Sociology as an organized approach to understanding human society emerged in the turmoil and strife of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as was the case with other academic disciplines of the so-called “social sciences” such as psychology and criminology. This period was marked by rapid development in the Industrial Revolution, mass production and social conflict based around struggles between social classes (the proletariat and bourgeoisie), and new forms of political mobilization in mass movements of labor. In addition, movements demanding increased access to justice and respect for previously oppressed groups, especially women and racialized communities, gathered strength and challenged social elites. This was also a period of substantial cultural change marked most notably by the large scale movement of populations from rural to urban areas, urbanization, and the migration of people internationally. These migrations brought about major cultural transformations, bringing large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds into close proximity in expanding urban and suburban areas. Other important transformations included the introduction and spread of new, mass technologies, from the telegraph to the radio to television, which allowed for the rapid transmission of information across great distances and which shifted communication from local to national and even global levels. Taken together these many economic, political, and social transformations represent conditions of what social theorists came to call modernity—urban, technologically advanced and industry-based, multicultural, mass societies. Early sociologists sought to understand the structures and processes that drove these modernist societies, how they were developing and changing, and what benefits and threats they might pose to human well-being, individually and socially.

Since their origins in the Industrial Revolution, anarchism and sociology have had ongoing intersections and engagements with one another. Yet, anarchists have often been excluded from the history of academic disciplines such as sociology, or, where included, marginalized and muted. This contribution critically examines intersections of anarchism and early sociological works by figures such as Durkheim, Weber, Spencer, and
Tönnies on issues of community and social change to rethink both anarchism and sociology. The largely forgotten work of people like Gustav Landauer and Emma Goldman, and the overlooked sociology of Peter Kropotkin, offer interesting touchstones in the current (re)envisioning of anarchy and sociology.

*Community, Society, and Anarchy*

Anarchists argue that for most of human history people have organized themselves collectively to satisfy their own needs. Peter Kropotkin notes that the state, the formalized rule of dominant minorities over subordinate majorities, is only one of the forms of social organization, and a minority one in human history at that. Anarchy uncovers and makes visible the presence of the state in people’s everyday lives, including the internal socialization of the state’s rules, ideas, and practices. For anarchists, people are quite capable of developing forms of organization to meet specific needs and desires. As sociological anarchist Colin Ward (1973, 28) suggests, “given a common need, a collection of people will...by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation – this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of order external authority could provide.” Order arrived at in this fashion is also preferable for anarchists since it is not rigidified and imposed, often by force, on situations and contexts different than those from which it emerged, and for which it may not be suited or welcomed. Self-determined order is flexible and evolving, where necessary giving way to other agreements and forms of order depending on peoples’ needs and the circumstances confronting them at specific intersections in time and place.

Anarchistic social organization is conceived of as a network of local voluntary groupings. Anarchists propose a decentralized society, without a central political body, in which people manage their own affairs free from any coercion or external authority. These self-governed communes could federate freely at regional (or larger) levels to ensure co-ordination or mutual defense. Their autonomy and specificity must be maintained, however. Each locality will decide freely which social, cultural, and economic arrangements, to pursue. Rather than a pyramid, anarchist associations would form a web. This order is both desired by anarchists for the future, but is also actively created in the present (Ward 1973).

Anarchists look to the aspects of people’s daily lives that suggest life without rule by external authorities and which might provide a