Background to the research area:

Yes, we are dreamers, because, like children, we don’t like nightmares. Yes, we are utopian. This utopia is not a heavenly paradise come to earth. Neither is it a return to a mythical Golden Age. This ‘other’ place is a symbolic territory, based on our revolutionary refusal to put up with a world founded on the violence of class and ethnic or sexual domination, of the exploitation of labour and the body, of alienation (Anarchist Federation 2008, p. 14).

In the contemporary world, anarchism has re-emerged on a global scale, as witnessed by the spread of the Occupy movement (Graeber 2011). Anarchism’s centrality within the alternative globalisation movement and the relatively scant academic attention it has traditionally attracted (Gordon 2007, Critchley in James 2009) position it as a timely and rich source of potential engagement for scholars. Essentially, anarchism seeks to achieve an orderly society liberated from governmental rule, evidencing ‘… a condition of statelessness, of free federation, of ‘complete’ freedom and equality’ (Kinna 2009, p. 5). Yet, popular understandings normatively conceptualise anarchy as meaning a chaotic state evidencing social disorder that frequently involves violence (Kinna 2009). While many anarchists disavow such popular understandings (particularly regarding the use of violence), Bakunin (1842 in Dolgoff 1971) intriguingly highlighted the positive connotations of chaos to anarchy, arguing that ‘the passion for destruction is a creative passion too’.

This quotation from Bakunin provides the impetus for my research, which proposes an interdisciplinary project to creatively and critically explore the passionate relationship between destruction and creation through textual assemblages addressing the potentiality of relational anarchy. Relational (or relationship) anarchy (RA) challenges the value of following pre-conceived models in interpersonal relationships or defining them through distinguishing labels (e.g. ‘partner’ or ‘friend’). RA promotes a non-hierarchical, egalitarian approach to relationships, respecting diversity grounded in principles of respect, honesty, autonomy and freedom (Nordgren 2006). Although compatible with many principles of polyamory, RA disavows relational hierarchies such as ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ (used by some polyamorous practitioners to describe partner relationships) in addition to broader relational descriptors (e.g. ‘boyfriend’). Through this rejection of relational hierarchies and qualifiers, RA holds, at least symbolically, the potential to equally value relationships in which people do not have sexual contact with each other alongside relationships that include sexual expressions. The links between polyamory and RA make it a topic of contemporary relevance, as Western societies, including Australia, evidence a trend of increasing representations of non-monogamous relationships within mainstream media texts (Freydkin 2010).

In considering RA, my project is interested in its potentiality as both prefigurative utopian vision and practical mode of social change to radically transform broader social systems of domination. Framing this, my research asks how might relational anarchy be located in both the symbolic territory of the ‘other’ place and offer the means to realise the different kinds of relating that Landauer1 argued would destroy the state?

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1 ‘The state is a social relationship; a certain way of people relating to one another. It can be destroyed by creating new social relationships; i.e., by people relating to one another differently’ (2010, p. 214).
Aims and significance of the research:

While ‘relational anarchy’ has yet to gain traction as a topic of academic research, there is a significant body of work concerning polyamory, which was the topic of my Honours project. In addition, a number of contemporary works about anarchism and sexuality have been published, notably including Anarchism and sexuality: Ethics, relationships and power published recently in the UK (Heckert & Cleminson 2011). This work reflects a growing trend of positioning anarchism in relation to compatible theoretical frameworks, including queer, feminist and poststructuralist, to facilitate analytical focus and depth. While concern with sexual freedom plays a central and enduring role in anarchism, and non-monogamous relational forms are attracting increased popular interest, the role of non-sexual interpersonal relationships in movements for radical social change seems to be largely underexplored, although solidarity is a core anarchist principle.

Thus, my research aims to utilise and extend existing knowledge about polyamory and anarchist sexuality to comparatively explore and link RA to this related body of work. In undertaking this task, my research acknowledges RA as a recently emergent and popular theory of relationships, which has developed from outside the academy in Sweden (Nordgren 2006). While not refuting the value of sexual relationships nor restricting my questions to non-sexual relational forms, my research aims to advance inquiry into RA across an inclusive range of relationships, drawing upon concepts such as ‘passionate friendship’ from anarchist writings to more fully examine modes of interpersonal relating that advance revolutionary potential (Landstreicher 2005).

My research also aims to answer Denzin’s (2003) call that the academy should be a site of resistance that encourages critical thought and public debate. To encourage this, I will seek to make my research readily available to readers within and outside the academy by publishing ten extracts from creative work to be constructed for my thesis as a series of zines (small, self-published pamphlets). These will be made available at key distribution points within Australia (e.g. Jura Books) and online. Through self-publishing, I acknowledge the anti-commercial tradition of ‘do it yourself’ (DIY) in anarchism and seek to make my work available for critique by a broader range of readers, including those within anarchist counterpublics. This engages with the politics of knowledge production and links means to ends by acknowledging modes of publication and distribution as political acts in themselves, rather than merely as channels through which content is disseminated (Ferguson 2011).

Another aim of my research is to productively engage with the critical debate about the role of creative practice in research in Australia, as addressed in a 2012 special edition of Text about this topic. It has been proposed that projects advancing a ‘conscious, critical interdisciplinarity’ that entwines and juxtaposes ‘practice-led research with research-led practice’ are needed (Messer 2012, p. 5). My research aims to respond to this proposal through mobilising an inquiry in which theory and creative arts practice, and additionally form and content, play equal and inter-related roles. To achieve this, I propose to use a research design that draws from RA to disavow hierarchies and value each research component in equal measure to all others. This enacts Greenway’s feminist (2008) model of methodological anarchism that seeks to engage with the politics of knowledge production to challenge binaries and hierarchies in research. In doing so, space is made for new forms of knowledge, and research may be experienced as both exuberant and transformative. While this will be addressed within my thesis, I also intend to
produce at least one paper for conference presentation and/or journal publication about this topic during my candidature.

Proposed methods:

This project proposes to use writing as a method of inquiry, incorporating textual montage and fictocritical techniques. Writing as a method of inquiry uses writing throughout all research stages to discover what is known and unknown. Through using different styles of writing (e.g. scholarly, creative), new perspectives on the research topic and the researcher’s relationship to it are uncovered and developed, valuing form and content in equal measure (Richardson 2000). In my project, creative works will be constructed through textual montage, facilitated by cutting and reassembling words, graphemes and image fragments from Arthur Mee’s ten-volume *Children’s Encyclopedia* (circa 1932–1939), which was extensively read in Australia from the period of 1910–1960s. In addition to being promoted as a recreational text for children’s domestic consumption, this text enjoyed a high level of popularity and status as an educational resource, making it significant to the history of pedagogy in Australia (Rodwell 1995). Through consistent modes of address and inculcation, the *Children’s Encyclopedia* positioned Australian children and their educators within an Anglo-centric worldview, constructing subjectivity through the dominant norms and language of empire, whiteness and masculinity.

In choosing this text as a source of material for textual reappropriation and reconstruction through montage, my research practice will engage in ‘… a sort of semantic raid on the textual-object’, which cuts into the knowledge body (Emberley 2002). Here, I confront the dynamic relationship between language as a repetition of signs and language as a means of transformation. This also enables me to interrogate and acknowledge my situated position as a researcher, including privileges of race, class and sexuality. In seeking to re-assemble new stories from a textual work that embodies Australia’s legacy of white invasion, my research will think with and through frameworks from cultural studies, feminism and political theory in addition to literary theories of intertextuality, poststructuralism and deconstruction. In the cutting and recasting of the *Children’s Encyclopedia*, I seek to construct a multi-layered, situated exploration of RA that holds notions of destruction and creation, past, present and prefigurative future in dynamic relation with each other. Through this approach, the research path remains open to potential lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) and imaginative possibilities. The creative heritage of my project is seen in the use of textual collage by the historical Avant-Garde (e.g. Dada and Surrealism), the ‘cut up’ novels of William Burroughs, and contemporary forms of ‘writing with scissors’, such as Graham Rawle’s *Woman’s World* (Leong 2012).

To communicate this research, I will employ a fictocritical approach that meshes styles and genres of writing. Further promoting the avoidance of hierarchies and binaries within my project, I will use fictocriticism to build an exegetical thread that runs throughout the text, rather than presenting a series of creative works with an external critical analysis. In doing so, I seek to comprehensively engage with the potentiality of RA while exploring how the passionate relationship between destruction and creativity may reveal unknown intersections and juxtapositions of pleasure, pain, playfulness and politics in language and text.
References:


Deleuze, G & Guattari, F 1987, *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.


