abdicating self-determination to the State, the individual at once foregoes self-reliance and abandons communal responsibility, surrendering to the whims of an ideology potent enough to rob humankind of its dignity. If power is vested in the hands of a toxic system that utilizes fear to curb the masses, this power will express itself in violence. Thus, authority is exposed as a ploy to control the people. Anarchists, who celebrate freedom as the highest principle, the driving force of their unending rebellion, recognize that surrendering their freedom to an entity that cannot be accountable for its despotism is fundamentally fatuitous.

The hardcore community recognizes the vanity of authority. Just as anti-authoritarianism is at the heart of anarchy, so too is this ideology the bedrock upon which the hardcore ethos rests. Messages of resistance, rebellion, and defiance resonate within every fathomable corner of the hardcore experience. This anarchistic philosophy persists within the venue where space is reclaimed from a capitalist state and exists to vaunt art for art's sake; it endures within the alternative soundscapes depicted by musicians experimentation with their instruments; above all else, it is relevant within the lyrics of hardcore songs.

New York's Backtrack released *Lost in Life* in 2014. The opening track sets the tone for the entire record: it's called "Their Rules." The declaration is vehement, "I'm sick of following their rules that they set for me...they won't let me breathe...they're not for me." As the song continues, bouncing along to groovy, old-school percussion and power chords, James Vitalo shouts, "Fighting their rules / sick of following / The last thing I'll ever do is follow you." Unconditional revolt permeates "Their Rules." Vitalo's lyricism vaunts unequivocal self-determination as a guiding principle.

Trapped Under Ice espoused a similar philosophy on "Pleased To Meet You." Vocalist and lyricist Justice Tripp—who went on to start Angel Du\$t—rejected authority writing,

I don't want to be followed by sheep.

Don't need the respect of the mentally weak.

I have no interest in leading the blind,
but walking among the people with open minds
because I'm TUI.

As long as I'm still alive,

I live to spite you.

Tripp muses later, "I can't believe how stupid you must be to follow everything that you read, hear, and see." This same attitude, pervasive in the hardcore community, is exemplary of an anarchist impulse to reject adopting authority.

Few songs reject authority so unanimously as Nails' "No Servant." The blistering 59 second track, bisected by a frantic solo, is short and to the point:

bow to no man

no pig

no book of myths

tolerate no deception

no ignorance

I'm not your fucking servant

Anarchists recognize that not only does “absolute authority corrupts absolutely,” but almost every iteration of authority leads to the pox of nihilistic self-worship. In order to maintain freedom, it is not enough for anarchists to simply resist those who have authority. Positions of authority must also be rejected.

Old Men Keep Dreaming Up Battles for Young Men to Fight

The state clings to the vestiges of its power through violence and fear. However, the focus of this violence is not always centered on its own subjects. Often, violence expresses itself in the murder of the State's enemies. This tragedy, the scourge of war, plays out increasingly beyond the lives and outside the knowledge of the people. Shadow wars, waged in the name of “freedom” and “democracy,” persist in Yemen, Afghanistan, and Somalia even as Barack Obama positions the country for all-out war against the Islamic State and its attempt to establish caliphate. Drones rain missiles from the sky, butchering civilians, sowing indiscriminate death. This new type of warfare is not a war on terror so much as it is a war *of* terror, one that consistently creates new enemies for the State to flex its muscles against (and, in the process, amass vast material resources as it expends trillions on military ventures and weaponry tied intimately to private contracts with the giant corporations that churn out new toys for the State to deploy against the so-called “terrorists” it creates.)

Though it's become something of a cliché to evoke George Orwell, the author and social critic's vision for the modern world has proven prophetic. “The primary aim of modern warfare,” Orwell wrote in 1984, “is to use up the products of the machine without raising the general

standard of living” (71). Perpetual warfare has created a climate where the notion of war itself ceases to exist. There are no great mustering, no declaration of war. Instead, war has come to define the fabric of American reality. In short, “war is peace” (Orwell 14). But, like Orwell’s world, the war is always “elsewhere.” So the war holds a dual status of being ever-present yet also vacant in the conscience of the populous.

In his best-selling work of investigative journalism *Dirty Wars: The World is a Battlefield*, Jeremy Scahill charted the extensive depravity of the U.S. war machine. In the introduction, Scahill notes that the “United States came to embrace assassination as a central part of its national security policy” (xxiii). Whether it was the assassination of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan or the droning of Anwar al-Awklaki, the U.S. government began to adopt a more rigorous and disruptive “expansion of US wars, the abuse of executive privilege and state secrets” (Scahill xxiii). It didn’t matter if a Democrat or a Republican was sitting in the White House, hawkish warmongering *was* U.S. foreign policy.

Anarchists categorically reject war—unless it is war on the state, that is. However, violence has an intriguing history in anarchist political theory. Certain anarchists adhere to an ethic of nonviolent resistance that refuses to take human life (and often animal life) out of a moral conviction to not play by the rules of the State. Many Christian anarchists, like Jacques Ellul and Leo Tolstoy, are stalwart in their nonviolence. Others believe that the State’s violence necessitates an equally strong response. Anarchists deploying black bloc tactics fall into this category, as do the type of anarchists who were moved to violence out of a dedication to humanist or environmentalist principles—such as Earth First! and Earth Liberation Front (ELF). There are still more anarchists who, after deploying violence, have since regretted and spoken against its use. One can note this evolution in the political philosophy of Emma Goldman and

Alexander Berman, who were accused of trying to assassinate Henry Clay Frick. Goldman later wrote that those acts of violence were not instigated by anarchist principles but by fury at “great political injustice” (8).

Drawing on the revolutionary example of Jesus of Nazareth and the legacy of nonviolence that has been fostered in the anarchist community, an enthusiastic group of anarchists borrow from the examples of nonviolent revolutionaries like Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. to advocate an anarchism that rejects violence. Since violence is the primary tool the State uses to enforce, regulate, and regiment the lives of the governed, nonviolent anarchists insist that the utilization of violence robs anarchism of its principles and morphs it into a grotesque version of fighting fire with fire.

Christian Anarchist Dave Andrews writes in *Christi-Anarchy: Discovering a Radical Spirituality of Compassion*, “Jesus Christ was the supreme example of authentic anarchy—the creative nonviolent anarchist *par excellence*—working not from the top down, but from the bottom up with the poor, and the poorest of the poor, to empower people and enable them to realize their potential” (73). His work borrows from the same philosophy that Leo Tolstoy espoused. In his seminal work *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy suggested that “no honest and serious-minded man of our day can help seeing the incompatibility of true Christianity — the doctrine of meekness, forgiveness of injuries, and love — with government, with its pomp, acts of violence, executions, and wars. The profession of true Christianity not only excludes the possibility of recognizing government, but even destroys its very foundations” (169).

Christian anarchists do not have a monopoly on nonviolent anarchism, however. As I mentioned before, Gandhi—who had an ongoing correspondence with Tolstoy—wrote that “the

ideally non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy” and “that State is the best governed which is governed the least,” a phrase Gandhi included from Thoreau’s *Civil Disobedience* (122). Nonviolence is viewed, by many anarchists, as a tool to destroy the state. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote that “nonviolence is a sword that heals” and it is this type of weapon many anarchists suggest can win the hearts and minds of the populace (14). Chris Hedges posits “the fundamental tool of any successful revolt is the nonviolent conversion of the forces deployed to restore order to the side of the rebels” (3). Thus, nonviolence is seen as both an ethical obligation and a tool for reclaiming dignity by enduring suffering without retaliating in kind.

Black Bloc anarchists typically deploy direct action initiatives against the State and its corporate stooges. These forms of direct action manifest themselves in a variety of ways. Often times, a brick through the window of a corporate store during a protest could be attributed to a Black Bloc anarchist. However, anarchists have also used bombs to disrupt corporate buildings and so-called “eco-terrorists” have sabotaged private property, bombed dams, and sunk whaling vessels. Though not avowed anarchists, the non-profit Sea Shepherd—which seeks to protect marine life through direct action—has a piratic reputation for sinking illegal fishing vessels. In all of these instances, the term “direct action” and “civil disobedience” are more appropriate terms than “violence,” since the behavior of these individuals resorted to the loss of corporate or government property and a resistance to capitalist ideologies rather than a loss of human or animal life.

However, history provides a handful of examples of anarchists using physical violence to harm and even kill other human beings. The Molotov-touting, whiskered anarchist is a reputation that has been difficult for contemporary anarchists to shake off. To this day, anarchists have been known to tussle with police at otherwise nonviolent protests (often in self-defense) and their

attempts to subvert corporate/statist property has, on the rare occasion, resulted in harm being brought to bystanders. Stephen Jay Gould advised that we “shed the old stereotype of anarchists as bearded bomb throwers furtively stalking about city streets at night” (106).

Indeed, this is the very realization that Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman came to after their infamous, botched assassination attempt on labor boss Henry Clay Frick in 1892. In the end, both Berkman and Goldman requited their actions. Berkman later wrote in his prison memoir that “there should be no war, no violence used by one set of men against another” (112). In her statement to the court, Goldman beseeched the jury to recognize how violence grew in the first place. “It is organized violence on top which creates individual violence at the bottom,” Goldman explained, “It is the accumulated indignation against organized wrong, organized crime, organized injustice which drives the political offender to his act” (10).

Violence is manifest as the final, impotent struggle of a disenfranchised and desperate people to retaliate against a state that robs them of everything else until all they can do is respond in a vengeful act that robs the individual of his or her humanity. I submit that anarchism is intrinsically non-violent, for it recognizes that in order to effect lasting change, humankind must not stoop to the degeneracy of the State. Instead, as Berkman suggests, “[humankind] will rise from the dust and stand erect: he will bow to no tsar either in heaven or on earth. He will become fully human when he will scorn to rule and refuse to be ruled. He will be truly free only when there shall be no more masters. The word ‘Anarchy’ comes from the Greek, meaning without force, without violence or government, because government is the very fountainhead of violence, constraint, and coercion” (27).

Though they’ve evolved steadily from their hardcore/punk roots over time, Rise Against has consistently maintained the integrity that makes them one of the few radio-friendly,

mainstream bands that stick to the hardcore ethos. Vocalist and lyricist Tim McIlrath has a penchant for writing politically-engaged tracks and he has never deviated from the aim. In 2006, Rise Against released *The Sufferer and the Witness*, a record many regard to be their breakthrough album. In “Bricks,” McIlrath intonates, Our children fight our wars while we keep back just keeping score / We’re teaching murder not understanding.” The only response to such a nefarious culture is to fight back and win the battle through civil disobedience. “We run on the fumes of injustice,” McIlrath declares, “we’ll never die with the fuel that you give us / Keep it coming, ‘cause I’m prepared to fight / Keep running, find me at every turn / So turn your life around into something true... / We’re burning it all to begin again. / With hope in our hearts and bricks in our hands we sing for change.” McIlrath’s anthemic declaration “burning it all to begin again” has the unmistakable ring of anarchist theory, directing the blaze not at the human beings who’re suffering and dying in wars of imperial aggression but razing the institutions and ideologies that suffocate the planet. This is, after all, the ultimate horizon to which anarchists aspire: to eradicate the errant ideologies that inundate the globe with oppression and injustice.

No Bragging Rights’ *The Concrete Flower* encapsulates the same energy of rebellion, resistance, and—indeed—violence that often crop up in anarchist circles. On “Right Minded,” vocalist Mike Perez implores disenfranchised hardcore kids to direct their anger and aggression not at one another at shows, but “front and center at a rally or a protest / I want your violence to swing back in defense of the helpless.” Yet, Perez also recognizes the way the State treats its soldiers. “Attention” is Perez’s desperate attempt to alert the world to the inadequate treatment of veterans, abandoned by their government, who kill themselves at a rate of 22 a day. He wonders “why are we too blind to notice a system that breeds broken men / A Purple Heart is a promise

and we've turned our backs on them." He adds, sardonically, "Thanks for your service / Now die in silence."

Still more bands reject violence against human beings. Keith Buckley, vocalist and lyricist for Every Time I Die, knows that the jingoism that leads to war will lead to broken-hearted parents standing at the gravesides of their children, remarking in "Who Invited the Russian Solider?" that "you're gonna wish you were me when the unsuspecting are dragged to their graves / and you're standing on the edge holding a rose." Buckley then alludes to Nietzsche's famous adage in *Beyond Good and Evil*, "Be careful, when fighting monsters, that you yourself do not become one...for when you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes back at you" (211). In the track's outro, Buckley barks, "There's nothing to see here / and that nothing looks back at us."

Thus, I argue that one can see ultimately a rejection of violence in hardcore music—especially state violence—despite the reputation the average hardcore show has for perceived acts of violence in the pit. Witnessing the frenetic energy of hardcore dancing could understandably leave the uninitiated with reservations about the nature of violence within hardcore music. Ostensibly, there appears to be no small degree of inflammatory behavior at shows. However, I posit that this energy can be directly connected to aggression, rather than violence—and aggression that unfailingly catalyzes a desire to fight against dogma and demagogues. While there are undoubtedly factions of show-goers who do not agree with the philosophy of nonviolence, this dissent is an important function in any democratic undertaking and is an essential facet of any anarchistic endeavor.

The Things You Own End Up Owning You

However, hardcore music does not shrink from recognizing the economic violence of capitalism. It is important to note the ways in which DIY culture subverts and resists the capitalistic enterprise, just as the lyrics in hardcore tend towards a rejection of materialism while embracing the economic understanding of income inequality that fans the flame of poverty. Before considering the way hardcore tackles capitalism, it is prudent to first tackle anarchists' critique of capitalism and provide the alternative of democratic socialism or anarcho-syndicalism.

In his seminal work *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas Piketty demonstrates that wealth has been inequitably distributed due to the modes of contemporary global capitalism and neoliberalism. Where many economists believe in the “scientific principles” of their field, Piketty posits we “should be wary of any economic determinism in regard to inequalities of wealth and income. The history of the distribution of wealth has always been deeply political, and it cannot be reduced to purely economic mechanisms” (21). Piketty argues, above all else, that inequality has led to the disaster of contemporary capitalism.

While Piketty does not endorse an outright rejection of capitalism, he finally brought the issue of inequality—and the fallibility of economic theory—into the mainstream conversation. No longer were issues of gross inequity relegated to protest camps, independent newsrooms, academia, radical economic critiques, or private conversations. Piketty's main thrust in his text is to apply a global, progressive tax in order to confront the overwhelming failure of contemporary capitalism. However, anarchists would argue that a reformist attitude will not be able to address the concerns of a morally—and financially—bankrupt state. How can one trust the U.S. government, which is run by the State's oligarchic elite, to police itself? When one considers the

elaborate and ingenious ways the State has turned its subjects against one another, it seems unlikely that a progressive tax will really speak to the root issue itself, which is capitalism.

In *MemeWars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics*, an anthological economic text from the founders of Adbusters, Charles Eisenstein laments the failure of the American Dream, noting it betrayed not only the disenfranchised 99%, but also those who “achieved it, lonely in their overtime careers and their McMansions, narcotized to the ongoing ruination of nature and culture, unconsciously aching because of it.” Capitalism fails not just the 99%, but the 1%, as well. This is why Eisenstein insists, “We have no enemies. We want everyone to wake up to the beauty of what we can create” (76).

This beauty Eisenstein alludes to could come in many forms. Anarchists have routinely associated themselves with socialism and anarcho-syndicalism. Noam Chomsky observes in *On Anarchism* that there is a direct correlation between the type of voluntary associations formed in anarchistic communities and the tenets of democratic socialism, observing “anarchism is necessarily anti-capitalist in that it ‘opposes the exploitation of man by man’” (9). Chomsky builds off the type of radical economic system that Rudolf Rocker suggested in the midst of the Great Depression: anarcho-syndicalism, which hoped to see direction action initiatives undertaken by workers in solidarity with the end result being a directly democratic system of self-management.

Many social critiques in hardcore music focus around the ways the music industry capitalizes upon artists and exerts a rigid materialism upon listeners, particularly in the more popular genres of music. Hardcore and punk have historically railed against consumerism and capitalism. Indeed, the hardcore community has consistently modeled a radical departure from capitalism that centers on selling merch (mostly t-shirts, hoodies, hats, stickers, and other

inexpensive attire) and albums. While one can utilize the internet to purchase t-shirts from a band, more often than not fans intentionally make a point of purchasing a shirt at a show. This process removes the middle-man and allows for a direct transaction rarely seen in the modern world. Funds transfer directly from the fan to the band and directly support the band's ability to continue to tour and make new music.

Similarly, it's intriguing that, despite this vehement defamation of capitalism and despite the plummeting music sales in the modern music industry, hardcore records continue to sell. Recently, there's been a resurgence of albums released on vinyl, which fans have gravitated to for a variety of reasons. Vinyl has been a staple of hardcore since the genre's inception in the 80's. Bands would pair up and press 7" splits with maybe two or three songs as a way to cut costs. These DIY 45's were often paid for out-of-pocket by the bands who got them pressed. This fraternal solidarity is at once indicative of an attempt to subvert the capitalistic impulse of the music industry and an anarchistic devotion to the community.

I sat down with Joshua Martin who runs the blog Don't Pirate, Collect! Martin has well over four hundred records on wax and has been collecting for the better part of three years. We discussed hardcore music, capitalism, and the vinyl record format. Martin explained that pirating music online is one way people could arguably subvert capitalism, but it's a double-edged sword. "It's like, 'We're gonna take this music because we really love it and want to listen to it,'" Martin told me, "but if we're not paying for it, we're not supporting. I think record labels know that and it's a vicious circle. If you don't support this artist, the artist will no longer be able to produce music." Record labels have historically preyed upon their artists and it's no different in the current scene. Bands have been known to break away from record labels and write song after song about the tyranny they experienced slaving for these companies who were supposed to be

supportive. One notable example is A Day To Remember, whose furious track “The Document Speak For Itself” off 2013’s *Common Courtesy* accurately sums up the attitudes many hardcore bands have for record labels: “no fucking respect” (McKinnon).

Martin observed, “There’s a huge political hold—with capitalism—on the music industry and it has infiltrated and is intricately interwoven into the DNA of music. How music is run, how music is profited off of, how music is sold, how music is advertised. All of it comes down to this mentality of sell, sell, sell, and sell high.” This is not a new phenomenon. The music industry did the same thing with punk bands in the 70’s. The Sex Pistols, the Clash, and the Ramones were all taken advantage of in a similar fashion.

However, the DIY ethos at the heart of the hardcore community endures. Martin remarked, “What I do appreciate is when bands go independent. And they’re saying, ‘Y’know what? We know we can do this on our own.’” Even with the support of indie record labels, bands often have to pitch in for their pressings. Martin suggests this may be one of the reasons hardcore records rarely get pressed on more than a thousand copies, often with three or more variants within that number. Yet, hardcore bands consistently bring the vinyl format with them on tour in order to cater to their fans’ interests, unlike many major label musicians whose vinyl records can only be purchased at corporate stores like Barnes & Noble or Urban Outfitters (who’ve now become the top-grossing vendor for vinyl record sales worldwide.) Martin told me, “If someone were to be like, ‘What’s hardcore to you?’ I’d tell them, ‘7” records.’ It’s so engrained in hardcore...and the bands know that wax and hardcore go together...You can’t have one without the other. In this instance, you are getting your cake and eating it too. ‘Oh, hardcore music? Oh, fuckin’ records?’ Boom, there you go.”

The recent resurgence of vinyl records is not limited to the hardcore community. While a dedicated minority of collectors have continued to accrue vast libraries of wax over the years, there has been a decidedly adamant group of materialists who've begun purchasing records and turntables not out of a devotion to the bands they adore but out of an aesthetic principle of self-fulfillment or because they've opted to follow a fad. One of the problems that ail hardcore bands who want to press their records is that pressing plants routinely shift back lower quantity pressings (like hardcore bands) in favor of the major labels' demands for thousands of pressings of the latest Taylor Swift album. Martin suggested a scenario in which a larger label, like BME, strong-arms smaller, independent record labels like Run For Cover, No Sleep, Deathwish, Inc., and Bridge9. This consumeristic lifestyle has routinely resulted in hardcore bands being crushed beneath the avalanche of what Martin referred to as "Top 40's bullshit."

It is for this very reason hardcore music has always categorically rejected consumerism. In their intense "Black Friday," Stray From the Path enthusiastically reject the despicable "holiday" with characteristically clever lyrics spat out over emphatic and aggressive instrumentals. The anthemic chorus protests, "You can't buy me. / I'm not for sale. / Money won't buy you a heart of gold. / They're fresh out, they were free with self-control." In the song's bridge, Drew York snarls,

It goes one for the money

Two for the money.

Forget about the third world

They ain't hungry.

Foreclosed homes,

five missed payments on six loans.

The dumbest people with the smartest phones

...

Too many people buying too many things

they don't fucking need it's just American greed.

The music video for the track depicts a group of men storming in while the band practices, beating them senseless, and stealing their possessions.

Architects, the hardcore titans from Brighton, England have a track entitled "These Colours Don't Run" written about American consumerism. Guitarist Tom Searle explained in an interview with *Noisey*—appropriately titled "Architects Don't Care if Americans Hate Them"—that they wrote the track while recording in California. "It's a lovely place," Searle admits, "but you go to Huntington Beach and you see the oil rigs on the horizon. You get this sense that it was such a beautiful place but it's been destroyed...That song is a general comment on hypocrisy" (Ewen). And vocalist Sam Carter's lyrics really pack the punch. "Vapid souls check the market price," Carter bellows, "Lifetime slave, living in a suburban grave / If there was a god, you would be the death of him." The song builds to its cacophonous breakdown in which Carter states resolutely, "In the land of the free, you know nothing comes for free / I'm struggling to find any poetry in this / Someone beat me to the line 'ignorance is bliss' / So I guess I'll just say it how it is / you had it all, you fucking pigs."

letlive. have a more nuanced approach to the subject of capitalism (though their sarcasm and cleverness is just as tacit as their peers.) 2013's *The Blackest Beautiful* showcases vocalist/lyricist Jason Aalon Alexander Butler's frenetic energy, meandering vocal style, and witty lyricism. "White America's Beautiful Black Market" comments on capitalist globalization, observing the manner in which the U.S. consistently sticks its nose in others' business, going so far as to directly reference Jeb Bush. Butler quips sardonically, "We'll let the dreamers dream if it's American-themed / but if it ain't then I don't believe a word / They say that bootstrap theory

don't fit on all of those feet." Butler goes on to cite the folly of the American healthcare system and its monetization of human bodies, before remarking, "With government sucking the dicks of corporations / it looks like Uncle Sam finally put his money where his mouth is."

That hardcore bands routinely speak out against capitalism should come as little surprise. After all, hardcore—which grew out of punk and hip-hop—was ultimately a defiant riposte to the culture of American consumerism and materialism that elevated DIY culture and independent labels over major market record labels and six-figure album contracts. Indeed, not only does hardcore consistently critique capitalism, but its elevation of personal responsibility and communal devotion provide a valuable alternative to the globalized market, a model that challenges the way capitalism functions.

No Flags, No Holy Books

Anarchists, like meandering musicians, are often reduced to statelessness. However, this rejection of nationalism is often self-imposed. Both groups recognize the arrogance of jingoism which leads invariably to imperialism. The very notion of flags and borders is ridiculed as outdated, even archaic. Perhaps this is because anarchists and hardcore musicians understand how easily states fail their subjects and ultimately crumble beneath the weight of their own chauvinism. After examining the ways anarchists embrace statelessness in an attempt to recognize a more cohesive vision of the human experience, insight into the culture and musicality of hardcore will once again provide examples of anti-statist direct action and rhetoric.

In *Failed States*, Noam Chomsky advances the argument that the United States is itself a failed state. Though the U.S. has tried, numerous times, to intervene on behalf of other floundering states (often to prop up tyrannical despots against the populist revolts in those same countries) it routinely fails to sway the tide of revolutionary people's movements. As a result, the U.S. government has consistently neglected its own people and allowed grave injustices to crop

up across the continent. The absurd war on drugs (which is really another attempt to control and enslave black bodies,) the astronomic U.S. incarceration rates, and the militarization of the police are all manifest symptoms of a decaying nation-state.

God and the State, the work for which Mikhail Bakunin is perhaps best known, acknowledges the correlation between statism and religion. Both demand slavish devotion to an invisible authority and obedience to outmoded methods of control that restrict liberty and decimate individuality. Bakunin, who equates the State with Christianity in particular, emphatically suggests, “*The idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice*” (emphasis included, 13). Indeed, one can substitute “the State” for “God” and the critique holds its merit. Bowing to sovereign authority, which manifests itself chiefly through the violence of the State, “necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind” and the abdication of scientific reason, upon which the entirety of Bakunin’s argument is based.

Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* impresses the same ethos upon its readers (though, admittedly, with less polarizing vehemence.) Said argues that resistance to colonization in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries were reflected in the literature that grew out of those eras just as much as the attitudes of imperialism were conjoined in the mainstream imagination of British subjects. Thus, empire—and the ensuing rejection of its power—relates directly to cultural manifestations. Said’s scathing critique of *Robinson Crusoe* posits that it is no accident the novel revolves around “a European who creates a fiefdom for himself on a distant, non-European island” (xii). There is, however, the revolt against these edicts which blossomed into “an immense wave of anti-colonial and ultimately anti-imperial activity, thought, and

revision” which forces Westerners to confront “crimes of violence...suppression...conscience” (Said 195).

Hardcore music and culture celebrates and empowers acts of resistance. Just as politically awakened writers in the nineteenth and twentieth century began to question the popular narratives of their time, so too have hardcore musicians in the twenty-first century subjected their own culture to rigorous inquiry. Hardcore musicians often advocate the dissolution of the nation-state, for they recognize the triviality of borders, which impose arbitrary boundaries and barriers on human interconnection.

Propagandhi, the Canadian punk band formed in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, released the anthemic *Failed States* in 2012. The record draws its title directly from the aforementioned work by Noam Chomsky. On their official website—the icon of which is the anarchy-A—they include the LP’s entire lyric sheet. The album’s title track recognizes the fantasy of utopic aspirations for the idealized nation-state. The song then personifies this blithe struggle, “Each of us a failed state in stark relief against the backdrop of the perfect worlds we seek. Perfect world. Fantasy.” If every human being is already a failed state unto his- or herself, how can humanity hope to erect an unflinching nation?

Enter Shikari released *A Flash Flood of Colour* in 2013. Arguably their most polemic work up to that point, Enter Shikari’s increased politicization resulted in a series of overt anthems that did not shy away from thunderous themes. “...Meltdown” implores its listeners to reject the insanity of jingoism. Vocalist/lyricist Rou Reynolds has “had the revelation: / fuck all borders and fuck all boundaries / Fuck all flags and fuck nationalities.” But this is not a song of hate. Rather, it is one that categorically resists divisionary politics and instead recognizes that “we are one / Fear begins to vanish when we realize / that countries are just lines drawn in the

sand with a stick.” It is this outdated attitude that Enter Shikari turn against, advocating inclusion and acceptance in the celebration of diversity rather than the arbitrary relegation of cultures to disparate corners of the globe.

These attitudes culminate in overthrowing empire altogether. Hundredth’s “Humane,” off their 2011 LP *Let Go*, insists “we will bring fire to the empires. / The imperial, they won’t prevail.” Once more, this is not a stance that comes from misanthropy, but rather from a sincere devotion to humanistic and anarchistic principles of freedom, equality, and solidarity, nurtured by a profound compassion. Hundredth’s vocalist Chadwick Johnson triumphantly concludes, “We will raise a banner of love above all flags / Over any nation that vies for our allegiance.” Once more, it is apparent that this banner—decidedly black—is different from every other flag. It is not meant to divide, but to unite. It is at once a metaphor for unity and defiance.

Fuck Them, No Justice

At the heart of anarchism and hardcore music is the compassionate anthem of the “dedicated, creative minority” rising up against oppression (King 112). Just as protest and direct action are intimately tied to anarchist philosophy, protest music is the crux upon which all political hardcore music operates. It is almost always an expression of indignant outrage over the indignities perpetrated by unjust apparatuses of statist control. Studying populist movements in recent history illuminates even more themes of protest in the hardcore community.

The history of anarchism is rich with examples of people’s movements—from the Paris Commune to the tumultuous events during the course of the Spanish Civil War and the Tragic Week. Increasingly, the disenfranchised have begun to rise against their masters in acts of nonviolent, civil disobedience that consistently results in the occupation of public space. Whether it’s Tahrir Square in Egypt, Gezi Park in Turkey, or Zucotti Park in New York City, the past decade has seen a tumultuous, world-wide resistance movement spontaneously erupt in

opposition to State power to protest grave injustices perpetuated by State violence and capitalism.

In an essay included in *The Occupy Handbook*, David Graeber examines Occupy Wall Street's anarchist roots. Graeber responds to the arguments levied against OWS, that it was too complex and that direct democracy and consensus wasn't effective for problem-solving. By Graeber's estimation, "The most sophisticated approaches usually conceded that a truly free society would be endlessly complex, with a constant proliferation of new social experiments, facing problems that most of us couldn't imagine." He continued, saying the one thing that almost everyone in Occupy Wall Street agreed upon "was that we had to begin by learning what it would mean to behave as genuinely free men and women, coming together in voluntary association, making decisions democratically, eschewing relations of exploitation for the practice of solidarity and mutual aid" (143). This explained why OWS refused to cooperate with the existing legal order: Occupiers saw that the law was morally bankrupt.

This international protest movement has been greeted not by political reform, but by the State investing in some of the very systems that caused the protest movement to germinate in the first place: barbaric police brutality, climate change due to gross negligence on the part of populations and corporations, and a defunct political system that masquerades behind the pretense of representation while truly bowing to the whims of multinational companies and multibillionaire oligarchies.

According to Shane Bauer's research in *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, the Department of Defense has given local police \$5.1 billion in grants since 1997—which pales in comparison to the \$41 billion the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has doled out since 2002. "The money is earmarked for counterterrorism," Bauer explains, "but DHS specifies that once

acquired, the equipment can be used for any other law enforcement purpose, from shutting down protests to serving warrants and executing home searches” (20).

During his time at an Urban Shield expo, Bauer met a representative from DHS’s Robotics Research program who was showing off a drone. Bauer observes the robot “not only captured video, but was designed to drop objects at specific GPS coordinates.” The cop showing off the drone said it was “like *Hunger Games*, if you will” (20). Apparently, the irony of comparing his new toy to a Young Adult novel in which children are compelled to brutally butcher each other at the government’s behest was lost on the drone pilot.

Naomi Klein writes in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* that “our economic system and our planetary system are now at war” (18). This is because capitalism is fundamentally corrosive to the planet. Infinite consumption in a finite world is a model doomed for disaster. Thus “we are left with a stark choice,” Klein argues, “allow climate disruption to change everything about our world, or change pretty much everything about our economy to avoid that fate. But we need to be very clear: because of our decades of collective denial, no gradual, incremental options are now available to us” (24). Only radical upheaval can change the apparatus damning the Earth’s species.

Hedges agrees with Klein: capitalism is fundamentally interconnected to climate change. Bankers “feed like parasites off of the state and the resources of the planet. Speculators at megabanks and investment firms such as Goldman Sachs are not, in a strict sense, capitalists. They do not make money from the means of production. Rather, they ignore or rewrite the law—ostensibly put in place to protect the weak from the powerful—to steal from everyone, including their own shareholders” (22). Not only are these Wall Street investors parasites upon the people, they are preying upon the very planet.

Each of these themes crop up in hardcore music. Amongst countless songs on the issue, Incendiary's "Force of Neglect" addresses police brutality with unmatched vehemence. The track's focal point is Kelly Thomas, a mentally-ill homeless man murdered by Fullerton, California police officers. According to medical records, Thomas was beaten so severely that the bones in his face broke and he choked on his own blood. The three officers charged were all found not guilty. Incendiary's vocalist Brendan Garrone cries out, "Society accepts this force of neglect. / The marginalized and weak, those without a voice to speak, / you killed the very person that you swore to protect. / You serve nobody but yourself." That this grotesque system of state violence is permitted to persist unpunished is a testament to the corruption of the State.

On the official YouTube page for "Leech," the third single off Northlane's 2015 effort, *Node*, guitarist Josh Smith wrote that "our government's approach to the problem [of climate change] is laughable...If the earth dies, we die with it, along with the half of the world's species that we haven't killed off yet." He includes a heart-wrenching anecdote about melting glaciers in New Zealand. The moving track implores listeners,

Tell me why we lost our reason.

Tell me the truth, not an excuse

'cause we have everything to lose.

Plastic oceans, plastic farms.

Cover your footprints like a bandaid on a broken arm.

While acknowledging the lyrics to the track are straightforward, Smith insisted climate change was not an issue humanity could afford to overlook, for it cultivates suffering for all lifeforms on the planet.

Few albums were as anticipated in the hardcore community as Stick To Your Guns' 2015 LP *Disobedient*, the follow-up to 2013's triumphant *Diamond*. Jesse Barnett's trademark, no-nonsense lyricism shined throughout the album. But no song hit as heavy as "I Choose No One," which featured Barnett's mentor and friend, Scott Vogel of Terror. The track opens with a portion of Charlie Chaplin's famous monologue at the conclusion of *The Great Dictator*. Barnett roars, "Fuck the way you try to turn my world black and white. / I won't let you bleed the color from my life." Here, Barnett refuses to turn to the black and white solutions offered by the Left and the Right. The track's chorus benefits from gang vocals that chant, "I choose nothing. / I choose no one. / I'd rather lose than ever be like you." The anarchist philosophy is on full display when Barnett snarls, "I don't live my life for your made-up rules. / I can't identify with your twisted views. / No one dictates my life for me." Rather than acquiescing to the whims of a particular political party, cultural creed, or religious dogma, Barnett decides to defy, to choose a path he's carved by himself.

The anti-establishment attitudes of hardcore music coincide perfectly with anarchistic philosophy. Whether the messages are anti-authoritarian, anti-war, anti-capitalist, or anti-statist, the protester's heart is on full display. Anarchism's devotion to radical politics is revealed throughout hardcore music. If anarchism shows us the philosophy for direct action, solidarity, and nonviolent civil disobedience, then hardcore music provides us with one hell of a soundtrack. Yet, hardcore is not comprised solely of excitable, emotional expressions. Rather, hardcore consistently champions anarchistic culture, embedding messages of resistance and practically employing those methods to right an injustice.

CHAPTER FOUR: IF I CAN'T DANCE, I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR REVOLUTION – PERFORMING GENDER

In the wake of the 2013 Ferguson protests and the city's subsequent failure to indict Darren Wilson for the murder of Michael Brown, many musicians in the hardcore community took to social media to rally against the militarized police state. The show of solidarity with protesters in defense of civil rights was uplifting. That is, until an essay written by Kayla Phillips surfaced on Noisey. Phillips, the vocalist for Bleed the Pigs, wrote damningly, "I cringed at how many of the hardcore kids [who] are indefinitely pissed off at something couldn't understand...that we're angry because another name is added to this incredibly long list of Black men, women and trans women that are killed by cops and vigilantes." Phillips notes how quickly the mantra "Black lives matter" devolved to one of "All lives matter" and she draws comparisons to the way women of color are continually stereotyped in the scene with the "Angry Black Women" trope, despite the fact that hardcore music is habitually fueled by anger and rage over injustice and oppression. Phillips recognized how patriarchal, hyper-masculine norms and white supremacy worked to sensationalize a black woman screaming into a microphone and she rallied against the off-handed dismissal of the insurrectionary language she utilized in her lyrics.

Lauraine Leblanc's *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* touches on many similar issues. First published in 1999, Leblanc's detailed interviews with young women involved in the punk scene are at once illuminating and discouraging. With a careful eye for the aesthetics of punk culture and the politics of personal expression, Leblanc reveals how women were persecuted in a scene that was originally founded upon a desire to create a safe haven of solidarity to empower outcasts against the society which ostracized them. Fifteen years later, Kayla Phillips is still writing on that very subject.

Curiously, there is hardly any scholarship on women in the contemporary hardcore scene and even less on its anarchistic sociocultural implications. Naomi Griffin discusses the performance of gender in the DIY 90's punk scene at some length while Kathi Beqqquist and Toni Armstrong explore the Riot Grrrrl movement in the late 70's and 80's. Many scholars have commented on the patriarchal violence of the State—most notably in its militarism—like Karen Struening, who examined the Pentagon and the “justice” system in the U.S. Still, precious little study has been directed at the revolutionary Third Wave Feminism(s) expressed in this radical music scene, which presents an opportune moment to delve into the contemporary hardcore/punk scene and research the ways women occupy (and reclaim) space.

While it is tempting to tote the utopic sentiments that the hardcore/punk ethos espouses—to reflect solely on the beauty of equality or the allure of acceptance—to do so would ignore the troubled history of women confronting and overcoming prejudice in a music scene literally created to defy Patriarchal notions of authority, violence, and power. Unfortunately, the polarization of women in the hardcore scene is not a new phenomenon. To ignore this plight would be a grave disservice to the history of hardcore, the political philosophy of punk, and the courageous women who created spaces of radical resistance to absolve the hardcore community of its failure to be truly inclusive.

Like Marxism, Second Wave Feminism was often criticized for the gaps it left for women (especially those of color) and LGBTQ+ folks. Hazel Carby's emphatic *White woman listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood* is, in many ways, as much a call-to-arms for the people of her day as it is a damning indictment of how Third Wave Feminism(s) are still trying to give a voice to those the movement has silenced. Carby writes that “sexual politics under patriarchy [are] as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race.

We also find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously” (213). Carby beseeches her readers to understand that respectability politics do the movement no favors and, quite the contrary, leave a stain on the history of feminism. Her essay demands feminists take responsibility for their shortcomings and work to create more inclusive environments for women, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, or religion. Carby sums it up clearly in the last sentence of her essay when she writes, “What exactly do you mean when you say 'WE'” (233)?

Given this ongoing struggle, the hardcore community clearly still has much to learn. After all, misogyny is precisely what hardcore, which surfaced out of punk music, is supposed to stand against. If the hardcore youth movement wants to truly engage in a compelling sort of activism, it must confront its double-standards through rigorous introspection. Emma Goldman once wrote, “If I can’t dance, I don’t want to be part of your revolution” and a revolution without dancing isn’t one worth having (3). In a scene that prizes crowd participation—where many dance, stage-dive, and sing along—to alienate fifty-percent of the world’s population is to cripple the potential for rebellion.

Though not without its flaws, the hardcore scene presents a radical, microcosmic model of a diverse, multicultural society. By studying the feminine insurrection in a revolutionary music scene, it is possible to locate the fissures of patriarchal customs, white supremacy, and heteronormativity and create new narratives of equality and liberty to subvert and, ultimately, replace these tired iterations of “normalcy.” After briefly outlining the political consciousness and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) attitude of the hardcore scene, I discuss music and culture in an interview with Sharrell Tai Love before examining lyrics that fearlessly explore feminine issues in order to conclusively demonstrate that politically-awakened anarcho-feminists in the hardcore

punk scene smash not just the Patriarchy, but the State, as well. This revolutionary counterculture deviates from neoliberal pseudo-freedom and, in doing so, provides a compelling example for how an inclusive, feminist society might operate. In order to advance contemporary struggles for liberty, it is vital we take these lessons to heart.

“Anarcha-Feminism” and Hardcore Punk

Women in the hardcore scene are introduced to anarchist politics almost immediately. It is no great secret that the entire punk ethos is built upon anarchist principles of liberation, freedom, equality, defiance, and anti-authoritarian resistance. One of Leblanc’s subjects, “at a mere fifteen years of age...spoke at length about her commitment to anarchist politics” (7). Women in the hardcore scene recognize, like the classic anarchists of the nineteenth century, that a revolutionary party will ultimately fail to be revolutionary and only vaunt a new system of oppression into the halls of power. True rebellion, then, is more than the simple task of acquiring power—it is about redistributing that power to all. Hardcore music was started by disenfranchised, middle-class, cis-gendered, mostly heterosexual white men. Yet, women in the scene refuse for power to be concentrated in the same demographic as it is in the rest of the world. Rather than taking power only for themselves, they seek to disseminate and (em)power others, regardless of race, class, or creed. In doing so, women recognize the truly radical nature of anarchist politics upon which hardcore and punk music were originally founded.

In many ways, women in the hardcore/punk community are the spiritual successors of anarcho-feminists like Emma Goldman, who recognized that feminism is mobilized by anarchist principles. Emma Goldman seriously doubted that the institutions of marriage, suffrage, and the State had any hope of liberating women from the oppression of the Patriarchy. In her essay *The Tragedy of Woman’s Emancipation*, Goldman writes, “woman is confronted with the necessity of emancipating herself from emancipation, if she really desires to be free. This may sound

paradoxical, but is, nevertheless, only too true” (87). Undoubtedly, this is the exact task that women in the hardcore scene (and, indeed, women in all of society) now face. In this community based upon anarchist philosophy, which vocally rejects sexism and racism, vestiges of these noxious themes still persist.

In many ways, these lingering travesties reflect the failure of women’s suffrage, which has proved unable to defeat the patriarchal constructs of a hyper-masculine society. Not because voting itself was untenable, but because representative republics are themselves intrinsically undemocratic (and, therefore, far from anarchic.) In a letter to a suffragist in England, Helen Keller observed, “Our democracy is but a name. We vote? What does that mean? It means that we choose between two bodies of real, though not avowed, autocrats. Have your...votes freed [you] from this injustice” (Zinn, 345)? Here, Keller demonstrates an implicit desire for the feminist movement to align itself with radical politics, which surely have the potential to liberate women from the injustices that plague them even to this day.

Furthermore, the Second Wave feminisms, which preached “equality” provided the recipients were white, middle-class, and heterosexual, is intolerable to women in the hardcore music scene. Equal pay, equal work, and equal rights were baseless and insubstantial when it only met the majority demographic. Third Wave feminisms, which acknowledge the diversity of the feminine while striving for basic human rights, thus focuses itself on inclusion. This diversity of radical thought in fact imitates anarchistic philosophy. The divergence of anarchist philosophy is as broad and multi-faceted as Third Wave feminisms. Hardcore, like Third Wave feminisms, moves towards addressing the issues that the disabled, women of color, and trans* folks endure and standing in solidarity with those who’ve been abandoned by mainstream, white feminism. Through adopting the radical promise of anarchism and the defiant ethos it implies,

women overcome prejudice and bigotry within the scene using their strength, intellect, and courage to disseminate power in equitable ways that do not rely on vanguard political principles.

You're Not Hardcore Unless You Live Hardcore

Women in the punk community have always advocated a Do-It-Yourself ethic. Against all odds, women overcome exclusion and seclusion in the hardcore scene and redefine what it means to be inclusive. Whether that means throwing down in the pit, crowd-surfing, stage-diving, grabbing the mic during a pile-up and screaming out the lyrics, or jumping on stage and playing an instrument, women have consistently devoted themselves to being active, aggressive, engaged participants and purveyors of hardcore music. In order to understand the place of feminism in hardcore/punk, it is necessary to situate contemporary musicians within the history of hardcore.

To understand women and hardcore, it is best to have at least a cursory understanding of the momentous riot grrrl movement. Pioneered in the 80's by bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile, riot grrrls helped reshape what feminism looked like. They rebelled against Second Wave feminism and carved out spaces of inclusion within the punk scenes they encountered. Their music was habitually politicized, wrestling with topics like domestic abuse, rape, sexuality, abortion, and feminine empowerment. Riot grrrl music championed punk ideologies through resisting male hegemony and subverting the monopoly men had on the scene.

Kathleen Hanna, who played guitar and sang for Bikini Kill, is credited by many scholars as being a driving force behind Third Wave Feminisms. Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner directly credits Hanna, suggesting that the music and zine writing popularized by the riot grrrl movement was indicative of “cultural politics in action, with strong women giving voice to important social issues through an empowered, female-oriented community, many people link the emergence of the third-wave feminism to this time” (127).

Female inclusion has been something women have had to continually fight for in the hardcore/punk scene. Just as women's civil rights have continued to be an issue even in the twenty-first century, women still struggle to gain traction in whatever arena they enter. Hardcore/punk music, however, equips listeners with a radical political message of defiance, subversion, and inclusion that is routinely amiss in more mainstream feminist conversations, which habitually make concessions and compromises in order to not be labeled as extremist. Hardcore/punk feminists recognize that there's nothing "extremist" about equality.

Obviously, the best way to illustrate the attitudes of women, the best way to understand their struggles and triumphs and celebrate in solidarity with them, is to speak directly with women already invested in the hardcore scene. I borrowed from Leblanc's model and interviewed my friend Sharrell Tai Love about her experiences with music, the hardcore scene, and politics.

Growing up, Tai listened to classic rock and hip-hop. Sonically, bands like Led Zeppelin and guitarists like Robert Johnson appealed to her ear, while the hip-hop lyrics of Tribe Called Quest, Notorious B.I.G., and Wu-Tang Clan piqued her interest in thematic and emotive poetry. Rock focused on song composition, creating disparate themes within the same track. A song could sound happy, but be filled with intensely traumatic lyrical content. Hip-hop lyrics drew her attention since artists nurtured the poetic ability to evoke so much emotion with so few words.

Hardcore incorporated both of these elements. Tai told me, "There's something about hardcore and metal that really makes you feel a certain way that nothing else can." It was aggressive, "really intense music," filled with high-energy that sucked listeners into the fold. The first heavy show Tai went to was to see the thrash metal band Gwar, renowned for their shocking performances, ridden with lewd and crude humor. "I was thirteen," she recalled. "I remember

they had these huge, dick water-guns and they, like, crucified Jesus. It was pretty tight. There was fake blood everywhere. When I came home, my Mom wasn't too happy."

But for all of Gwar's ridiculous antics, their sound was what really grabbed Tai's attention. In middle school, she began listening to bands like Bikini Kill and Babes in Toyland. She got into classic hardcore—Converge, Madball, Hatebreed, Rise Against, Seven Seconds, H₂O, and Set Your Goals—but also grooved to the White Stripes and Sonic Youth. The lyrics didn't shape Tai's political views so much as they secured her convictions and reassured her that she wasn't alone in her beliefs. Tai explained, "I was confused about god, sex, and everything else and I used to try and put it in black and white. I just wanted to figure things out for myself. I wanted to question things and really challenge myself and other people. The music I listen to now reminds me that I'm not the only person who thinks this way." Hardcore talked about the subjects other music shied away from. It dug into the gritty issues that concerned Tai—race, LGBTQ+ rights, animal activism, veganism, religion. No subject was safe from critical inquiry and, if necessary, ridicule. "It's kind of a fuck-it-all type of thing," she said with a laugh. "There is no black and white in hardcore. There's always a gray area."

Tai told me that to this day there were still issues with being a woman at a hardcore show. She rejected the "stupid-ass mentality of no-clit-in-the-pit" and insisted she would do whatever she damn well pleased. Racism has no place in hardcore, but Tai still had to deal with it on occasion. One of the first shows she went to was at a tiny venue in Orlando called Island Oasis. "There were these two girls standing behind me laughing. And one of the girls said, 'Oh, my god. Who let the nigger in here?'" I asked her what she said and she repeated it and I punched her in the face." Needless to say, the girl didn't show up at any more shows.

I asked Tai if she thought hardcore had anything to offer to the world. Her answer was painfully honest. “Maybe,” she admitted. “It’s not gonna hit everyone the same way. It’s gonna be different for everybody.” Hardcore can be alienating to some people who reject it off-hand or refuse to listen to the messages in the lyrics. But Tai insisted that her generation wasn’t an assortment of lazy, apathetic, technology-obsessed, entitled punks. Though those elements exist, they aren’t the defining qualities of the hardcore community. Tai insisted, “We have such a good group of people who see a problem and fix it. We have a resolution for any disagreement that we might have.” Hardcore isn’t just about voicing dissent, then. It’s about providing opportunities for growth, evolution, even democracy. Tai told me hardcore kids were open-minded and compassionate, driven. “I think we got this,” she said. “We can take over the world. It’s fine.”

The Content of Dissent

In her article “No Place for Self-Pity, No Room for Fear,” recently published in the 150th Anniversary Edition of *The Nation*, Toni Morrison acknowledges that “the world is bruised and bleeding, and though it is important not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to refuse to succumb to its malevolence. Like failure, chaos contains information that can lead to knowledge—even wisdom. Like art” (185). Her insight is stirring—there is something that we could all learn from chaos, a wisdom that defies the parameters of conventional political thought. And if punks are “clothed in chaos,” as Dick Hebdige suggests, then who better to turn to for the knowledge and wisdom to which Morrison refers (114)?

Lyrics stand at the forefront of hardcore and punk music. They pack the political statements, important messages, and empowering courage the community thrives upon. Vicious instrumentality, down-tuned guitars, sludgy bass tones, and pulverizing percussion are the vehicles by which the lyrics are conveyed. They sonically enhance and reinforce these ferocious asides to a world deafened by materialism, militarism, and capitalism.

To understand the confluence of anarchism, feminism, and hardcore music, it would be best to split the lyrics into two categories. The first includes songs written by women, for women—Bleed the Pigs, Code Orange, Punch, Pussy Riot! and War on Women all fall into this first section. The second group is comprised of songs written by men, for women. The attitudes within this latter party vary substantially—from the wildly (and purposefully) offensive to the heart-breaking and tragic to the uplifting and empowering. For the purposes of this paper, I will reflect on the ways men in the hardcore/punk community write about sex workers, mothers, and lovers. These homages are important to study, for though they are not written *by* women, they help us understand the ways feminism has won the hearts and minds of men in the hardcore scene and provide strategies that can help women in other cultures do the same.

“Fear of Violent Service” by Bleed the Pigs pulses with frenetic energy, a frantic and hyperactive indictment of racism. Though it only clocks in at 1:48, it covers a lot of ground stylistically. It opens with a punishing bass riff that churns with rage before catapulting into a frantic, fast-paced punk mid-section that ends in a clunky outro ridden with feedback. Kayla Phillips reveals the endemic violence and hatred systemic to a culture of white supremacy in order to recapitulate her own struggles with misogyny and violence. “Weak men wish to control me,” Phillips snarls, “Smiling in my face while throwing a noose.” It is impossible to miss the damning references to lynching, the vicious critique of disingenuous meekness and chivalry disguising misogyny. But Phillips refuses to succumb, releasing the parts of herself that don’t align with the woman she wants to become. In “Inferiority,” she writes:

I watch myself float along
Aiming to leave as much of my
Invalid self behind

Become a new being

Not aware of self

Not aware of failure

I'm not alone

In the final stanza of the track, guitarist David Hobbs lends his voice to the fray and the two bandmates roar in tandem an anthem of solidarity.

In 2014, Code Orange (formerly known as Code Orange Kids) dropped one of the most explosive albums of the year. Recorded with the legendary Kurt Ballou of Converge in GodCity Studios and released on his independent record label Deathwish, Inc., their sophomore effort eventually culminated into the eleven tracks known as *I Am King*. Widely recognized for their belligerent (and often violent) fan-base and absolutely bat-shit live performances, Code Orange's *I Am King* debuted at #1 on the Billboard Vinyl Records chart, proving that fans of hardcore music still purchase records and, in doing so, directly support the bands they love and allow them to continue writing music and touring the world. It also suggests that the DIY ethos of hardcore/punk is still alive and well, thriving in the underground independent scene.

While the album is sonically diverse and strikingly unique, two tracks off *I Am King* particularly evoke notions of equality and inclusion—the deafening title-track and the thunderous “My World.” The album opens with the title-track, which assaults the listener with a tsunami of noise not unlike the industrial sound-waves Hans Zimmer popularized in the soundtrack to Christopher Nolan's *Inception*. The music video for the track is particularly striking. At moments serene and picturesque, it matches the quiet images of a barn and pasture with gory and jarring shots of a man getting words carved into his flesh intercut with disjointed displays of the band and their instruments. The video enhances the disturbing dichotomies that encapsulate Code Orange.

The lyrics to “I Am King,” which were penned as a joint effort from all the band members, are, at first glance, almost autocratic rather than anarchistic. There are references to peasantry, bowing down, and of living like a coward. It all culminates in the short, declarative statement that would become the title of not just the song but of the entire album: “I am King.” It’s curious, however, that each of the three band members who do vocals—guitarists Reba Meyers and Eric Balderose and drummer Jami Morgan—all bellow this refrain. It complicates an autocratic reading of the poem. After all, how could all three of them be “king” simultaneously? When put into context, the lyrics reveal a subversive message.

“When you live a coward, that is how you die,” the band writes, “continuously slowed down by our perception of ourselves.” Cowardice is equated to living without integrity and authenticity, which leads inexorably to a paralysis that is limited by a flawed perception of the self. Code Orange reject these fragmentary visions and declare, “In a world of servants and liars and spies, I am King.” They adopt a mantra similar to Marquis de Sade, who rejected god and country and served himself. It is *Übermensch*-esque, refusing to submit to authority by becoming ultimate authority for oneself. Similarly, the idea of “servants and liars and spies” is decidedly political, especially when read alongside “I am King,” and the prevalence of these tropes in today’s world of global digital surveillance is more pronounced than ever. It is revealed, then, that the peasants referred to earlier in the song do not bow out of deference or subservience, but out of acquiescence, a result of failing to recognize the regality dormant in us all. Thus, “I Am King” is at once an anthem of the band members uniting together and acknowledging the god-like qualities they each possess and an invitation to all who would listen to embrace the kingliness latent in every person.

The sixth song on *I Am King* is “My World.” Much like “I Am King” before it, “My World” functions as the opening track to the second half of the album. (On the vinyl pressing of *I Am King*, it is literally the first track on the B-side.) As such, it begins with a frantic riff, sludgy bass, and pile-driving percussion. Again, this song might be easily interpreted as another example of reclaiming the world and staking a claim on public territory (which are decidedly anarchistic actions.) Yet, when read with a feminist lens, it’s also not difficult to draw parallels with women staking out space within the hardcore scene. The band writes, “When you are so far from the ground that we are nowhere in sight, how can you be the one to dissect, the one to decide?” Someone is clearly self-righteous and on their high-horse and, if the lines that follow offer any hint as to who the culprits might be, it seems misogynistic men are the guilty party. “I’ve waited at the door. I’ve waited too long.” Women have been alienated within the music scene, forced to stand at the door and observe, but not permitted to cross the threshold and interact. But Code Orange has had their way. Reba stands proud on the stage, a champion of chaos and energy. And the band declares, “Now you’ve stepped too far. Now you’ve crossed the line. Now you are finally inside my world.” Cue a positively punishing breakdown, fraught with panic and peril, all the more so since Code Orange don’t just talk the talk, but walk the walk, as well.

Worth More than Your Opinion is the third LP from the San Francisco-based hardcore act, Punch. Released in September 2014, *Worth More than Your Opinion* drew inspiration for its title from Sini Anderson’s 2013 documentary on Bikini Kill, *The Punk Singer*. Meghan O’Neill, former front-woman for Punch, wrote on a wide range of topics—failed relationships, abuse, addiction, veganism, and feminism. The title-track of *Worth More than Your Opinion* mixes the best of punk’s no-nonsense rhythm and hardcore’s frenetic energy. Each word from O’Neill’s

lips is laced with spite and venom. Like many lyrics from the hardcore scene, the title-track has a definitive focus: sexist men who objectify women. O'Neill shrieks in the song's conclusion, "Your unwanted opinion is worthless, but not harmless. Our looks, our bodies are none of your fucking business. We don't exist for you to appraise. Not a compliment, no fucking thanks." Clearly, O'Neill recognizes that misogyny is not a victimless crime. The celebration of female empowerment intermingles with a searing indictment of the male gaze.

Elsewhere, on the band's 2011 EP *Nothing Lasts*, O'Neill underscores the punk DIY philosophy with a tough-love life lesson. "Do It Yourself" is only 1:26. Propelled forwards by blast-beats, punk riffs, and relentless urgency, O'Neill declares, "The world doesn't owe you shit. The universe doesn't know you exist." Here, O'Neill dwells in ostensible nihilism. No gods or masters are waiting to lend her listeners a helping hand. Yet, the ambivalence of the cosmos is no reason to lie down and die. O'Neill insists we "stop waiting for things to happen. Only you can make a change." Caught in the throes of meaninglessness, O'Neill rejects apathy and embraces an existentialist philosophy not unlike the one forwarded by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. "I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain," Camus concludes, "One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks...The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (123). O'Neill's lyrics also find strength in struggle, that the pursuit of the goal is itself a virtue of strength and self-reliance.

No discussion of modern punk would be complete without examining the international sensation that is Pussy Riot! Practitioners of protest performance art, the punk feminist collective from Russia have become infamous for their colorful balaclavas, unpolished punk music, and their consistent criticism of Vladimir Putin. Pussy Riot! even have a cameo in the third season of

the Netflix Original Series, *House of Cards*, starring Robin Wright and Kevin Spacey. Pussy Riot! utilize inflammatory lyrics, punk methodology, and DIY tactics to bring their insurrectionary message into the mainstream. Their hyper-feminine performances are usually staged at unconventional public venues. They emphasize femininity by donning colorful dresses, tights, and their trademark balaclavas. Typically, the collective shoot video of their performances, put music to those videos, and then post them online. It's the perfect fusion of direct action and performance art.

During one such guerilla performance at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior, the collective filmed a music video for their song "Punk Prayer – Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!" They wished to protest the alliance between the church and Russia's president. On March 3, 2012, Nadezhda "Nadya" Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, two of the members of Pussy Riot! were arrested and charged with "hooliganism," a charge which would also be levied against a third member of the group, Yekaterina Samutsevich. They were each sentenced to two years in prison for crimes of "religious hatred." The court case received considerable attention, particularly in the United States. HBO filmed a documentary, the American Civil Liberties Union unilaterally condemned Russia's actions, and over a hundred famous musicians assembled a petition calling for the immediate release of the band members.

In her closing statements during what many critics describe as a kangaroo trial, Tolokonnikova said:

Pussy Riot's performances can either be called dissident art or political action that engages art forms. Either way, our performances are a kind of civic activity amidst the repressions of a corporate political system that directs its power against basic human rights and civil and political liberties. The young people who have been flayed by the systematic eradication of freedoms ... have now risen against the State. We were

searching for real sincerity and simplicity, and we found these qualities in the *yurodstvo* [the holy foolishness] of punk.

Tolokonnikova's reflection on the "holy foolishness" of punk speaks to the disenfranchised youth who've had their freedom and political liberties stolen from them. Punk, according to Tolokonnikova, is the political expression of those who've been maligned by the State, who reject its authority over their lives outright.

Similarly, the anarchistic sentiments in Alyokhnina's closing statements are also impossible to miss. She likens her struggle to that of Franz Kafka and Guy Debord, saying, "I believe that I have honesty and openness, I thirst for the truth; and these things will make all of us just a little bit freer. We will see this yet." Both women stared the State defiantly in the face and refused to repent of their actions or recant their words. They stood with the likes of contemporary anarchistic dissidents like Jeremy Hammond and Barrett Brown, jailed for acts of political protest and deeds of conscience.

Baltimore, Maryland's War on Women are arguably one of the most outspoken bands in the American punk scene. During the recent uprising in Baltimore, the members of War on Women took to the streets to protest the death of Freddie Gray and the systemic violence of police brutality. Their debut, self-titled LP emerged courtesy of Bridge Nine Records to soaring praise while they toured across North America with the fabled, politically-charged Propagandhi. Their self-titled record is straight-forward, pissed off post-punk music—fast, nasty, and aggressive. But War on Women also infuse their sound with classic riot grrrl sensibilities, paying obvious homage to the bands that came before them like Bikini Kill, Calamity Jane, and Sleater-Kinney.

Spat out over frantic, catchy riffage and spurious drum-beats, Shawna Potter's vocal delivery is unbelievably diverse. At times, she shouts frantically, at some points her voice is

barely above a whisper. She mocks meatheads in an appropriately hyper-masculine husk and satirizes feminine short-sightedness in “Second Wave Goodbye.” The variety in her voice empowers her words, coating them with potency. In “Say It,” the unflinching second track off the band’s self-titled LP, Shawna Potter yelps, “We will no longer be silent! / Speak up, let your voice be heard / Dissenters drown in a sea of truth and our healing will cover the Earth / Say it! Say it! I was raped.” Potter makes it clear she won’t be a victim. Her refusal to back down offers an exemplary beacon of hope to others who’ve been violated in so grotesquely.

On “Effemimania,” the single off their 10” *Improvised Weapons*, Potter explains she “is a participant, not just a passive recipro-cunt.” She smashes the idea of a gender binary, insisting, “They want us to think we’re opposites: Effimimania. But it’s a spectrum, we’re not opposites.” Potter recognizes the problems associated with a gender binary. Allan G. Johnson insists in *The Gender Knot* that the binary is “politically contextualized and constructed” and not mutually exclusive (21). Potter seizes upon this comprehension and empowers her listeners with a concise message of defiant self-love.

Sex workers are often left by the wayside, even in feminist circles. This was certainly one of the greatest criticisms of second wave feminism. Self-Defense Family, the musical collective with almost a dozen members spread across the United States and Europe, released their fourth studio album *Try Me* in 2013. The record is built lyrically upon the story of Angelique Bernstein (better known as Jeanna Fine, the American pornographic actress and erotic dancer.) Not only are there nine tracks built conceptually around vocalist Patrick Kindlon’s childhood, which are viewed in part through Bernstein’s life, but the album also features an additional LP with almost forty minutes of an interview conducted between Kindlon, SDF guitarist Andrew Duggan, and Bernstein in a New York motel. The interview features no questions, only Bernstein’s voice. It is

graphic, disturbing, and heart-breaking—a wide-ranging story that explores her own history in the punk scene, her struggles with abusive relationships, and her confusing childhood.

All of these life situations offer motifs for Kindlon's lyrics. Interestingly, however, the interview (stretched over two tracks, "Angelique, Pt. 1" and "Angelique, Pt. 2," which are the A and B-sides of the second LP) leaves Bernstein's days in pornography mostly untouched. Clearly, the band is less focused on the sensational topics and more concerned with the human being herself. Kindlon explained to *Noisey*'s Lukas Hodge that "you don't need an interest in pornography to find her story compelling. You just need an interest in human beings." The interview discusses Bernstein's confusion with her own sexuality, her attraction to women, and her gig as an erotic dancer. She recounts tales of being a prisoner to abusive boyfriends, of being raped by her uncle, being called "fag" and "queer," and the dawning realization that there were other women in the world who would want to have sex with her. It is a moving portrait, bolstered by the art the band includes with the record. Even the album's title, *Try Me*, is an homage to "a woman's unbreakable will" (Hodge). Though this is only one example within a sea of records released by dozens—if not hundreds—of hardcore bands, *Try Me* is indicative of the type of respect for human life that the scene is fundamentally built upon.

Broken homes are rampant across much of America. It's a sick tragedy that plays out again and again, foisting the burden of caring for a family upon a single mother, forced to carry the weight of her children alone. Hardcore music has been known to levy the blame on the chief offenders: abusive or absent fathers, too self-absorbed or addicted to their own misery to care for their families. There are innumerable examples: Vanna's "The Weekly Slap in the Face" ("you're not a man, I'll tell you why, men don't leave their families just to die,") No Bragging Rights' "Cycles" ("you couldn't hold my hand because your hand held a bottle,") Gideon's "Bad

Blood” (“you were never family...you took me for granted,”) etc. Yet, for all that enmity, there is a compassion matched for the mothers who chose to stay.

Rotting Out’s “Iron Jawed Angel,” off *Street Prowl*, meets these two themes in the middle. An intensely personal song, “Iron Jawed Angel” illustrates the trauma of a young man facing off against his abusive father. Walter Delgado recounts how his mother cared for him, even while she was tending to her own wounds. Delgado recalls that “her face was black and blue, but she’s still so fucking beautiful.” The vocalist’s use past and present tenses seem to denote the endurance of that beauty, which transcends physical blemish, resting in a deeper and purer well of maternal affection. Delgado insists he “would’ve taken every hit if it meant she slept in peace.”

The ending of the track is as explicit as it is heart-breaking. As the guitarists slide their picks across the necks of their guitars, the drums pound on. I’ve witnessed first-hand the fury in Delgado’s face in this song’s final moments: hooded, crouched on stage on-stage, microphone gripped like a knife as a snarled. But he wasn’t there. He was a thousand miles away, in some old kitchen in the not-so-distant past, staring at his father as he spat out, “Old man, this one’s for you: / you fucking coward, you know you don’t deserve her. / ‘cause in the end, I know you’ll just desert her. / The way you struck her showed just how much you loved her. / A simple ‘sorry’ just can’t replace what you took from her.”

The Christian hardcore band Being As An Ocean, who wrote a song appropriately titled “Mothers” on their sophomore effort, *How We Both Wondrously Perish*, gives credence to the depth of maternal love and its intrinsic creativity and beauty. The meandering track roams through a hypnotic melody that gradually builds into a spoken-word segment in which vocalist Joel Quartuccio recounts the numerous examples of maternal love he was shown, which he

likens to the benevolence of a creative, loving deity. A woman who worked hard to make ends meet, was “forever humble and first to forgive, treating the other as family.” This maternal figure showed the speaker that “meek doesn’t have to mean weak. / Learned to show Love to all, no matter title or rank. / While not your own, you’ve helped raise me / and for the things you’ve shown me / I could hardly offer sufficient thanks.”

But not only is this woman compassionate and filled with grace, she is also exceedingly strong. Quartuccio writes, “Even as the sickness lingers in your blood, you’ve carried on in hope and love / and even though trouble surrounds all the while, / you’ve continued to greet all with a heavenly smile.” Bewildered by the might of this dying woman, the speaker mourns her loss, a weight that causes his faith to falter. Yet, it is her inspiration that encourages him to “truly glean all we can from our youth, / letting the rest of our lives stand as proof. / There is a point to all of this, to learn to love as you.”

Even love songs are different in hardcore music. Though routinely coupled with images of anguish or broken relationships, there are the rare few love songs that shine like beacons. The intensely personal and deeply honest lyrics of the hardcore genre do not allow bland generalizations of women like those popularized in mainstream pop in order to generate quick revenue off iTunes sales from a love-starved populace. Rather, what few love songs that do exist in the hardcore scene are lenses to glimpse their writers’ intimate passions in a way that is at once vivid and scarring.

Counterparts, the Ontario-based hardcore act, offer one example. “Compass,” off *The Difference Between Hell and Home*, demonstrates vocalist and lyricist Brendan Murphy’s regard for a loved one who has helped him heal from past wounds: “Affection allowed me to let the light in, / the fear made me whole again. / Help me rebuild my broken bones. / Help me regain

my sanity.” Murphy’s love is powerful enough to outlive death. He writes, “I’d force my ghost to write your name in the flowers on my grave.” But, for all his affection, Murphy fears that a life on the road will cause a rupture in the relationship with his lover. Murphy mourns, “I’m scratching at my skin to take my mind off the absence we’ve created...I wish I wasn’t so alone. / You are the difference between hell and home.” Indeed, this is a sad tragedy that plays out again and again for touring bands, who sacrifice their relationships with loved ones to be on the road, playing shows, following their dreams, and trying to inspire their listeners with earnest messages of hope and love.

Smash the Patriarchy, Smash the State

In *It ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at*, Paul Gilroy’s discussion of hip-hop culminates when he notes how music “[develops] our struggles by communicating information, organizing consciousness and testing out, deploying, or amplifying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency...it demands attention to both formal attributes of this tradition of expression and its distinctive *moral* basis” ([emphasis included] 132). Gilroy recognizes that music is a vehicle for mobilizing effective political discourse, which evolves out of a moral obligation to organize and amplify information in an inherently egalitarian and democratic way.

Hardcore, which owes its origins as much to hip-hop as it does to punk, pushes this political impulse even further. Politics are integral to hardcore’s ethos of resistance and feminism is one way this punk philosophy manifests itself. Like hip-hop, hardcore proves effective for disseminating radical messages to its listeners. Radical feminism is not only interwoven in the lyrical messages of hardcore but it also manifests itself in the culture of the music scene. Though it’s clear that the scene is far from perfect, the anarchistic impulse of hardcore music provides a compelling platform for equality nevertheless.

Feminism, therefore, is a cornerstone of the hardcore ethos. After all, feminism is implicit within the disobedient attitude hardcore music espouses. Resisting oppression and subjugation are innate to hardcore and rebelling against the authority of the patriarchy is necessarily a part of counter-cultural movements like hardcore/punk. It is evident that the community presents a radical example of feminine inclusion and empowerment.

CHAPTER FIVE: NO GODS, NO GOVERNMENT – RELIGION IN HARDCORE

Harm's Way, the pulverizing, Chicago-based hardcore band, are known for incorporating industrial-like tones in their music. Signed to the one and only Deathwish, Inc., Harm's Way have made a name for themselves not just in the scene, but in the real world, as well. The band's drummer, Chris Mills, is actively engaged in social justice work when not on tour. In an interview with *Noisey*, Mills explains how Harm's Way's music is an expression of the darker and more sinister elements of the human condition, noting, "Things can't always be positive and things aren't always going to go your way. There needs to be a contrast. This 'both/and' philosophy needs to be accepted to move closer to peace" (Ludwig).

While still signed to Closed Casket Records, Harm's Way released their 2010 EP, *No Gods, No Masters*. The blistering, five-track EP features a beheaded pig skewered on a sword, the crown on its head tilted slightly askew as its tongue lolls aimlessly out of its mouth. On the second track, "Puppet," the lyrics paint a scathing portrait of contemporary religion, which it purports to be "the downfall of man" (Pligge).

That infamous anarchist adage, "no gods, no masters," has a vivacious history. The phrase is derived from the French slogan "*Ni dieu ni maître*" which translates literally to "neither god nor master." Penned by the socialist Louis Auguste Blanqui in 1880, it became the title of a French resistance journal. It was subsequently adopted by popular people's movements and labor revolutionaries in the twentieth century, such as the Industrial Workers of the World who were part of the Lawrence Textile Strike in 1912. Recently, it has cropped up in popular culture as well, such as in the widely acclaimed *Fallout* video game series by Bethesda Studios. Chiefly,

however, it has become a euphemism embraced—consciously or unconsciously, overtly or subtly—in the hardcore music scene.

It is not altogether surprising that anarchists are often opposed to religion. When one considers the way religion has been used to control and oppress and justify bigotry and violence, it seems natural that anarchists would stand against such unconscionable ideologies. Indeed, anarchists have always been critical of religion. Mikhail Bakunin, Emma Goldman, and Francisco Ferrer i Guàrdia were all incredibly suspicious of the power religion often had over people's lives and its ability to distract human beings from the immediate crises of the planet through the enticing fantasies of an after-life.

However, there were also self-styled anarchists who believed very much in Jesus of Nazareth as an anarchist hero of the poor and oppressed. From the minds of literary titans like Leo Tolstoy and Henry David Thoreau to the classic Christian anarchists like Jacques Ellul and Dorothy Day to the more modern Christian anarchists Shane Claiborne and Alexandre Christoyannopoulos, Christianity and anarchy have always had a fascinating relationship that complicates the more traditional reading of anarchy that many of the classical anarchists harbored. For these Christian anarchists, the Christian ideology is much less about following the Bible's edicts and much more about imitating the historical Jesus of Nazareth.

Interestingly, the hardcore music scene reflects this tempestuous debate. While there are popular bands in the hardcore scene like Stick To Your Guns, Stray From the Path, and Counterparts who categorically reject the comforting delusions of Christianity, there are still more who embrace a politicized Christianity that is equally critical of contemporary Christian life but hopes for a more Christ-like ideology to triumph. This second category of musicians includes acts like Beartooth, Being As An Ocean, and the Chariot. There is yet another group of

musicians whose music began with a Christian worldview before shifting towards a more secular standpoint. Hundredth is perhaps the most striking example of this phenomenon, but *La Dispute* and *A Plea For Purging* are also fitting examples.

In order to keep this chapter concise, I will focus primarily on the relationship between the Christian religion and hardcore music. Though there are a multitude of intersecting philosophies that relate Buddhism to punk music (*Hardcore Zen: Punk Rock, Monster Movies, and the Truth About Reality*) or the resistance culture of hardcore and its relation to women's empowerment in Iran (*Persephone*), the crux of this chapter will focus on Christianity and hardcore. After highlighting some of the key points made against religion by the classic anarchists, I'll advance some of the theories put forth by Christian anarchists. Then, I will show how Christianity and hardcore music have clashed, collaborated, and separated over the years.

God is Dead...Right?

In 1882, Mikhail Bakunin's *God and the State* was first published. Perhaps the essay for which he is most famous, Bakunin mercilessly derides Christianity with his trademark sarcasm and unyielding wit. In the text, Bakunin contends that Christianity has been used, throughout its existence, as a tool for cudgeling and controlling the public. Bakunin draws on the legendary Voltaire, who remarked "if god did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." This is the "safety-valve" that keeps the people in check (Bakunin 9). Without batting an eye, Bakunin criticizes the "absurd tales...and the monstrous doctrines that are taught, in the full light of the nineteenth century, in all the public schools of Europe, at the express command of the government" (Bakunin 6). By Bakunin's estimation, Christianity has been used by those in power to pull the wool over the eyes of the masses and distract them from the State's activities.

Bakunin ultimately charges the State for practicing an authority based on lies. Instead, Bakunin advocates that instead of turning to humankind for infallible authority, the people

should instead use the investigative philosophies of science. About halfway through his essay, Bakunin triumphantly declares “we reject all legislation, all authority, and all privileged, licensed, official, and legal influence, even though arising from universal suffrage, convinced that it can turn only to the advantage of a dominant minority of exploiters against the interests of the immense majority in subjection to them. This is the sense in which we are really Anarchists” (18). Thus, Bakunin paves the way for the rational philosophy of classical anarchism, which relies upon the scientific method as a means of elevating human consciousness above the misanthropy of religion.

During Catalonia’s Tragic Week, which took place July 25 – August 2 in 1909, a series of bloody clashes broke out between a populist labor movement spearheaded by anarchists and socialists and the Spanish army. Peaceful demonstrators, protesting the militant colonialism of the Spanish Republic, were violently assaulted by the Spanish army. Barcelona, which would later become a bastion of anarchist community during the Spanish Civil War, was a hotbox of political and secular philosophy, waiting to explode. There were mass strikes, riots, and direct action initiatives to halt troop transports and rebel against the capitalist, Catholic-based oligarchy. Martial law was declared, arrests were made, hundreds were butchered by the State.

The Spanish anarchist, educator, and revolutionary Francisco Ferrer (Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia) was tried in 1909 for supposedly spearheading the events of the Tragic Week. A kangaroo court sentenced the anarchist blasphemer to execution by firing squad. Before he was murdered by the State, Ferrer wrote on the walls of his cell, “Let no more gods or exploiters be served. Let us learn, rather, to love one another.”

Borrowing heavily from Nietzschean philosophy, *The Failure of Christianity*, an essay published in 1913 by Emma Goldman, declares that “the subtleness of the Christian teachings is

a more powerful protection against rebellion and discontent than the club or the gun” (1). These dogmas, in Goldman’s eyes, lead to the stagnation of the human experience. Goldman posits that “the Christian religion and morality extols the glory of the Hereafter, and therefore remains indifferent to the horrors of the earth” (2). Since religion is fixated upon the afterlife, it cannot hope to shake human beings from their apathy in the here and now.

Goldman’s scathing conclusion is that “Christianity is the conspiracy of ignorance against reason, of darkness against light, of submission and slavery against independence and freedom; of the denial of strength and beauty, against the affirmation of the joy and glory of life” (5). In 1916, Goldman published her *Philosophy of Atheism*, in which she argues, “Thoughtful people are beginning to realize that moral precepts, imposed upon humanity through religious terror, have become stereotyped and have therefore lost all vitality...Atheism, in its negation of gods is at the same time the strongest affirmation of man, and through man, the eternal yea to life, purpose, and beauty” (4).

While compelling in their own right, these philosophies of anarchy are challenged, interestingly enough, by the ethos of Christian anarchism. While not a necessarily a popular sect in the anarchist philosophy, Christian anarchism has remained a stalwart and important part of anarchistic philosophy. Perhaps this is the case, in part, because it provides a more historic, realistic, and even secularist view of Jesus of Nazareth. Reza Aslan’s best-selling *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* is one notable attempt to historicize Jesus of Nazareth. To inundate this chapter with the multitude of varied, colorful theories surrounding the Christian mythos would detract from the main thrust of Christian anarchism which presents Jesus of Nazareth as an anti-imperialist, anti-misogynist, socialist, anarchist hero who practiced direct action to resist the Roman Empire, which occupied first century Judea.

Christian anarchism has existed since the likes of Leo Tolstoy and Henry David Thoreau. In *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy presents some of the main points of Christian anarchism. Expressly, human beings are not inherently bad, heaven and hell are metaphorical devices, and it doesn't matter whether or not Jesus was god (or if he even existed) because his message is more important than who he was or who he was not. For Christian anarchists, like admirers of Shakespeare, it doesn't matter whether Jesus was one person or many: the takeaway was that the non-violent, civil disobedience advocated in the gospels and the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount provide a theological framework for an ethical lifestyle.

Tolstoy was devoted, like many Christian anarchists, to the principle of nonviolent resistance. By Tolstoy's reckoning, violence was the greatest tool of the State, capable of whipping up a fiendish nationalism. Indeed, so popular and moving was *The Kingdom of God is Within You* that a young Mohandas Gandhi listed it in his own autobiography, *A Story of My Experiments With Truth*, as one of the top three most influential books in his entire life. Tolstoy was opposed to Christianity because he was convinced it departed wholly from the teachings of its founder. In *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, Tolstoy wrote, "In affirming my belief in Christ's teaching, I could not help explaining why I do not believe, and consider as mistaken, the Church's doctrine, which is usually called Christianity" (5).

Henry David Thoreau, infamously imprisoned for refusing to pay his taxes due to the scourge of slavery and the horror of war, was another fine example of a Christian anarchist. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau suggested, "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have" (3). Thoreau's practice of tax evasion was a form of direct action to resist a government which perpetuated injustice through violence and oppression. He wrote that "Unjust laws exist: shall we

be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress at once?" Clearly, Thoreau himself practiced the third option and implicit in the question is an invitation to imitate him. Thoreau continued, wondering, "Why does [the State] always crucify Christ" (9)?

Shane Claiborne is one of the pioneering voices in contemporary Christian anarchism. His book *Jesus For President*, co-written with Chris Haw, is a masterpiece of theological inquiry intentionally designed to be creative, accessible, and thought-provoking. Claiborne's criticism of contemporary Christianity is scathing. Claiborne writes, "The history of the church has been largely a history of "believers" refusing to believe in the way of the crucified Nazarene and instead giving in to the very temptations he resisted--power, relevancy, spectacle" (121). Yet he also outlines an alternative, one in which:

"Jesus is ready to set us free from the heavy yoke of an oppressive way of life. Plenty of wealthy Christians are suffocating from the weight of the American dream, heavily burdened by the lifeless toil and consumption we embrace. This is the yoke from which we are being set free. And as we are liberated from the yoke of global capitalism, our sisters and brothers in Guatemala, Liberia, Iraq, and Sri Lanka will also be liberated. Our family overseas, who are making our clothes, growing our food, pumping our oil, and assembling our electronics--they too need to be liberated from the empire's yoke of slavery. Their liberation is tangled up with our own."

(Claiborne 331)

It is worth noting that there are some serious issues between Christianity and anarchism. Anarchism intrinsically relies on leaderless communities that self-organize in order to distribute power equitably. Many Christian anarchists believe that they owe no allegiance to "the world's"

governors, nations, and leaders, but do feel that they are indebted to Jesus—and, by extension, god—through the sacrifice Jesus made to cleanse the earth of its sin. In this way, Christian anarchists are more akin to Marxists, who wage revolutionary politics through a vanguard party or spearhead political action through the vessel of a figurehead. Indeed, just as there are plenty of Christian anarchists, so too are there a plethora of Christian Marxists (Thomas J. Hagerty, Ernst Bloch, Diane Drufenbrock, etc.)

Many factions—political, religious, even cultish—have made attempts to vie for Jesus of Nazareth, twisting what little we know about him or what was recorded in the Christian Gospels in order to validate the biases they already harbor. Capitalists twist Jesus’s parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) in order to justify their financial systems while authoritarians utilize Mark 12:17 to tax the poor relentlessly. I remain convinced, however, that “Christianity is at its best when it is peculiar, marginalized, suffering, and it is at its worst when it is popular, credible, triumphant, and powerful” (Claiborne 221). If Christianity is to actually imitate the edicts of its founder, it has much to learn from those who radically interpret Biblical texts not out of a desire to amass power or stabilize the status quo but to actually show compassion, mercy, and forgiveness the way the legends of Jesus of Nazareth clearly demonstrate.

Christian anarchism thus complicates an easy interpretation of anarchism as a solely secular (and even anti-religious) political endeavor. The richness of anarchist political thought is continually discernible in hardcore music, which so explicitly expresses anarchist themes. Whether atheistic, “Christian”/spiritual, or showcasing the death of faith, hardcore music again and again ties Christianity and anarchy to a culture of ongoing resistance.

A Doctrine Bathed in Ignorance

Almost every secular band in the hardcore scene has written a song about religion (usually Christianity) and its hateful bigotry, ignorant dogmas, and pious narrow-mindedness.

Indeed, so plentiful are the examples of contempt for religion that the subject has almost become a trope in hardcore/punk lyrics. I will, however, include several noteworthy examples in order to illustrate the anger that is routinely directed towards religion in hardcore music.

On their celebrated 2014 record *Lost Forever / Lost Together*, Architects included a track titled “Broken Cross.” When it officially debuted as a lyric video showcasing breath-taking images of interstellar galaxies in the cosmos, the band also included a short blog post explaining that they weren’t necessarily bashing a specific religion, but a religious fundamentalism in general. In the first verse, vocalist Sam Carter bellows, “No flags, no holy books. / I’ll burn in hell with the misunderstood.” It’s impossible to miss the explicit connection of anarchist theory to Carter’s sentiment. In fact, “no flags, no holy books” is strikingly similar to “no gods, no masters.” In the chorus of “Broken Cross,” Carter ponders, “Are we perfect mistakes or almighty fuck-ups? / One thing’s for sure: [god] doesn’t fucking love us.”

Counterparts have written several songs about religion, including “Cursed” and “Thank God.” On the former, which appears on 2013’s *The Difference Between Hell and Home*, Brendan Murphy is positively vitriolic when he shrieks, “A doctrine bathed in ignorance, / written in the blood of the enslaved. / You see, I never lost my faith. / I just never had any to begin with.” Later, he uses imagery reminiscent of a black sheep rallying the flock to rise up against the shepherd—an anarchist image if ever there was one. Murphy hollers, “We are the sheep who rose against the shepherd. / We are the ones who went astray.”

Jason Aalan Butler’s clever lyrics shine on letlive.’s *The Blackest Beautiful*, released in 2013. Notably, “27 Club” features Butler’s sardonic comment, “They say there’s no such thing as an atheist in a fox-hole. / I tried to be a goddamn believer but the road to heaven’s full of plot-holes.” The assonance of “plot-holes” evokes “pot-holes” in the golden-paved streets of heaven.

In the chorus of the same song, Butler invites his listeners to “raise hell until it’s high enough to be heaven. / Then maybe I can find [god] there. / They told me if I look up then I would find [god] there. / If I look up to find you, then how could I deny you?” The track ends with an existential, pseudo-spoken word segment in which Butler contemplates killing himself to find out definitively if god is real.

Stick To Your Guns defend the oppressed and shut down Christian homophobia in their blistering, 1:29-long track “Life in a Box” off their critically-acclaimed 2012 release, *Diamond*. Jesse Barnett holds no punches when he roars, “This is a place of acceptance, not a place of repentance. So save your breath, you homophobic shit-head. One day you will pay your debt, but until then I’ll fight to undo every word that you’ve said. And every time you lift your hand to cast your stone, I’ll find you and shove it back down your throat.” The punishing line is greeted with a shattering breakdown that packs Barnett’s hard-hitting, no-bullshit philosophy.

Stray From the Path are known for their witty lyrics, which they often write jointly. “Prey,” off 2011’s *Rising Sun*, features Drew York’s signature whine as he recites, “If that white light would shine brighter, then I’d love to watch you burn.” Elsewhere, on their 2009 LP *Make Your Own History*, York shouts in “Damien,” “What gives you the right to think that you can come and save me?” Then he writes, “I’ll save my breath for something real as you look towards the sky. / Pray forgiveness, this ends tonight.”

Thematically, most of the work by secular groups that addresses religion does so out of a desire to address bigotry and demand freedom from oppression. This isn’t expressed solely in the music. Many bands use their shirts and merchandise as a way to purport their message. Stick To Your Guns has a shirt that draws on lyrics from “Life in a Box,” which depicts a Westboro Baptist Church Protester waving one of their hateful signs and a punk kid sporting a picket sign

with an arrow pointing at the WBC Protestor that reads “Fuck this guy.” Certain bands posit Satanic imagery—like Rotting Out, for instance—out of an express desire to align with the rational, inquisitive human spirit that Satanists celebrate (though, admittedly, this is often viewed as a gimmick by many in the scene.)

I Hate Your Hate

Since the birth of Christianity, it’s indisputable that Christian messages have often been espoused in music. Whether overtly through Christian worship songs in church halls, the gospel anthems that comforted slaves in the nineteenth century, or more contemporary Christian pop radio hits, the messages of Jesus of Nazareth—contorted, though they often may be—are continuously found in popular music. Christian music was especially popular in the heavy music scene, if only for a relatively short period.

Recently, “Christian” bands—or, at least, bands who marketed themselves under such a label—have become increasingly scarce in the heavy music scene. Many have abandoned their faith, abdicating belief for reason. Others have simply lost steam as fewer Christian fans remained in the scene, exhausting their ability to play to religious audiences and either unwilling to perform before secular audiences or the audiences aren’t willing to pay for entry.

In the 90’s and early 2000’s, though, it seemed like every other band in the “heavy scene” had some sort of Christian message espoused either lyrically or, from the more passionate bands, on-stage. Lyrics from these bands were rarely explicitly Christian. Rather, heavy Christian music utilized the anger and passion to remark on a variety of traumas in the world—social injustices, personal hardships, and, on occasion, faith and belief. However, songs that discussed Christianity in general often came from a negative angle. Christian conservatism was vocally rejected at every turn in favor of a more liberal (indeed, a more anarchistic) flavor of Christianity.

Post-hardcore experimentation vaunted acts like Underøath and Emery to stardom while bands like August Burns Red and The Devil Wears Prada continue to remain metalcore juggernauts. Certain bands (such as ABR and TDWP) even dipped their toes into the political waters. ABR's *Leveler* had several politically vague tracks—such as “Poor Millionaire” and “Empire”—while TDWP's *Zombie* EP had some of the same nods to social commentary as the Romero films from which the group drew inspiration. Yet, even a casual listener would suggest that these “metalcore” bands had more in common with their “metal” roots than with their “hardcore” counterparts.

However, there are certain bands that fully embrace the ethos of Christian anarchism. Showbread—who've been together for nearly two decades—are one immediate example. Though theatrical, comedic, and often sampling musical genres with seeming abandon, Showbread have been a force to be reckoned with since 1997. In 2004, after signing with the infamous Christian label Tooth & Nail Records, they released a string of controversial albums that challenged the comfortable Christian conservatism of their Southern Georgia roots. Since then, Showbread have released 7 LPs for a grand total of 10 albums. Each met with varying success—*No, Sir, Nihilism is Not Practical* (2004) and *Age of Reptiles* (2006) were widely celebrated and featured vigorous touring schedules while *Who Can Know It?* (2010) and *Cancer* (2012) went unnoticed save by the most dedicated of fans. Showbread recently released their final studio album, *Showbread is Showbread*, in the spring of 2016.

Still, in no way was this indicative of a deterioration in style, artistry, or direction. Rather, as Showbread's work became increasingly political, it seemed to resonate with fewer audiences. This can perhaps be attributed to the staunch Christian anarchism that Josh Dies, the band's vocalist and lyricist, penned into the latter songs' attitudes. For example, *Cancer*—a science-

fiction concept album produced without the assistance of a major record label and released to fans for free—is indicative of a DIY ethic that rejects the comforts of capitalism in an effort to vaunt art into the foreground. Indie Vision Music lauded *Cancer* as their most elevated work.

“Anarchy!” finds Dies decrying the nationalism of contemporary Christianity as he writes, “we won’t lift our hands to pledge allegiance to a flag or to piece of land. / Non-violent non-resistance, sworn to honor our true king. / Anarchy!” Driven by a groovy bass lick and an almost beachy-sounding lead guitar riff, the track thunders on to its triumphant conclusion. Dies assures listeners “we want to demolish this sad parody / tear down the flags of every nation and then let freedom ring.”

Other bands are less overt, but political nonetheless. The melodic hardcore band Being As An Ocean, who’ve recently garnered much popularity in the heavy scene, have a plethora of Christian messages in their music. However, rather than languishing in proselytizing, Being As An Ocean trade rigorous hypocrisy for compassionate integrity. In 2014, BAAO released their second studio album, *How We Both Wondrously Perish*. Its first single, “Death’s Great Black Wing Scrapes the Air,” is a soaring work with moving spoken word segments, melancholy crooning, and ferocious growls. Vocalist and lyricist Joel Quartuccio recounts the tragedy of starving children and domestic abuse, remarking

We’ve chosen the wrong enemy.

Hate, ignorance, and inhumanity are what we should be battling.

Now’s the time for knowledge.

Now’s the time for Truth.

Humanity has already suffered so much abuse.

We must take responsibility

and do away with apathy.

Unlearn society's teachings to be blind and selfish.

Because what you must learn

is that the problem is us.

Rather than shifting the blame onto others' shoulders, Quartuccio and his bandmates stand in solidarity with the "least of these" and admit they are a part of the problem.

The Chariot are legends in the hardcore scene. Josh Scogin, who was already infamous as the vocalist of Norma Jean, started the band in 2003 (he's since moved on to the two-man-rock-band, '68.) Renowned for smashing guitars, stage-diving off speakers, and generally wreaking havoc, the Chariot disbanded in 2013 after releasing four devastating studio albums and a sensational EP. *Wars and Rumors of Wars*, arguably their most popular record, featured the song "Daggers," a vehement anti-war anthem featuring Scogin's tortured scream, "Old men keep dreaming up battles for young men to fight. / War—it's only skin-deep." The general chaos of the Chariot, matched with their political views, made for a compelling testament to the history of Christian anarchism.

Beartooth, formed by Caleb Shomo, the former vocalist of Attack Attack! (a band that garnered much controversy during its tenure in the heavy music scene,) are another remarkable band. While refraining from issuing calls to love or lofty images of paternal deities, Shomo draws a line in the sand on the band's debut LP, *Disgusting*. "Keep Your American Dream" is a brazen song defying the cozy-living and complacency fostered in American culture. At the conclusion of "Dead," the following track, Shomo bellows, "Will you ever wrap your head around this? / Sin will not define us. / Sin will never control us." After pairing the two tracks, it's not difficult to identify the rigid, conservative structures Shomo so vehemently rejects.

In many of these instances, Christian anarchism is not a focal point. That being said, once one is equipped with an adequate understanding of Christian anarchy, it's impossible to miss the

politicized elements in the lyrics of these Christian hardcore bands. Whether a band overtly calls for anarchy—as is the case with Showbread—or merely advocates for the poor and oppressed, speaks out against war, and against Christian conservatism, I contend that these bands are enhanced by the Christian anarchist’s ethos, which falls close in line with the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

However, there are bands who don’t fit easily into these two categories of secular and Christian. Indeed, there has been a recent departure from Christian themes and an embrace of rational, intellectual discourse. This move is consistently politicized in nature and there are more than a few bands who fit this pattern.

I Had to Blind Myself to Believe

Numerous studies show that religion—especially religious fundamentalism in the United States—is in its death throes. According to a demographic analysis released May 5, 2015 by the Pew Research Group, “the Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing.” There was a particular spike amongst “millennials” and youth cultures who’ve departed from the church. It is no surprise, then, that a culture that celebrates youth, such as the hardcore community, would display similar intellectual development.

A piece in *The New York Times* found that “low levels of Christian affiliation among the young, well educated and affluent are consistent with prevailing theories for the rise of the unaffiliated, like the politicization of religion by American conservatives, a broader disengagement from all traditional institutions and labels, the combination of delayed and interreligious marriage, and economic development” (Cohn). Many also contribute this phenomenon to the spread of information in the digital age. The internet has become a particularly savvy tool for disseminating knowledge. *Salon* recently published an article by

Amanda Marcotte which examined the ways a fundamentalist Christian church and Mormon church reacted to trolls on the internet. Marcotte argued that ultimately “the real threat to the faith is people making strong cases against the Catholic Church and religion in general.”

In the past several years, there has been a collapse of Christian bands in the community. Whether they were unable to support themselves due to the changing ideological landscape of the hardcore community or simply traded faith for reason themselves, fewer and fewer bands identify as “Christian bands” in the hardcore scene. Not even underøath—adored by many for their outspoken Christianity, abhorred by many others for the same reason—remained a Christian band until their hiatus in 2013 (they recently reunited.) Indeed, this was one of the main reasons they were abandoned by their drummer Aaron Gillespie, who has since gone on to become a worship director. No study of religion, anarchy, and hardcore music would be complete without pausing to examine this phenomenon.

Few bands exemplify loss of faith like A Plea For Purging. Based out of Nashville, Tennessee, APFP released four full-length records and an EP before their break-up in 2012. Their third LP, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*—which takes its name from poet William Blake’s work—is an absolutely bristling indictment of contemporary Christianity. Spliced between the various tracks are emphatic sermons from frenetic pastors, screaming about hellfire and brimstone. “And Weep” features yet another nod to classic literature and philosophy. The opening lines, penned by Andy Atkins, declare, “Your god is dead.” Though Atkins later professed in “Words Misread” that his intention in writing *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* wasn’t to “[breed] anger” but to “provoke thought.” It seems, however, he did both.

This Or The Apocalypse hail from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Their 2012 LP, *Dead Years*, is filled to the bursting with lyrics defying oppression and celebrating self-empowerment.

However, it is also marked by the growing pains of abandoning one's faith. The final track is marked with the anguished chorus, "the faith we lose, we can't get it back." Vocalist and lyricist Ricky Armellino ends the song with the plaintive, melancholy observation, "We blindfold our own eyes. / We reach in the dark for one another. / So desperate, we shake each other hard enough to kill as we repeat the same question: / will you see god?"

On *Wildlife*'s "St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church Blues," La Dispute vocalist and lyricist Jordan Dreyer chronicles the death of faith. In the beginning, the church is filled with enthusiastic attendees on an Easter morning. However, the church falls into disrepair. As time elapses, vandals wreak havoc on the church, the grasses grow tall, and over the decades the building falls into disrepair. Dreyer plays off the notion that the "church" is not just a building but also a body of believers. In the end, Dreyer notices a caretaker and chants, "I saw him lift a rag to wash the years of filth from off those windows. / Made me wonder if there's anyone like that for you and me and anybody else who's broke and has lost hope."

No band abdicated its faith with as much furor and integrity as Hundredth. One can trace the shift from belief to unbelief easily in Hundredth's lyrics by tracing them chronologically. Chadwick Johnson wondered on their first record, 2010's *When Will We Surrender*, if god still saw him as beautiful in spite of his shortcomings. *Let Go* (2011) found Johnson embracing Christian anarchy. On "Humane," Johnson thunders, "we put a price on their worth to finance our greed / and blindly pledge to a flag / when justice lies in a King." This King, of course, is Jesus. 2013's *Revolt* finds Johnson rejecting the "chariot of fire" that saved Elijah, declaring, "We perceive power to be above. But the only power is in love...Keep your chariot, we're already home" on "Euclid (Slave Song.)" However, he ultimately turns away from Christianity entirely. 2014's "Demons" finds Johnson declaring, "Some may say I lost my faith. I just got up

off my knees, stopped staring into the sky, and started looking inside of me.” Hundredth’s most recent record, *Free* (2015), sums it up perfectly, expertly weaving in the titles of each of the band’s former records to show just how far Johnson has come. “I tried *Surrender*, but I had to *Let Go*. Rise in *Revolt*. *Resist* the fear I was being sold. I *Freed* myself from your divine delusion.”

It is here that the scene now seems to stand. While tenets of spirituality and personal faith are left well enough alone, the apparatus of organized religion—particularly its confluence with human affairs—is adamantly admonished. Though they would be the first to defend the marginalized and oppressed, those in the hardcore scene recognize how religion is often used to bludgeon reason, impair free thought, and foster bigotry and intolerance. Once again, a clever anarchist motto comes to mind that expertly summarizes the hardcore community’s stance on religion: “respect existence or expect resistance.”

CHAPTER SIX: RESISTANCE IS A WAY OF LIFE – THE PERSONAL AS POLITICAL

In *Wages of Rebellion*, Hedges observes the isolation of the rebel. He or she is ridiculed for harbored convictions, discarded as idealistic or naïve, and even demonized by the very communities he or she is trying to emancipate. “The rebel knows the odds,” Hedges writes, “To defy radical evil does not mean to be irrational. It is to have a sober clarity about the power of evil and one’s insignificance and yet to rebel anyway. To face radical evil is to accept self-sacrifice” (215).

Hardcore music has a reputation for addressing the tragedy on planet Earth. While its commentary on sociopolitical matters is sharp and piercing, it recognizes that the big picture matters little to those suffocating as they wrestle with personal demons. Though political apathy may be rampant in today’s youth, it is evident that much of this disinterest stems from the existential burden of meaninglessness and purposelessness that cripple young people. Kids turn to the hardcore community because they’re misfits—ostracized by a world that does not have a niche for them. It is a place where abused, depressed, angry outcasts are welcomed with open arms. At a hardcore show, everyone shares one thing in common: their love for music. It is this unifying feature that allows solidarity and friendship to triumph.

Yet, even these interpersonal struggles have a broader social implication, for the personal is simultaneously the political. Much of the purposelessness imposed upon young people today can be traced back and mapped onto a system that has cheated the up-and-comers. We were promised jobs if we went to college and drowned in thousands of dollars of debt instead. They told us our dreams would come true if we worked hard enough, but we’re stuck working retail for minimum wage. Force-fed on a lie that if we got the right grades, we would work our way up

to the top, we labored in vain, not realizing the “top” was already occupied by the nation’s oligarchs.

Youth are becoming increasingly aware of the state’s impositions upon their lives. Some may find it easy to dismiss the abuse, depression, and anger of young people in contemporary America and place the blame on a group of people they deem disinterested, technology obsessed, and entertainment saturated. But that rage has reached a boiling point, searching for a place to overflow into creative purpose. Nietzsche wrote in *On the Genealogy of Morality* that “No artist tolerates reality” (78). Instead, they seek to reshape reality. Hardcore musicians prove the truth of these observations. They refuse to merely critique, but instead strive to use their art to instigate insurrection.

This Cycle Ends With Me

Every year, there are three million reports of child abuse in the U.S. alone. Between four and seven children die every day due to abuse and neglect in the U.S., which is one of the highest (ie, most disgusting) records in any industrialized nation. Every minute, twenty human beings suffer physical violence from their partner. Furthermore, our culture is still steeped in bullying that targets the weak and marginalized, especially those who are deemed to be “minorities.” Transgender teens are especially targeted for bullying, with the result being a catastrophic suicide rate amongst trans* youth. Violence towards women is widespread and rampant, as well. The World Health Organization estimates that nearly seventy percent of women have been physically or verbally abused a partner. Each year, there are approximately 293,000 sexual assaults, though these crimes are known to be grossly under-reported because of the U.S.’s despicable rape culture that blames victims and gives perpetrators a free pass.

Hardcore confronts these issues head-on. Recognizing the depravity of pervasive injustice, the hardcore scene has traditionally provided a safe-space for those who are suffering

to be embraced with open arms. For several hours, kids can escape the horror of life and let loose, enjoying the entertainment of a performance while also being challenged to confront the same systemic issues that persist in the world today.

One excellent example is Bearhooth's "Beaten-In Lips" off *Disgusting*. The music video for the song features a house show in a dilapidated home, inter-spliced with kids standing in front of their own broken homes with marks of abuse. However, in powerful shots, the video then cuts to these same individuals singing and jumping and enjoying the community of hardcore at the house show. Shomo addresses abusers unequivocally in the song's lyrics, "Does it make you feel good? / Do you feel strong / ruining the lives of everyone you love?" before devoting the track's chorus to "the kids with the beaten-in lips, whose parents try to shut them up using their fists: keep living loud and proud, they never can hold you down." The song builds to its triumphant crescendo as Shomo howls, "Listen to sound of your children revolting." Bearhooth's anthem of rebellion against the cruelty and neglect of abusive parents can be easily transposed to general revolt against the sociopolitical systems that perpetuate poverty and often create the tragic circumstances in which abuse festers.

Rotting Out depict what happens to young people who are kicked again and again when they're down. In "Stab," Walter Delgado describes a boy driven to the point of stabbing his father after watching him abuse his mother one too many times. "A boy obsessed with movies and comics," Delgado spits on the track, "hated his old man, so he cursed him in silence. / One day, the boy snaps. / He switches over to violence. / He saw his mom slapped and it pinned back his eyelids...He picked up a screwdriver and his rage spread like a virus." The song's conclusion is unrepentant. Delgado points out, "'This is the boiling point of a bastard boy. / This is the turning point of a boy destroyed. / What would you do if it was you?" From comments Delgado

has made on stage before, I've concluded this personal song is at least semi-autobiographical. This is largely because hardcore musicians write about events that have actually happened to them, rather than construct quaint fables or fantasies of violence the way blues musicians or metal musicians might respectively.

The theme of abuse isn't related solely to parents, however. Hardcore musicians recognize that the system of capitalism is arraigned against them. L.A.'s Trash Talk address this very issue on their 2012 LP *119*. "Exile on Broadway" notes the overwhelming depravity of the economic system in the U.S. and how it leads to "drugs, despair, violence in the air." Vocalist and lyricist Lee Spielman writes, "All I see is poverty. Cold concrete, lingering disease. All they see is suffering." Those cheated by the system are "Lost, scared, tucked away in alleys. / Out of sight, out of mind, / hidden from society's eyes" until they devolve, "defunct, defeated, corrupt, mistreated, exile."

The response, for many, is depression. Systemic neglect and abuse breed a conscience of worthlessness. Suicide is an issue that musicians do not shy away from. Often, it is seen as viable option. Without eternal values or concrete terms of ethics, perpetual purposelessness often strands human beings in insufferable ennui, which catalyzed Camus to ponder, "the exact degree to which suicide is a solution for the absurd" in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (6). This same question saturates hardcore music.

On Counterparts' "Slave," Brendan Murphy wonders, "How much longer do I really have when I wish every breath would be my last?" Suicide is personified within the accusations levied against Murphy, who writes, "Your words like rope, tied around my throat. / Remove the earth beneath me. / Watch my spirit sink." The song itself feels utterly claustrophobic, especially at the cacophonous conclusion which shatters with feedback as it fades away.

There Is A Hell, Believe Me I've Seen It. There Is A Heaven, Let's Keep It A Secret was Bring Me the Horizon's breakthrough record. It showed the band was capable of evolving past their metalcore roots in order to create compelling, innovative soundscapes. Lyricist Oliver "Oli" Sykes also wrote less cryptically, exposing a certain honesty that was absent in the band's earlier discography. "It Never Ends" was one shining example. "You say this is suicide," Sykes rasps after the first chorus, "but I say this is a war / and I'm losing the battle. / Man down." These thoughts of suicide pervade the vocalist's psyche. At the track's thunderous conclusion, emotion clogs Sykes' voice as he shouts, "Every second, every minute, every hour, every day. / It never ends."

Touché Amoré, renowned for their earnest lyricism, discuss death's finality in "Condolences" off *Parting the Sea Between Brightness and Me*. The entire track uses only piano and atmospheric sound samples, which aids to the absolute pain and anguish in vocalist/lyricist Jeremy Bolm's voice. Bolm hollers, "If you fantasize about your funeral, I understand. I've been there before. If there's more importance in the music played than who'd attend we are the same." No Bragging Rights' "Outdated" off *The Concrete Flower* rejects the notion that depression is a choice. "You really think I choose to feel like this?" Mike Perez shouts. "That I should just get over it. / Why didn't I think of that?" Yet, there's solidarity in suffering. "I would do anything," Perez insists, "but I won't bury another friend. / I'm done with goodbyes, / I won't lose you to their lack of understanding, outdated way of thinking. / This can't be ignored anymore."

Indeed, suicide and its prevention are themes that have surfaced even more in recent years. The Color Morale devoted an entire record to the notion, 2014's *Hold On Pain Ends* (or "H-O-P-E.") On "Suicide;Stigma," which features guest vocals from We Came As Romans' Dave Stephens, the vocalists declare, "Suicide doesn't end the pain. / It passes on to the ones you

love and remains. / Take yourself out of the equation and the problem stays...The stigma will never leave unless all of us can just start talking.” Indeed, personal struggle is equated with communal relief (a decidedly anarchist tradition) when vocalist Garret Rapp shouts, “Sometimes to win a battle inside, / you need to start a war.” In this case, Rapp declares war on suicide. He refuses to let his depression control him and uses that creative energy to spark a better response: anger.

It is this potency of anger, which can be used to combat the depravity of the world, that hardcore so often taps into. Obviously, this anger expresses itself in a myriad of ways. At its worst, it devolves into misanthropy. But, at best, it is harnessed into something positive—art, rebellion, even a movement. Thus, it is important to first reject self-hatred. On the title track of their 2009 effort *Axe to Fall*, Converge’s vocalist/lyricist Kurt Ballou recognizes, “I need to stop this suicide machine...I need to stop this destruction...I need to learn to love me.” This anger, which expresses itself in radical compassion for the self, is far different from the type of hatred that infects, divides, and erodes the human spirit.

Those in the hardcore realize that it’s important for this anger to not subside into hatred for others. In the Ghost Inside’s riff-infused “Out of Control,” which appeared on their 2014 record *Dear Youth*, vocalist/lyricist Jonathan Vigil realizes in the track’s triumphant bridge, “We tear each other down to build ourselves up. / A system failure, enough is enough. / ‘cause in a world this shaky and unstable, / we’ve got to be less fucking hateful.” As the song churns on, Vigil suggests, “This is beyond aggression. / Knuckles white, / because we need new direction.” This new direction must be channeled into a movement.

In their titanic, fan-favorite anthem “Against Them All,” Stick To Your Guns imagine what such a movement might look like. As the track soars to life, Jesse Barnett bellows, “I know

you because you're just like me: / always questioning every single thing." Armed with critical minds, the movement is able to endure, "never giving up without a fight because...resistance is a way of life." The target of anger is refocused on the powers that be. "Young and angry, with every right to be," Barnett says, "bent, but not broken. / Hanging on by a thread. / Looked past by most, looked down on by all. / We don't need them, / forever us against them all." This declaration, far from intending division, is a battle-cry of sorts, encouraging listeners to embrace their anger and focus it on the institutions that have humanity by the throat.

In refusing to perpetuate the oppression that plagues the world, artists and activists begin to erect alternatives to systems of hate that inundate the world with poverty, war, and suffering. When people start to realize that these systems which feed abuse and depression are corrosive and utterly unnecessary, they begin to recognize the lie that has been fed to the hungry: you're worthless, you're inherently evil, and you need to be protected from yourself. The vicious cycle of violence and depravity ends only when people of courage and conviction emphatically say, "Enough is Enough." This is precisely what A Day To Remember say in their first single for 2013's *Common Courtesy*, "Violence (Enough is Enough.)" Jeremy McKinnon asks those in power in the song's titanic breakdown, "What's the world gonna say when I call your bluff, punk?"

CHAPTER SEVEN: YOU SAY “FUCK THE WORLD,” WE SAY, “FUCK YOU”

On November 15, 2013, I stood in line outside a venue in Jacksonville, FL waiting for the doors to open for the evening’s show. I’d travelled two hours, through an impressive storm, to make it in time for the gig. Stick To Your Guns, who had recently released a split 7” with the pop-punk group The Story So Far, were on a co-headlining tour. Such Gold, Rotting Out, and Souvenirs tagged along for support. Rain still pattered across the pavement. A nearby nightclub was preparing for the onslaught of nearby college partiers. As has often been the case in recent years, I attended the show by myself, but stood in line amongst a sea of familiar faces.

While I waited for the venue doors to open, I scrolled anxiously through my Twitter feed to find a transcript of Jeremy Hammond’s sentencing hearing. I had been in transit when his sentencing occurred. Hammond, the twenty-six year old hacker and anarchist, associated with the hacktivist collective Anonymous, was sentenced to 10 years in prison—the maximum penalty allowed under his plea bargain. Hammond, who had hacked into the private intelligence firm Strategic Forecasting (StratFor) provided approximately five million emails to WikiLeaks and *Rolling Stone*, showing how the private surveillance industry—another hammer in the State’s corporate toolbox—spied on activists and dissidents. Indeed, it showed how these very protesters had been punished and penalized under gross misrepresentations of terrorist legislation that had been put into use since 9/11.

It was another stunning example of how the State punished those who resisted its totalitarianism. For Hammond’s courageous act of civil disobedience which shone a light on malicious (and illegal) corporate behavior, he was handed a grotesque, disproportionate sentence. Hammond, however, remained stalwart. During the sentencing phase, Hammond read from a

prepared statement, “The hypocrisy of ‘law and order’ and the injustices caused by capitalism cannot be cured by institutional reform but through civil disobedience and direct action. Yes, I broke the law, but I believe that sometimes laws must be broken in order to make room for change” (Hammond).

As the show went on, I tried to have a good time. Rotting Out, in particular, put on a thrilling performance. But Hammond’s sentencing hung heavy on my mind, clouding my thoughts. Between sets, I read articles in the *Guardian* and *RT* as well as the *New York Times* on Hammond’s trial. Looking around the room, I wondered if anyone else was plagued by the same sadness, the same fury. Then Stick To Your Guns took the stage.

Jesse Barnett, beloved throughout the scene for his thundering and empowering on-stage professions, seemed possessed by a righteous fury. Three songs into their set, as a hush fell over the stage, Barnett stepped forward, a grim conviction on his face. He told us that our world was being destroyed, ravaged by greed and corruption and gross, overwhelming apathy. He told us that change starts inside. It begins in venues where hardcore music is played. “It starts with me,” he said. “Jeremy Hammond realized this. Chelsea Manning realized this. Edward Snowden realized this. They say, ‘Fuck the world,’” he declared, quoting STYG’s “Empty Heads,” and the crowd roared back, “We say, ‘Fuck you.’” Then the band launched into “Empty Heads” and the crowd was suddenly possessed by even more frenetic energy (which is saying something.)

This is the attitude of hardcore. It is one that is shared intimately with anarchy. It is a political ideology that recognizes the realities of this world. It is cognizant of corruption, aware of apathy, and understands that if humanity continues to look for reformers and regulators to rescue us, we will inevitably succumb to what Sheldon Wolin referred to as “inverted totalitarianism.” Hardcore and anarchy recognize we are destroying our planet, that capitalism is

ravaging our lives, and that we are killing each other at the behest of draconian dogmas as jingoistic jargon jars us from sanity. These pernicious policies say “fuck the world.” The hardcore community says “fuck you.”

Young Americans are beginning to realize the farce of U.S. government. According to an article in *The Week*, young Americans are even less likely to vote in the 2014 elections—only 23 percent of those polled by Harvard said they would “definitely vote.” The same poll shows that those between 18 and 29 years of age have “less participation and less trust in almost every single institution” that the university tracks. However, this isn’t because they don’t care. On the contrary, it was found that “young people are still very interested in making a difference, but they’re doing it more through community service” (Goddard). This “community service” presents itself in a variety of ways—from corporate-sponsored charity work to protest and student occupations.

The logic of anarchy is not a battle-cry of apathy or inaction. On the contrary, anarchists insist on *direct* action. In “Naysayer” off Architects’ *Lost Forever / Lost Together*, Sam Carter declares he’s “so sick of the sound of people giving up. You can’t stop me from giving a fuck. Fuck it, I’m a dreamer and I’m dreaming on. Apathy is our new Messiah...you can’t fight fire with fire.” Carter demonstrates that we cannot respond to the carelessness of the world’s oligarchy with more of the same. We have to give a fuck.

Anarchy reflects the demands of a people who’ve come to recognize that there is no hope to salvage the remnants of a shattered political duopoly. Anarchists encourage one another to remain skeptical of the semantically-savvy politicians on the TV screen, espousing carefully-orchestrated rhetoric intended to placate. Anarchist philosophy inspires people to recognize and

trust in the capacity for hope, perseverance, and life within themselves and to share those ideals with their communities.

I submit that absolute abolishment of the State is the only way to achieve freedom for all, not just for some. If we would call ourselves “fanatic lovers of liberty,” we must turn inward as intellectual beings of conscience. Equipped with an ethics of equal-liberty and an understanding that human beings have the simultaneous potential for great kindness and exceptional cruelty, we have an obligation to engage in civil disobedience. Not just for our own liberty, but for the freedom of all humanity—for one can only be truly free once all chains have been broken. This is the eternal anarchist struggle, one that does not suddenly end with “the revolution,” but one that endures so long as humans remain susceptible to the temptation of dominance.

The greatest tool the anarchist has at his or her disposal is the brain. Possessed with a critical mind, the anarchist can begin the tough work of exposing the sham of representative democracy which has always worked to protect oligarchs. This critical mind expresses itself unequivocally in the art manufactured in anarchist communities and the hardcore scene is a clear example of the potency of questioning everyone and everything. Northlane’s “Rot,” off their 2015 release *Node*, captures the drive of anarchist philosophy: “don’t let the world rot...a mind at large is a power they can’t repress.” Enter Shikari’s Rou Reynolds points out that “science is an appliance that emancipates us from dogma and slant and bias” on the band’s 2015 track “Never Let Go of the Microscope.” Reynolds goes on, as the song builds to their vocalist’s deafening declaration, “We swear allegiance to no one. / We’ll never let go of the microscope...We’ll harness the heat of the sun / and we’ll burn you out of fucking existence.” Elsewhere, in “Gandhi, Mate, Gandhi,” Reynolds reflects on

a long outdated system that produces
war, poverty, collusion, corruption,

ruins our environment, and threatens every aspect of our health

and does nothing but divide and segregate us.

I don't think how much military equipment we're selling to other countries,

how many hydro-carbons we're burning,

how much money that's being printed and exchanged

is a good measure of how healthy our society is.

But I do think I can speak for everyone when I say:

we're sick of this shit."

Hardcore music understands that the solution does not rest with the political institutions that have ravaged the earth. Anarchy is the answer.

I submit that we can no longer can we afford to look outward to corrupt men and women who promise us "hope" or "change" while stealing our civil liberties, our rights to privacy, and the hard-earned dollars in our wallets, all while waging endless war on our foreign brothers and sisters—men and women and children who're just like us. Instead, by embracing anarchism, we can begin the tough work of abandoning the miasma of the current sociopolitical (dis)order in order to actively create environments of autonomy, continually nurturing a culture of non-violence that's based upon a moral obligation to ourselves and to one another. The dream of a revolution may be utopically distant, but they'll forever remain an unattainable horizon if we seek to use laws and legislation to change our pale, blue dot.

Infinite growth has begun to outpace the finite world upon which we're stranded. If the corporate state has its way, our society will consume until the earth is nothing but a husk of what it once was. The odds seem insurmountable. And as long as we continue to buy into the borders and barriers erected by the State, we will remain separated and disconnected from both the planet and one another.

Anarchy insists, however, that another way is possible. As Chadwick Johnson observes on “Shelter,” off Hundredth’s *Resist*, “We’re backed into a corner, forced to live on our knees. / They shun those who think and silence those who speak. / But, fuck authority. Leaders make us weak. / I’d rather be awake to fight the misery. / I’ll waste away if I stay asleep in my apathy.” Anarchists show us that it is imperative that we begin to adopt a new outlook.

By its very nature, dissidence demands to be expressed. Instead of voting, anarchists foster the reclamation of power in the streets through popular assembly and protest. Anarchists advocate stealing from morally bankrupt corporations and champion local bookstores, fair-trade coffee and tea, and cruelty-free attire. Anarchists create art that challenges the current order and expresses dissatisfaction with the status quo. Hardcore is an essential aspect of this dissidence. As Jesse Barnett insists, “Resistance is a way of life.”

Anarchy is order.

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