Journal Editors' Introduction

RICHARD J.F. DAY and SARITA SRIVASTAVA

Please join us in celebrating the first issue of *Affinities: a Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action.* Our hope is that this journal will be a space where conversations and shared projects among academic, activist, and artistic communities can flourish. Many of us are simultaneously academics, activists and artists; however, there are few spaces where these connections are acknowledged and cultivated. This issue, on Autonomous Spaces, begins the kind of inquiry we hope to see continue in this journal. How are activists, academics and artists crossing the historical boundaries of progressive politics, identities and theories? What are the common paths of groups, movements, communities, and peoples engaged in challenging and creating sustainable alternatives to state and corporate forms? What are the inequalities and forms of oppression that trouble these experiments? We are committed to publishing both academic and activist writing on these and other questions, as well as other forms of cultural production.

Starting a new journal is a tremendous amount of work, and we owe many thanks to members of the editorial board for their guidance in setting up the policies and practices of the journal, to Sean Haberle for his organizational help, to Kevin Stranack, Mohamed Abdou, and especially Eric de Domenico, for their work on the website, layout, and design. We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Enda Brophy, who has put together an excellent cast of contributors on the topic of autonomous spaces, and has been a tireless and joyful co-worker. And finally, we must thank all the contributors to this inaugural issue – their diverse contributions on autonomous spaces have helped to make *Affinities* the kind of space we had envisioned.

We'd like to hear your thoughts, not only about this issue, but also about ideas for future issues. You can make comments on articles via the website <http://www.affinitiesjournal.org>, or send them to us at affinities@queensu.ca. To learn more about our policies and the project in general, see the 'About' item at <http://www.affinitiesjournal.org>

Richard J.F. Day and Sarita Srivastava, 'Journal Editors' Introduction' (Editorial).
Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 p. 1.

The Voices of Autonomy

ENDA BROPHY

The concept of autonomy has been a resurgent theme amongst radical social movements over the last few decades. Beginning with resistance to manifold forms of exploitation and oppression, autonomy is the practice by which radical social movements subvert them and construct concrete democratic alternatives. The first issue of *Affinities* is dedicated to the spaces created when the concept of autonomy becomes practice.

The notion of autonomy has guided experiments in social organization that are wondrously diverse in what they resist, the forms they take, and in their outcomes. This collection is composed of voices arising from struggles within and against homophobia, the environmental devastation wrought by car-culture, IMF- and State-induced poverty, the commodification of culture, the hetero-normativity of corporate media, labour precarity, patriarchy, racism, and still other forms of social marginalization and exploitation. While not exhaustive, the struggles discussed here therefore cover a broad range of movements organizing at different nodes, in different spaces.

A key quality these contributors bring to our attention is the varying forms that emerge from the creation of autonomous spaces. From Italy, activists from the *centri sociali occupati e autogestiti* (the occupied and self-organized social centres, or csoa) movement speak of the occupation of urban areas, of the attempt to set up social hubs that allow communities to explore ways of meeting their own needs, outside of the circuits of the state and corporate forms. Brought together in a "virtual roundtable," Argentinean workers speak from the network of worker-recovered enterprises, illustrating how labour does not need capital to run a factory. We receive a valuable first-hand account of two spaces of sexual autonomy, the Queeruption event and the Okupa Queer squat in Barcelona, and a dispatch from within North American urban cycling cultures describes the creation of antagonistic and livable alternatives to the suicidal endgame of car culture. Two urban activists reflect on their time in the Zapatista *caracoles*, arguably one of the largest autonomous spaces in existence, where entire generations teach each other the lessons of democracy, self-sufficiency, and solidarity. An analysis of slash fiction speaks of the autonomous zones already present within our converged and concentrated mediatic landscape, reminding us that independent media are as much about creating and sustaining subversive cultures as they are about reporting on the struggles those cultures create.

All of the pieces in this first issue of Affinities, then, are voices emerging from the daily struggles to create spaces that are 'other than' those of constituted power, the voices of autonomy. While disparate, these struggles are not necessarily disconnected however. As a delegate's piece on the fourth Latin American Conference of Popular Autonomous Organizations (held earlier this year in

Enda Brophy, 'Voices of Autonomy' (Editorial). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 2-4.

Montevideo) shows, autonomous experiences can reach out and connect--across struggles, cultures, and continents. What these struggles have and produce in common is not only the manner in which their self-definition aims to resist the practices of domination, but real experiments in social relationships that create alternatives to those practices. As Hollon and Lopez suggest, autonomy "is a project rooted in both community and rebellion, where community-based resistance redefines the terms on which relationship building occurs." Autonomy, then, is not merely a practice of refusal, but a real production of alternatives.

The way in which these concrete alternatives are defined is a recurring theme for our contributors. Carlsson's piece tells us of outlaw cyclists whose DIY approach eschews both car-culture *and* the recent and persistent niche marketing to cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts. Similarly, for B. Vanelslander the Okupa Queer squat in Barcelona was as much about resisting the "*peseta rosa*, or gay consumerism, and the neo-liberal appropriation of sexual identity" as it was about fighting homophobia. This relationship between autonomous movements and more established left-wing politics (be it discourses of consumer sovereignty, established trade unionism, state reform movements, or others) is a fraught yet defining one, always present, always bringing with it a series of difficult ethical questions surrounding autonomy, solidarity, and responsibility.

There is a danger, for example, of conflating the goal of creating a safe, anti-oppressive space with the search for an impossible purity. If respect for difference is a defining moment for movements creating autonomous spaces, most of the voices in this collection acknowledge that relationships with the spaces outside one's own are a perennial challenge. As Steve Wright's translations of work by social centre activists show, social centres can be ripped apart by discussions over how to relate to the people who attend cultural events but are not otherwise involved in the protection or organization of the space. Moreover, these spaces are not idyllic islands free of oppression or contestation. Social centres can become no better than affordable versions of nightclubs, circulating up-and-coming cultural forms for general consumption. Queer squats can become the setting for forms of bi- and transphobia. Worker cooperatives can morph into scaled-down replicas of the hierarchical relationships enacted within multinational corporations. The membrane separating each of these instances from what they refuse to identify as is in a continual process of constitution and degeneration, a perpetually present part of the ethical and organizational challenges confronted by the subjects creating these autonomous spaces.

The act of bringing attention to and reflecting upon the autonomous spaces created through these struggles is at once an ethical and strategic move for politically committed scholars, theoretically committed activists, and anybody in between. Ethical because it resists a fascination with established, or constituted, forms of power in favour of emphasizing the moments in which that power is ruptured and anti-oppressive practices enacted. Strategic because it is only through inquiry into the real alternatives created during such struggles that we

become aware of our potential and can therefore protect and multiply such spaces.

Despite their problems, these spaces of autonomy are precious reminders of alternate ways to live a life, of the very real moments where resistance to constituted power generates subversion and new democracies. While dramatically different from each other, each also carries lessons for the others. Hollon and Lopez's article asks the question of how practices from one autonomous space can be imported into another setting, demonstrating the manner in which forms of struggle tend to circulate from one space to another. B. Vanelslander's piece reflects on the merits of permanence versus temporariness in the creation of autonomous spaces. Rambukkana considers the role of alternative cultural spaces within movements fighting to escape oppression. Finally, all autonomous spaces must be protected, an effort which, as Ciccarelli makes clear in his interview, often involves massive expenditures of time and resources. Furthermore, we need to be wary of the difference in privilege between those who may play at creating autonomous spaces and those for whom their creation arises out of naked necessity, a need to do or die. The existence of this latter continuum raises questions (largely unaddressed in these essays, and therefore requiring further inquiry and discussion) of the mutual obligations of solidarity binding such spaces, moments, and practices.

Rather than hoping to achieve an unlikely synthesis, the best way to confront the questions brought up here is to listen to these voices. They are the best guides to the composition of the struggles they emerge out of, to their successes and failures, joys and sorrows, inspirations and fears. By listening to the voices of autonomy we accomplish a double step that is also amongst the goals of this journal: to reflect on actions and act on reflections in the creation of spaces that show us another way.

Long Live Temporariness: Two Queer Examples of Autonomous Spaces

B. VANELSLANDER

Description of both projects

Okupa Queer was a squatting project that was concretized in the occupation of a wonderful sunny "palace" in Montgat, Barcelona. The squat was opened in the summer of 2004 and was evacuated by the police in the early spring of 2005. During this period, occupants came and went; some of them stayed several weeks or months, others came by for just a few days. Usually, five to twenty people lived in the Okupa Queer at the same time, having their own room or sharing it with a few other persons.

The general idea was to have a safe space for queers who wanted to live together in a squat free from homophobia and machismo. From the preparation till the very end, there were several conflicts and power shifts. As in many squats, they arose from different characters and differing viewpoints on the scale and the openness of the squat: the contrast between a closed community and a social centre and between "inhabitants" and "guests". However, many conflicts were also linked with gender, sexuality and violence. In dealing with these problems, it became obvious that the content of the word "queer" had been understood in different ways by different people.

Apart from the living project, a few workshops took place at the squat, as well as two parties during the last weeks of occupation. Also, most meetings for the preparation of Queeruption 8 Karcelona[1] were held there, but only one to three of the inhabitants participated in them.

Queeruption is a squatting project too, but generally lasts a week or ten days. Sometimes the occupied space(s) already exist(s) as an occupied social centre (e.g. Afrika/ De Zwijger in Amsterdam), sometimes the space is squatted shortly in advance for the specific purpose of holding the festival (e.g. in Barcelona). Usually there are one or two-dozen organizers, whereas 200 to 300 people participate in the actual event. Especially when everything is concentrated on one site, it is an intense experience of many people sharing most activities together.

The aim of Queeruption is to create an 'opportunity for Queers of all genders and sexualities to gather, celebrate [their] queerness and diversity – to share experiences, fun stories, ideas, [to] listen and learn from each other.'[2] It is a DIY (Do-It-Yourself) festival with general meetings, workshops, (sex) parties and performances. In addition, one or more political actions are organised outside the squat.
Queeruption is not a long-term living community project, but a concept that is repeatedly put into practice for a limited period of time. It is comparable to Ladyfest: basically anyone can take up the general idea and search for people who want to organize a Queeruption in their own town. This has happened 8 times since 1998: in London (twice), New York, San Francisco, Berlin, Amsterdam, Sydney and Barcelona. The next edition will take place in August 2006 in Tel Aviv.

B. Vandelslander, 'Long Live Temporariness: Two Queer Examples of Autonomous Spaces' (Article). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 5-11.

Communicative Strategies, Sources and Methodology

Okupa Queer had a mailing list that was used several months before the actual occupation until shortly after the eviction. It was mainly used to inform international contacts about the development of the project and to invite them to come and participate, rather than a means of communication between the occupants, who were seeing each other regularly, after all. In order not to discourage potentially interested people, problems and conflicts were not communicated on this list, with one or two exceptions near the end, when physically violent situations had occurred.

Queeruption has a general website, which includes an open publishing system for activity announcements, meeting reports, local news etc. In addition, every single edition has a separate website, an elaborate mailing list and a reader/guide/fanzine that is distributed during the festival itself. A comparison of the Sydney and Karcelona readers proves that information, statements and ideas are transmitted and re-evaluated from one version of the event to another. Some texts are copied (and translated), some are left out or changed and some are added according to the specific local context.

Indymedia is used by both projects, but mainly to communicate "serious" and concrete matters like occupation, danger of eviction and external political actions. In the case of Queeruption, some personal accounts have been posted as well. (e.g. on http://ovl.indymedia.org and http://indymedia.nl)

I used these means of communication as sources for this research. In the first place, however, it is based on participative observation during and after my own experiences in the Okupa Queer (autumn and winter 2004-2005) and Queeruption 6 Amsterdam (June 2004). Due to the intense character of the experiences, I mainly participated when present in the space, and observed mostly when there was more spatial and/or temporal distance. In the case of Okupa Queer, this means I tended to evaluate my experiences most thoroughly when I had left the squat for shorter or longer periods. Analysing Queeruption 6 happened entirely after the event.

As a result of this approach, this paper does not pretend to be objective, which in my opinion is in any case impossible if one wants to grasp the meaning of such radical and potentially life-changing projects. If one wants to live a queer time and space, it seems that not much time and space is left for clear-cut analysis and structured contemplation during the process itself.

Since the definition of "queer" is constantly being negotiated, I will not pre-define the term. Rather, I will let the reader discover how it has been used and defined in the two examples of autonomous spaces, which I will now further describe.

What the Fuck is Queer?

In the Okupa Queer, most inhabitants and guests were unfamiliar with queer theory. Nor were they very interested in exchanging written discussions and information on the subject. After a while it became clear that both successive "leaders"[3] had

defined "queer" in the first place as a combination of (male) homosexuality and a punk identity, lifestyle and appearance. Biphobia, heterophobia and transphobia were the direct results of this. Although the rejection of heterophobia had been the stake of a power shift, it was later taken up again by the very same new "leader". Later still, he trivialized it again by supporting a violent and macho straight man who was unwanted by the vast majority of the inhabitants. Clearly, there was no common agreement to reject physical violence and support its victims. On the contrary, victims and other people feeling unsafe were not taken seriously by everybody; sometimes they were even ridiculed and blamed. The majority of the inhabitants wanted to evict the aggressive man, but seemed powerless to do so.

Furthermore, the interdependence of queer politics and feminism was disagreed with by some men. In general, power was mainly in the hands of white males. If deconstructing gender categories had ever been a common agreement, self-definition was hardly respected or accepted in relation to pronoun use or non-mixed (sub-) spaces. Apart from ignorance and/or genuine transphobia, this was also caused by the small number of trans people involved in the event and the lack of cooperation and support among them.

In spite of the theoretical disinterest, it is remarkable how in many conflicts in the Okupa Queer, political arguments were used, whereas their personal dimensions were not recognized or admitted. Since the meaning of "queer" or queer politics had never been clearly defined or agreed upon, attempts at exclusion were easily motivated by saying some person or someone's idea of the project was not queer. In the case of heterophobia, people would change their opinions on the subject depending on the person(s) concerned. As for (trans)gender identities, theoretical discussions on "queer" eventually brought the second "leader" to admit at one point (in private) that his desired project was not in fact queer. He explicitly resisted radical gender deconstruction and had no interest in living together with dykes, transmen or anyone without a penis. However, this did not result in yet another power shift. By that time, the habit of house meetings had been completely abolished, since they had always ended badly. Also, more and more inhabitants had become discouraged and had left or planned to leave, making place for new people who were invited by the "leader" and therefore supported him. The communal squatting project had already been evolving further and further away from any queer or even anarchist ideal. Instead of creating a safe space for queers, the Okupa Queer was eventually a story of power dynamics and exclusions among different kinds of queers and other squatters.

Putting the Queer Ideal into Practice

As previously mentioned, Queeruption is organized by a group of people who build on a tradition of similar events and transmitted information. Furthermore, the group negotiates what they understand by "queer" at the beginning of the preparations (as I witnessed within the organizing group of Queeruption Karcelona). The somehow common perspective developed was then further communicated to all participants through the website, mailing lists and zines, but also during the general meetings that took place at the beginning of each day.

For instance, at several general meetings in Amsterdam, the principle of gender self-definition was brought up. Since new people arrived every day, it was explained a few times that one of the sleeping spaces was non-mixed for women who felt this need. During the sex party, there was also a women-only space, the boundaries of which were a bit harder to define. For it was stressed that people had the right to define themselves as women, regardless of their biological gender. In addition, during one of the first meetings, somebody reminded the reunion that one should not assume anyone's gender identity based on their appearances and one should consequently not presume to know which pronoun any person prefers. Proposed solutions were: ask people what they prefer, use new ones (like *ze* and *hir*) or try to avoid any use of pronouns, especially for people who do not want to define their gender. Repeated references were made to previous Queeruptions where trans issues had often been dealt with, thus showing that these issues were complicated, but had to be taken seriously. This theme was reflected in the topics "fuck gender" and "respect" in next edition's zine, a text that was largely copied and translated for Queeruption Karcelona.[4]

But even this transmission of information did not result in an instant and complete respect of self-definition during Queeruption Amsterdam. In English, gender-specific pronouns are mainly used when speaking about someone. When this person was not present, one did not always seek the opportunity or feel the need to negotiate pronouns. In Spanish and French, people can easily define their own linguistic gender. Many, but not all queeruptors respected other people's personal choices. Sometimes people were even corrected when using a masculine adjective that did not correspond with their biological gender. However, a process of consciously dealing with gender in language could be observed, especially in the attempts of avoiding gender-specific expressions. Personally, I experienced Queeruption Amsterdam as an enormous challenge not to assume or even define people's identity (especially their gender), either in language or in thought. If queers want the broader society to break down gender boundaries, I experienced Queeruption as an occasion to start with myself.

As for sexuality, I felt a general atmosphere of non-assumption as well. Biphobia and heterophobia were clearly rejected, and this was again made explicit in the Sydney and Barcelona readers. A testimony on Indymedia Holland describes the discovery of the writer's own bisexuality and an example of an attempt not to assume the preferences of the girls he liked.

Violent incidents also happen during Queeruptions and the organizers do not deny their (possible) occurrence. They do however clearly reject violence and agree not to tolerate it. As the Sydney zine suggested, "[a]nyone engaging in violent behaviour – such as fighting, sexual assaults, threats, harassment – can be thrown off the site.'[5] Apart from expressing their clear position on the subject and thus creating an atmosphere of intolerance to violence, they try to manage it by additional measures. Every day, a few persons act as support people. They can be addressed by people who are unable or unwilling to deal with a personal violation alone or with the help of their friends. To me, it was not always clear who these support people were, but it was also stressed that anyone could (and should) take up responsibility when confronted with violent situations, their victims and/or offenders.[6]

Transversal Issues: Consumerism and Language Hegemony

Queer politics have arisen from (among other things) criticism against lesbian and gay identity politics. Bisexual and transgendered people have attacked their dichotomous and fixed identity concepts. Black and poor people criticized the invisibilized normality of their whiteness and middle-class positions, and demanded greater attention to the complex character of identities. As a result, transverseness is an inherent but by no means exclusive part of queer theory and politics. Post-colonialism, feminism, anarchism are just some of the movements that have been contributing to this development.

It must be noted that both queer theory and politics have not developed this transverseness to an equally large extent on all levels. The relationship between gender, sexuality and race has been dealt with quite extensively (especially in North-American contexts), whereas the interest in economic issues is much smaller. Neither of the queer spaces discussed here made any significant attempt at developing new economic alternatives. They tended to use those already practiced in many urban squats: In the DIY (Do-It-Yourself) spirit they would recycle food and clothes, set up free-shops and prepare vegetable spreads instead of using prefab ones. Naturally, these practices did not make the projects entirely autonomous and independent of capitalism. They are, however, given an additional significance by criticizing *la peseta rosa*, or gay consumerism, and the neo-liberal appropriation of sexual identity.

In both projects, translations were used during the reunions. In the relatively small community of Okupa Queer, meetings were mostly bilingual (English and Spanish), causing them to last longer but making the job of the translators easier. After some time there were no meetings anymore and all communication was informal. Language groups began to establish, however not rigidly, since most people spoke more than one language. Besides English, French gained a more dominant position as more and more friends of the "leader" were invited to live in the squat. Most of the time, there was only one person who spoke Catalan. While being in his own region, within the squat he formed a somewhat isolated minority in this respect. These issues were rarely discussed, the problem was less and less commonly recognized and no structural solutions were proposed.

At Queeruption Amsterdam, the consciousness of Anglo-Saxon hegemony already existed after discussions at previous editions. Still, meetings were facilitated in English, but non-native speakers were asked to facilitate. Simultaneous translations were provided by multilingual queers, who became stressed near the end of the event. In spite of their efforts, more and more people who did not understand English did not attend the meetings anymore and were thus excluded from the decision making process. Some of the tired translators then decided to facilitate the last general meeting in Spanish. The aim of this language power shift was to make English native speakers realize what the reunions must be like for, for example, most Spaniards and Italians, and to make it visible that English native speakers were actually a hegemonic minority. It was suggested that every meeting should be facilitated in a different language everyday. I do not know what happened in Sydney, but in Barcelona it was decided to challenge the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Queeruption

and facilitate all meetings in Spanish. Maybe the suggestion made in Amsterdam will be put into practice in Tel Aviv.

Conclusions Concerning Temporality

In my personal experience, radical and relatively new politics such as queer politics have been extremely difficult to concretize in long-term, fixed spaces in which people try to share a political project and daily life at the same time. Power structures and personal conflicts can intertwine with the political agenda to an extreme extent, since people have to negotiate politics concerning their identity and safety in their own home. There is little time and space to which one might withdraw if one wants to remain part of the project.

I am of course aware of the many differences between the queer spaces I have briefly described. On the one hand, the Queer Okupa had to deal with problems that occur in many long-term squat communities. On the other hand, specific problems related to queer issues could perhaps be explained by reducing them to misunderstandings, caused by a mere lack of theoretical information and practical experience in queer politics, as well as a lack of theoretical and structural preparation (such as mission statements, including definitions of "queer", decision making, violence etc).

I do not intend to completely reduce the difference in success to the difference of temporality, nor do I want to discourage people who want to engage in any long-term autonomous queer spaces. I do conclude, however, that the concept of creating an autonomous queer space for a limited but repeatable period of time has interesting effects.

First, by organizing Queeruption in different places, different local issues and language hegemonies are dealt with. Secondly, by gathering a mass of people with similar interests, perspectives change when a very diverse minority becomes a temporary and still very diverse majority. Although queer theory rejects the protective sense of belonging to any identity group,[7] it is valuable to have the opportunity, from time to time, to raise one's self-confidence as well as political motivation. Thirdly, participating in a queer space for a short but intense period of time enables radical (inter-)personal experimentation, inquiry and change. But also on a broader level, it permits the exchange of ideas and their practical implementation. Last but not least, this approach limits discouragement and exhaustion. After ten days of Queeruption, one is of course tired, but not necessarily discouraged, quite the contrary. A next edition can be organised after sufficient time and by a group of (partly) new people. At the same time, a certain balance of continuity and development is maintained, through the transmission of information of former editions and lessons from former mistakes.

Thanks to these characteristics, Queeruption succeeds in transcending its own temporariness and can bring the concretization of queer politics a little closer every time.

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Notes

[1] *Karcelona* is the name by which some radical leftist people in Barcelona call their city. It contains the Spanish word for prison, *carcel*. Like an ad-busting, it criticises the tourist-oriented image of Barcelona as a fashionable, hip and happy city and emphasises the fact that there are also less pleasant things, e.g. real estate speculation and violent squat evictions.
[2] See Anon. (2005). "Q7 Sydney info-book - Feb 16-23, 2005."
[3] Since the community initially tried to live anarchist decision-making through general meetings and consensus, there were no official leaders. However, there were of course more and less powerful people and even one person at the time who was more or less considered as having most power and/or authority. This position was, among many other things, related to the amount of time he had been engaged in the project and actually been living in the squat.
[4] See Anon. (2005). "Fuck Gender" and Anon. (2005). "Respect."
[5] Ibid.
[6] See Anon. (2005). "Conflicts and Personal Violation."
[7] See Tomolillo, Sylvie. "Queer: Ce n'est pas normale!"

A Window onto Italy's Social Centres

Assembled and Translated by STEVE WRIGHT

The following materials were translated for the final issue of a journal that never appeared. They provide some snapshots from the social centres in the first half of the nineties.

'Forte Prenestino'—Alba Solaro[1]

This account of a prominent Roman squat was published in 1992, as part of a longer piece concerning the movement of social centres. Other essays in the book discuss the alternative music scene and cyberculture in Italy. As its name suggests, the Forte had originally been built a century ago as a military base, and stands on eight hectares of land; it was occupied on May Day in 1986, and has played host to concerts with audiences sometimes approaching the 10,000 mark.

'All of a sudden, we were inside, "running" the place—we who had never managed anything except our unemployment, our homelessness, our own little patch, our streets. And it was precisely the problem of management which soon forced upon us a debate which if experimental, contradictory and at times even boring, was nonetheless very important. In this way the management assembly was set up, because we felt ourselves to be a committee, or a collective, with our own identity to claim and advance. But an open structure, not reducible to this or that political area; also because we believe, then as now, both in the valorisation of diversity, and a trajectory of liberation outside monolithic structures and party lobbies.'

Together with the management assembly the first cultural initiatives were undertaken: language courses, seminars on street theatre, a puppet theatre, a cinema space . . . and the first concerts by groups closely associated with the do-it-yourself (self-produced) circuit. Like Leoncavallo in Milan, the Forte could count upon an enormous edifice which held many possibilities. As the spirits which 'animated' it were many: from punks, who had pushed the concert programs, the influx of hardcore, and the contacts with the DIY circuit; to people (not only autonomists) coming from the various political experiences of the seventies, who brought with them debates over nuclear power, anti-militarism and third worldism, the new left, censorship, psychiatry and so on. Almost immediately however the Forte found itself forced to confront an issue which still today remains a central node in the debate within the self-managed spaces: namely, the relationship between 'consumers' and the social centre.

'This debate represented one of the major moments in Forte's growth, even if it was full of contradictions and dust-ups. On the one hand there were those who proposed replicating what happened in the social centres of northern Italy. In other words, to pay for a ticket/subscription during concerts, as some sort of testimony of participation in the life of the occupation. On the other hand, the awareness that, if digging only into our own pockets was a failure, everyone who had some relationship with the social centre needed to take responsibility, but in a dialectical

Steve Wright (trans.), 'A Window Onto Italy's Social Centres' (Articles and Interview).
Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 12-20.

rather than forced way. This debate, which was very vocal and even polarised on occasion, halted the Forte's activity for more than a month, precisely because none of the realities within the centre was able to win a majority . . .'

'Trieste: Chatting about the Social Centres'—Innominabile

This article, which has been slightly shortened, is taken from issue 67 of the Italian anarchist magazine Germinal *(May-September 1995). Trieste may well be the most difficult Italian city for squatters; at that point in time, the Collettivo Spazi Sociali, one of whose activists is interviewed below, had yet to hold an occupied space for more than a few days.*

Germinal Between the various occupations [of 1994-5], you held a range of negotiations with the City Council, in which you were well and truly screwed over. Would you do it again, or have you had a change of heart?

CSS Activist Look . . . As you know, the debate over this problem within the antagonistic movement in all its components (autonomia, anarchists, . . .) has been rather ferocious in recent years, provoking fights and fallings-out . . . The problem arises from a reflection which everyone involved in the social centres has made, the problem of your real possibility to sustain these places and to make them function well. The point made by a section of the social centres is this: if I can have a place without the terror of the cops knocking on the door every day, then I can do things I couldn't otherwise—for example have music and films within the occupied place. Whereas from a very practical point of view, if they evict me then these possibilities are lost. So here in Trieste it's clear that if fifteen of you go to occupy or to initiate a campaign directed at the Council, and you don't have a force behind you, you won't get anywhere.

To my mind the social centres are no longer the pockets of resistance that they were in the eighties, when they gathered the anger of a certain section of youth and catalysed it into a whole series of cultural realities—a process at which they were very successful. Now in the nineties they are configuring themselves differently, as public spheres within the cities which are networked and, while retaining their own individuality, are acting in common over a series of demands, such as for one or better for two, three, four, five spaces . . .

Therefore the social centres can, within the now endemic and irreversible crisis of the welfare state, become the catalysts for certain primary needs like housing, income, as well as moving on to questions such as heroin and social needs. With heroin an anti-prohibitionist discourse has been advanced for years, while on the other hand the social centres have always represented an alternative to marginalisation. Then, in a city like Trieste, with a high percentage of

people aged over sixty, the centres could conceivably provide meeting spaces for them as well.

Germinal — To my mind the fracture within the occupations movement is much broader than you suggest: not so much on how to obtain the space, since within the anarchist social centres there isn't a myth about occupying—anything but! The division is based above all on how to live the space and how to utilise it. On one side there are those who want to become a public sphere within the cities, on the other there are those who see the occupied place as a means above all to satisfy their own individual needs, for example for housing, sociality . . .

CSS Activist — Yes, but I'm not ruling that out.

Germinal — OK! But beyond this already-substantial difference, there are also divisions over many other questions—first and foremost over work. So if on one side some social centres seek to collaborate with the COBAS[2], with the self-organised groups and similar realities within the world of work, other places are critical of work in itself.

CSS Activist — Let's be clear: the refusal of work is now the patrimony of the whole antagonistic movement. Cultural differences within the social centres are another matter, even if the labels autonomist or anarchist point to an outmoded dualism. Within our group, for example, there are convinced anarchists.

Germinal — Whatever the labels, you can see the differences in concrete things. Like the difference between the meeting of social centres led by Leoncavallo of Milan and Officina 99 of Naples, and the group of occupied places which met in Turin at El Paso to produce a national manifesto against the legalisation of squats. In a word, there was and still is such a division.

CSS Activist — I don't know, perhaps I don't perceive these things. For example, on the question of work: what would be the differences?

Germinal — In some social centres they talk of 'working less, everybody working' . . .

CSS Activist — Which in fact means 'working very little, everybody working'.

Germinal — OK, but the concept is still there. And then there is the discussion of a guaranteed minimum income. In some occupied spaces there is a discourse which, if still-embryonic, has been developing for some years, and which makes a radical critique of work, which it sees as exploitation and slavery. For example last year in Turin, on the occasion of May Day, there was a national meeting against work, and there will be another one this June in Bologna. Instead of talking about working less, there is an immediate and total release [*affrancamento*] from work. While this discourse is still in its early days (and not forgetting that the refusal of work is as old as work itself), its exponents don't hold

dialogues with the COBAS, they don't make demands. Instead they seek to advance individual paths of liberation from work. As you can see, it's a very different approach.

CSS Activist I'll try to be clearer. Above all there is the guaranteed income. More accurately I'm talking about a citizenship minimum income, which means that for the mere fact of existing I have the right to the minimum means of subsistence, so that I can survive. If I can't at present overthrow this system, then this system must at least give me housing, income . . . This discourse over the guaranteed income is also interesting because it can be extended to a whole series of subjects such as immigrants and those with AIDS. Therefore in a situation where I'm unable to make a revolution, I at least try to obtain some minimum objectives in order to keep alive. This is something over which there are often disagreements, and which requires further discussion.

On the concept of work: bloody hell, let's be clear for a second! Work understood as things I'm able to do of my own choosing [*di per se*] is different to this crap that capitalism has created. The discourse is that I must free myself from wage labour, and I think that everyone is agreed on this. In all the social centres, even the most 'punkified', people work, but they do it for themselves.

Germinal It's logical that to survive you must do things, no one likes to be inactive. But work is something else.

CSS Activist We could call it human activity.

Germinal Yes, but even if we change the name, the approaches within the social centres will still vary. On one side there are those who want a 'minimum income' and on the other there are those who refuse it, because they see it as one of the major pillars of social peace. For example, you can see what's happened in some European countries where masses of young people do nothing more than wait for their monthly subsidy without batting an eyelid and without rebelling.

CSS Activist The minimum wage is not an unemployment subsidy, it is a citizenship minimum income which leads to the second point, which is that liberation from work allows you to engage in really autonomous activity within the communities where you live. There are interesting examples like the Pedro social centre in Padua, which has done all this work with the nomad camps, and succeeded amongst other things in winning those people the right to remain in Italy. And it was this experiment which led to collective projects together with the Roma to establish some minimum services.

Germinal Another thing which has led to this division is the legalisation of occupied spaces. The most spectacular case was in Rome, where some social centres had been gathering signatures together with other associations (including, it's rumoured, the boy scouts) to be granted the places they had occupied, in exchange for a more or less

symbolic rent, because their spaces were socially useful (a notion of social utility which, having been recognised by the City Council, is very debatable!). At the same time, other social centres which stood aside from this exercise in official approval now face eviction. As has happened elsewhere in Europe, legalisation leads to a division between the good and the bad: those who negotiate with the Council are good, and those who refuse to do so are bad. For example in Rome, the Pirateria di Porta social centre was evicted a few days after leaving the coordinating committee of local social centres.

CSS Activist

Look, the Pirateria story went a bit differently, and the social centres which did accept this 'procedure' did not fail to show solidarity with those that were evicted. I was in Rome the day after the eviction and all the social centres went to show their solidarity. In any case it's clear that on the question of disputes with the Council you can't place a city like Rome or Turin on the same level as Rovereto . . . So it's logical that in Trieste you carry out what dispute you can. If instead you're in Turin and so strong that you don't care what the Council thinks, that's great, but if there are fifteen of you in Monfalcone (to take a local example),and you've already tried to occupy three thousand times to no avail, and the Council says, 'have this place', what do you do, do you say no? And the fact that in taking it you risk eviction for the places which aren't legalised in Italy is something which has yet to be proved. For example in Padua, Pedro has been legalised for more than a year and the Gramigna squat isn't risking eviction[3].

Germinal

I don't mean that these Roman social centres which collected signatures are wicked bogeymen who don't give a damn if the others are evicted, I'm saying that like it or not the other occupied places are placed in greater risk of eviction as has already happened elsewhere in Europe.

CSS Activist

This line of argument on evictions has yet to be substantiated, and we hope that it never will be. As for good and bad: in respect to whom? If the council administrations, remember that we're talking about politicians, those who have power in the city. If instead you mean in respect to citizens, then this necessarily means in respect of what you do and to your practice.

Germinal

In any case I question the very premise of the Roman agreement. Although, as I said before, I don't hold to any myths about occupied places, this discussion concerns those who have already had an occupied place for years and then, whilst having the strength to defend it, opt nonetheless for legalisation. This strength exists in Rome, it's undeniable, because no-one would dream for example of evicting Forte Prenestino.

CSS Activist

Still, in my opinion, the thing that weighed heavily upon the Roman agreement was the territorial presence of fascists, a frightening presence which luckily doesn't exist anywhere else. And it's pointless recalling how many social centres have been burned down and

attacked there. If here in Trieste every attempt at occupation was met not only by 200 cops but by dozens of fascists armed with monkey wrenches, you'd think twice.

In conclusion I can say that at a certain point you have to think in these terms: we want a social centre, by any means necessary. But this means not only that you're prepared to occupy and to be arrested, but also that you've come to terms with the fact that if you're in the shit, you need at least to float, if not to swim . . .

'Flexibility'—Morion Social Centre[4]

The following is an extract from a longer document written in March 1997 by a social centre based in Venice. Taking as its starting point the spread of casualised working conditions, it argues that those whom the Human Committee in London have recently dubbed the 'quasi-employed' are likely in the near future to become a majority within the working class. True or not for Italy as a whole, such a conclusion is certainly far from implausible for a city whose labour market is regulated by the ebbs and flows of the tourist trade.

Having discussed some of the demands which commonly circulate within the social centres—a shortened social working day, a 'third sector' of self-managed production, and a guaranteed minimum income[5]—its authors turn to the question of organisation:

How can we begin to experiment, around these programmatic elements, with this new class composition's trajectories of struggle and organisation? How to overturn the flexibility, mobility, and casualisation of social labour against the bosses, as the mass worker once overturned the rigidity of work organisation within the assembly line of the taylorist-fordist factory?

We are still on the level of experimentation, but therein lies an enormous potentiality which is as yet unexpressed. This new class composition based upon flexible, precarious, territorially mobile labour courses through the Social Centres in a material sense; the centres are shot through by that social fissure produced by students who are no longer only students, by unemployed people who are no longer simply unemployed, by workers who are no longer wage labourers in a classical sense; the social centres are produced by this new class composition within which—amongst other things—migrant labour power (which is the most disposable, obviously, to the most mobile, flexible and badly paid jobs) holds full citizenship.

In terms of organisational forms, too, everything has yet to be invented and experimented with for this flexible labour power. The classical 'union' form, or the rank and file committee (Cobas) rooted within the workplace, are obsolete organisational formulas, given that this flexible labour power no longer has a classical, fixed, 'place of work'. Some comrades have evoked the epic of the American Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World) at the turn of the century. Perhaps we need our own Wobblies of the dispersed metropoles and the mobile

network of sabotage and territorial counterpower, to construct the foundations of the new bill of rights of the postfordist worker.

Rather than a Cobas, we need an organised autonomous subjectivity, one that finds its common identity and aggregation on a territorial basis, around its own independent space of sociality. Territorially mobile, able to intervene with all means necessary, from legal aid (using what still remains of the labour laws from the fordist period) to boycotts against abuses of power, violations of rights, unregulated forms of exploitation, for the real defence of the new class of workers, from the area of casualised social labour to immigrants.

Why not then set up, starting in each social centre, Wobbly agencies—or better Fobbly agencies (Flexible Workers of the World)—so as to begin to (self)organise on this terrain of flexible and precarious labour?

Agencies that can begin with an enquiry into all the forms of atypical contracts used in the sphere of flexible employed labour: fixed term, part time, apprenticeships, training, seasonal, temping, off the books etc.

Agencies which above all begin with an enquiry into the flexible jobs existing in the specific territory, mapping out the various flexible forms of work and those who employ them, with questionnaires circulated during each social centre's initiatives, with direct interviews, with the realisation that the comrades of the social centres themselves do the most flexible and absurd jobs, but without ever thinking to organise on this front . . .

'Negative/Positive Aspects of the Social Centres'—Senzamedia[6]

During the summer of 1994 a collective of university students conducted an extensive survey within sixteen Roman social centres. The results, which draw upon the reflections of more than 600 respondents, have recently been published on the Internet. Amongst other things, 145 of those surveyed offered written comments concerning the negative as well as positive aspects of the centres; here are the first twenty of them:

- a tendency towards self-reference in initiatives/vitality, possibility of experimenting with new forms of cultural aggregation;
- for better or worse, it's always the same people/it's a non-commercial circuit that develops self-production;
- the privileging, at times, of cultural gatherings/being outside of schemes, including those of the institutional left;
- little politics: difficulties in communicating with people. A certain sectarianism which is starting to disappear/that they exist (there is nothing else in some zones). They are unaffiliated to the parties of the historic left;
- bringing most people together for concerts rather than around political issues/still they make it possible to maintain a political presence in neighbourhoods;
- they can become ghettoes, if they don't also open up to the neighbourhood, to the world outside/a different type of socialisation to that of other meeting places;

- illegality and anti-conformism at all cost/the 'social' and the promotion of new ideas and culture;
- difficulties in inserting themselves in the neighbourhood/political activity (even if ghettoised);
- self-ghettoisation and often, strange to say, difficulties in socialising/anti-fascism;
- sometimes it closes within its own 'area', other times within a conformism which mirrors that which it contests/place of debate, spectacle, politics. Place in which to practice non-conformism;
- the great risk of becoming a mental ghetto, if it has not already done so/they are the only ones who undertake interesting initiatives;
- often more than social centres, they are private centres for a group of friends/fusion of different cultures;
- music/the courses offered and discipline;
- communism/ communism;
- too many people who don't even know why they've come to a social centre/the possibility of participating in alternative initiatives, giving space to otherwise ghettoised realities;
- lack of social and mental opening, at times political obtuseness and a limited possibility of encounter/comunication (particularly at concerts where participation is greater);
- the following: at times intolerance is paramount/social and political commitment;
- very often they are used by many people only as places to drink and smoke dope /the concerts;
- deviation from their ideals /socialising, solidarity, culture (theatre, concerts, cinema);
- generally the initiatives are open to all, but in the end it's always the same people and this ghettoises the situation/musical, cultural and political gatherings. Being together.

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[1] Solaro, Alba. (1992). 'Il cerchio e la saetta: Centri Sociali occupati in Italia', in Carlo Branzaglia et al. *Posse italiane: centri sociali, une cultura giovanile degli anni '90 in Italia*. Florence: Tosca, (pp. 50-2 of 11–68).

[2] Cobas is a rank-and-file Italian union that emerged out of deep disaffection towards the established trade unions in Italy during the late sixties and seventies (Editor's Note).

[3] In fact the Gramigna 'popular centre' would later come under renewed official pressure 'to move on'. And while the autonomists of Pedro expressed their solidarity with Gramigna, their feelings toward that centre and the marxist-leninist-stalinists who occupy it have been distinctly cool (Translator's Note).

[4] Centro Sociale Morion. (1997) "La "flessibilita' e' il nuovo paradigma produttivo."

[5] See Wright, Steve (1995) 'Confronting the Crisis of Fordism.' (First published in *Reconstruction*, No. 6). URL: http://libcom.org/library/confronting-crisis-fordism-steve-wright (September 12, 2006).

[6] Senzamedia. (1997). "Troppe persone non sanno neanche perche' si va in un centro sociale." (No longer online but the table of contents at the moment is still cached in Google.

On the Centri Sociali: Interview With Roberto Ciccarelli

Interviewed and Translated by ENDA BROPHY

Brophy *What in your opinion motivates people to set social centres up? How do they see their activities in relation to states, corporations?*

Ciccarelli When I participated in an occupation in 1994, the project was to find a space for a different kind of sociality in a provincial city that was difficult to live in, rigidly divided as it was between the bourgeois city centre and the illegality - occasionally violent and mafia-inspired - of large parts of the periphery. This space of alternate sociality, at least at the time, was intended not only as a space of aggregation for those excluded from these dominant formations, but for the exploration, even tendentially, of a social experiment that could cut across highly different and complex classes and social subjectivities, a living laboratory of styles of communication, counter-information, and local politics, with the closest possible links to the university and the world of new metropolitan intellectuality.

In Italy, the "institutions" of the state and capital are not so homogenous - at least with respect to the question asked, they are highly differentiated between themselves, and rarely can one speak of fields that are coextensive. Certainly it was this way in the past, when it was the movement that counter-posed itself to the state. Yet it was a different movement back then, that had much different theoretical roots and objectives that no one in Italy is re-proposing today. In the South, too, the relationship between capital and the state remains to be analyzed. From my position, the institutions were taken a bit by surprise - between 1993 and 1997, there was an incredible flowering of occupations and self-organization. Never in my city had such a thing been experienced.

There was formed a relationship of solidarity with the parties of the left (Partito di Rifondazione Comunista and the Verdi, with whom subsequently there were enacted some specific short term political alliances). The press took note of what was happening, and the movement was able to use it (many of those involved in the occupation had developed media experience since the times of the "pantera" student movement in late 1989 and 1990). I cannot deny however, at least as far as my memories of it go, the politically marginal nature of this aggregation, which only with great difficulty found cohesion between the different groups, beyond the urgent

Endy Brophy (trans.), 'On the Centri Sociali: Interview with Roberto Ciccarelli' (Interview). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 21-32.

problems generated by the pursuit of economic survival and of the organization of structures which impeded a longer-term development of the project.

Brophy

Would you like to see the social centre become a generalized social practice or is this a form of struggle for certain groups at certain places and times?

Ciccarelli

It's certainly a project enacted by at a group level, deriving from an analysis of a situation that is determined and circumscribed temporally, and that depends on the experience, the political imaginary and the history of the group itself. I would add that occupying a social centre and, above all, defending it, necessitates a capacity for permanent mobilization. This means that a certain military force for self-defense against violent evictions, assaults by organized crime in the neighbourhood, or from the fascists, is required. There is, therefore, the need for a steward's organization [*servizio d'ordine*] of some kind, and this cannot be conjured up in a matter of days. This can happen in a situation where there are the right prerequisites for maintaining control of the territory, knowing how to behave in certain situations, and creating a protective barrier: knowledge of the neighborhood, the people, the histories, the adversaries. Militants are threatened daily in cities. The struggle is one of individual physical survival before that of the social centre.

It is because of this that I say that a steward's organization is not something that can be conjured up in a day – groups in the South, but also in the larger cities in the centre-north, need time to form themselves in order to confront the daily war on the street, a street upon which one can easily be lost. This is one of the reasons for the terribly high mortality rates of the centri sociali. It isn't possible to find people committed to carrying on street warfare for the rest of their lives.

For the historically established centri, which have a more solid base having already gone through these difficulties and being able to count on a lasting local presence, it is a different story. But the experience of the SC as "militant" and "antifascist", in other words the one you're interested in, has been exhausted. This is above all for one reason: the "militant" that animated it is finished. This social role, which was to constitute a movement external to and antagonistic towards the protected social swathes of the traditional worker's movement (in industrial cities such as Torino or Milan, and in the Veneto and Emilia Romagna regions), or the Italian Communist Party that was besieged in large cities like Rome. In other words, the militant that animated the "movement of '77" and remained the ideal type for the entire social centre experience,

even if it was only an approximation with respect to reality. The "social worker" does not exist any longer, at least in the version given by Toni Negri in his interview on operaismo in 1978 and then reproposed in his *Futuro Anteriore* book of 1990.

This militant organized the security force in his group, let's say he was like Erri De Luca, who in the early seventies was responsible for the steward's organizations for *Lotta Continua* and is today a very well-known writer. He was a professional organizer. I will avoid the theory of expropriation, of the assault on private property, of the occupation of the city, of the interruption of the city's circuit of monetary exchange, all notions that belonged to the theory of the social worker, but which gave way to the figure of the social centre militant who was essentially conservative, barricaded within his small, miserable fortress, obedient to a kind of "neo-tribal" organization (as described by Primo Moroni, someone who studied the Italian movements with the acutest of intelligences after having lived these movements from inside).

The passage from the social worker to the "social centreite" was a cultural regression therefore, as well as a political one. It was the fruit of repression, but also of the fact that the steward's organizations of the various groups in the seventies gradually turned into what would become the armed organizations of the latter half of the decade. This brought repression onto everyone, even those who hadn't chosen armed struggle but who still, along the lines of the social worker, pursued a strategy of existential, territorial and economic reappropriation.

But what remains today? What is left after the social centre "militant" has disappeared? The situation is far more complex. First of all it must be pointed out that the function of the centri sociali has mutated radically. Today the successful ones are integrated into the metropolitan society of the spectacle. In a certain way they function as a business, the work carried out inside is like a cooperative that organizes events and offers them to the public for a certain price in order to finance themselves but also in order to stay within the market. Let's say that work has entered the weak and self-referential world of the social centres. The problem of Capital (in its spectacular form) is posed, and for this reason it forces militants to encounter the harsh reality of post-Fordist labour. Today a militant cannot be a "professional" organizer because their own individual biography is disintegrated into discontinuous and scarcely coordinated segments, just like the work she carries out in the centro sociale, but also as in the rest of the city (like working in a club, organizing concerts, etc).

In social centres in Italy today there is the brutal, violent experience

of rapidly enacted, quickly consumed, and on-demand relationships prefigured and supported by the new labour law. One works to put on projects, to put on "events", one senses the availability of a circuit that offers these, it is all over very quickly, all that's needed is to put on a "night" – the payment is immediate and then one starts with a *tabula rasa* once again. Because of this it is obvious that there is no chance for the militant to perceive oneself as a political subject, and beyond this there is no way that this kind of labour (of which, I repeat, the social centre is just one example) can be condensed into class antagonism, into some kind of action. This subject can be a receptor, the catalyst of an "event" such as a demo in support of a "campaign", but nothing more "dense" or "material" than this.

There is a gaping chasm between this form of activism and the social worker, as there is with the old social centre militant. The new militant, unlike the old and banal iconography of the social worker that has been completely devalued, does not pass his time fighting on the street, keeping capital under attack, but rather seeks an understanding with local institutions, gives in to a kind of paleo-capitalist organization. Antagonism becomes a kind of "wardrobe" to fish from when putting together "events", something that is coherent with this new identity that is integrated with the "scenario" of the urban spectacle. From this there could potentially emerge a critique of the society of the spectacle, one that is obviously critical of post-Fordist labour, of post-Fordist labour law, one that presents a demand for a social wage. But all of this is a long ways away.

For this reason I believe that the centro sociale is no longer a form of struggle to pursue both in itself and for itself. Its function can be important from the point of view of financing, but politically it is by this point secondary, it can function only in a network of subjects that labours in a self-coordinating fashion. It is animated by many levels, through many different people and activities. In another context the centro sociale could be absolutely flexible, volatile, an impermanent organization, and the activity of the movement would no longer have its center in the "centro sociale", which ought to be used only in some cases, precisely because it is by this point difficult to keep alive, it costs too much, there is a need for too many people, there is a huge stress associated with defending it.

In short I'm describing the ideology of the social centre, marked by the ideology of spontaneity, of the "libertarian" ideology of the antagonism against the state so as to live in a world "without the state", perhaps even proclaiming a "return to nature", a tribal one to be precise, where there are only nomads that move through the metropolis, armed one against the other, certainly free of capital

(but how?), but obsessed with the need for survival. The contiguity of this ideology with a certain anarchist offshoot of liberalism (like that of Robert Nozick) has been noted by many, but not examined.

I believe it ought to undergo some scrutiny. Spontaneity is certainly fundamental. The occupation of centri sociali is a spontaneous gesture of insubordination against the real order of urban and social metropolitan institutions. Adopting the position of spontaneity against the state, of the "natural" model of life against the "statist" one becomes part of the social centre identity, which occasionally is connected to technological superfluities (such as no copyright movements, hacking, etc), and occasionally with tribal or group belongings. The call to spontaneity finds in virtuality as it does in identity, in the ideology of telematic immediacy as in the group belonging against the state, notable kinds of integration. We should be careful however: the ideology of spontaneity does not necessarily constitute an anti-state, but rather a society "outside" of the state. The cultivated spontaneist has French anthropological models or, something that annoys me, the Deluze and Guattari of *A Thousand Plateaus*, etc, as reference points. The spontaneist in the know studies the Frankfurt School, the protest Marcuse, the use of technology in order to achieve a union between primary and secondary natures, the phylogenetic and the ontogenetic, the psychic and the physical. The "spontaneist" in other words, wants to live outside and against the state, in a republic of self-sufficient autonomous communities, likely in the countryside, outside of the metropolises, but even within them. He lives his alienation as separation, as identity, a flag to rally around. This ideology, one that is quite widespread in Italy, connects with quite sophisticated themes and important philosophers the reception of whom, in Italy, was in my opinion shamefaced. There has been formed an editorial market, "currents of thought" that claim this "sorelo-nietzschiean" legacy of spontaneism, to be adopted against capital. I don't want to be polemical with people I don't know and whose intellectual and political path I am not interested in, but only to point out that the spontaneist "militant" of the social centre is the incarnation of this ideology of spontaneism. His maxim is: "everything now and right away", which is very similar to another cry "everything and free." Surrealism and fancy. Watch out for that which is claimed to always be easy, for those who claim that all that is needed exists in nature already, we just need to take it. To answer your question: the contingency that sees a group occupy a centro sociale is elevated to necessity, the constitutive factor of an experience of "antagonism" which finds in spontaneism and ideology its culmination.

Brophy *Do you see the centri sociali as prefiguring alternative ways of life, or is this a transitory form?*

Ciccarelli

Without a doubt, at least in the manner in which we've known them to exist since the nineties, they are a transitory form of struggle. The way in which one lives in a social centre is, outside of certain moments of struggle and extremely acute conflict with institutions and police forces, very difficult, hard, occasionally merciless, in my view not overly gratifying. I think social centres have remained in the middle: neither a transitory form of struggle nor a prefiguring of a new way of living. At least in their older, "militant" incarnation they never resolved the question. Today, they are very different - large businesses that organize events, mass aggregation - they are managed quite professionally, in a way that is very integrated with the institutional fabric of citizenship. They function perfectly, changing the types of commercial offering every season. I go there often - above all in Rome there are places like the Brancaleone that in the winter put on quite interesting things, they appear to be more or less underground places that have aspirations falling between acting as an artistic vanguard and being a night club. But I think it is like this in other places in Italy and Europe. I think that the experience of the centri sociali offered a response to the crisis that occurred between 1993 and 1994 in the big Italian cities (let's say Milan and Rome) - exactly at the point that the practice was spreading to the south by choosing to become a part, as a specialized pole therein, of the organization of the integrated society of the spectacle whilst certainly not resolving any of its ambiguities. The centri offered some spaces or services to groups in need of it: information booths, arts groups that couldn't find space in the city, but also and above all they organized self-run businesses, an interesting form of self-organized entrepreneurship which is deserving of study. It has nothing to do with an alternative way of life or with the struggle against capital, I believe. More like a way to create self-sufficiency for some groups which represent themselves politically by offering a service to the antagonistic and militant community, that social strata of marginality and economic exclusion which expands ever more in the Italian cities, beginning at the end of the seventies. The nature of this type of service rendered ought to be discussed more profoundly. Traditionally the centri sociali have opened themselves to the "social", to the neighborhood, offering minor services like information booths for immigrants or a nursery for children, or Italian lessons for immigrant workers - services that are by their nature transitory, tied to single volunteers who perhaps do it as a profession in specialized cooperatives. The constitutive limit of the centri sociali is that of an idea of labour that is tied to volunteering, to self-exploitation, to the fanciful notion of providing total assistance for subjects who slip through the cracks of public assistance. A laudable project, but one cannot hide that there is a worrying double-bind inherent in it: a critique of work and a revolt against work, a fundamental point of

every culture antagonistic to capital, cannot accept these assumptions, which in Italy have a precise social connotation. They represent a sensibility marked by Christian charity of assistance as an act of love (gratuity is part of the idea of a gift through which there is communicated the absoluteness of a love that cannot admit from the interlocutor either trade or exchange), a spirit which animates realities that are marginal within Italian Catholicism, with most of the tendency all aimed towards a moderate politics, bent towards the conservation of the historical bloc which has always dominated Italian politics as a whole. Appealing to this spirit is perhaps laudable for well-thinking people, and is certainly laudable on an ethical level for believers in this idea of love. Those who instead study and live working over historical materialism, for those who know a philosopher such as Spinoza, or Nietzsche, not to speak of Marx, cannot but criticize the humanitarianism underlying the ideology of volunteering. A critique of the alienation of work, a critique of capital and of work subsumed under capital, cannot ignore the fact that this spirit, if elevated to a social rather than individual level, becomes functional to practices of exploitation. In this way we observe a grotesque contradiction of a militant and a social centre that struggle for liberation of and from work and then voluntarily submit to practices that lie somewhere between self-exploitation and slavery. The fundamental contradiction that social centres, at least the "militant" ones, have fallen prey to, is therefore the following: the new form of life beyond and against capital is based on self-exploitation, volunteering, a life that depends absolutely on money and on all of the circuits of exploitation because it cannot produce anything if not free assistance as the proof of absolute love.

A few years ago there was a debate on the left around this question, I remember a book by Marco Revelli, *Oltre Il Novecento*. I think it is an exceptional piece of work. The work of militancy, which Revelli harshly criticizes, just as Georges Bataille does in his work on sovereignty, considering its birth out of the sacrificial logic typical of a particular season in international communism, that of Stalinism, finds regeneration in the volunteer work, in the "third sector", in the work of social assistance, in the feminization of labour. Interesting and useful practices, but ones that reflect perfectly the contradiction of which I spoke earlier. Those on the front of the critique and the struggle against capital must understand that these discourses can only reveal false consciousness: how can a counter-society be born that is based on the free provision of care, of love, of the interweaving of the social that is free of money, but obsessed with daily survival due to the fact that it is constitutively external to every circuit of production? The theory of the non-profit sector has been devastating for the left. Historically, it was formulated exactly during the period, let's say

between 1996 and 2000, the years of the "centre-left" government of Romano Prodi and Massimo D'Alema, in which legislation concerning "atypical" work was introduced, a very diffuse practice in America, but one that here has had socially devastating effects. The most recent figures produced by ISTAT [Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, the Italian Agency for Social Statistics] suggest that those who fall under the rubric of "atypical" workers in Italy are now more than 6 million, that is, more than a third of the Italian working population! Between 1998 and 2002 six million positions were created that in reality do not exist – they're virtual, they predominantly oscillate between the no longer and the not yet. And this doesn't even consider the impact that Berlusconi's reform of the labour market will have.

Brophy *How have the centri sociali positioned themselves with respect to this issue?*

Ciccarelli What happened was that the debate on a guaranteed income was born (or reborn if one considers that it has been discussed at least since the beginning of the nineties). I believe this is a possible exit route, but let's get to the heart of the question: how might this happen? Who can force the Italian political establishment to protect six million precarious workers with a guaranteed income? It might seem like a strange question, but this is exactly the matter at hand. I don't believe that the centri sociali have the capacity to pose this question to themselves, nor do they have the capacity to give themselves an answer that is executive, political. It is not their history, nor is it their debate. Even if I look at them with benevolence I can't agree with those who would assign to them a "vanguard" role in the movement. It is not like that, and from what I can see they would not go far. In the 1990s the centri did other things, they worked on the battle over public opinion, on "campaigns" as a certain kind of imported reformism refers to them now - campaigns against GMO food or the WTO, or against prohibitionism, or even around immigration. It is in these activities that they ought to be assessed. All interesting, but ones that do not even graze the social composition of the militants in the social centres, who are for the most part "atypical" workers. This is the contradiction. It has been discussed for years, but the reality of the social centres (assuming that one could offer a unitary image out of a universe that is so ample and one that is transforming itself so quickly), does not seen to be able to offer ways out of this contradiction, nor to be able to use it politically. This is the passage of class struggle, in which the political use of contradiction was possible in the struggle against Capital, in the struggle for life. It is clear that the new labouring subject does not perceive itself as "class", cannot give itself stable representation like that of worker's movement, banking instead on individualism and egotism, pre-

political passions that are useful for the struggle for survival, essential to resisting the furious, inflexible, and unending aggression of the politics of the neoliberal labour market. Is the struggle for life useful to the struggle against Capital? The former is able to avail itself of institutional tools for negotiation, mediation, but is it able to do the same for political clashes? One thing is certain: new labour is fragmented, and the old (somewhat workerist) idea of locking it inside social centres (or the chambers of work and non-work, as was stated in a White Overalls manifesto from a distant 1995) in order to give it political representation is a demand that is somewhat ridiculous, fanciful, devoid of a meaningful foundation. The political use of contradiction, the only way to struggle against capital, remains far off. Yet it cannot be invoked by critical knowledge [sapere].

I can say that the social subject that animated the centri sociali, which at first was the protagonist of the "Pantera" movement between 1989 and 1990, has transformed itself. I believe it is an interesting, albeit inconspicuous, subject of social transformation in general. Our political problem, in Italy, is the following: this subject refuses forms of political representation, confronts work and the problematics it offers on an individual level, and suffers the aggression of neoliberal policy without responding collectively, but by instead searching for other paths of resistance. We are used to perceiving politics as demonstration, contestation, demand, conflict. All of this seems to me to be distant from this subject, of which I myself am a part. What happened to this social subject? What happened to all those people across Italy who occupied universities over ten years ago? They are cognitive workers, specific intellectuals, social researchers, cooperative workers. Others, like us, work in Italian and European universities. We are autonomous workers, as Sergio Bologna says, we are precarious and atypical workers, we live at the margins of the organization of the social reproduction of capital. These workers live an ambivalence: they use social sciences with a view to counter-subjectivation but they work on research commissioned by large multinationals. And it is this way too with those who work in universities, albeit with completely different labour conditions. And what are the political capacities this subject possesses? This is a delicate point: From 1990 to 1995-96 there was the great wave of the social centre movement and many, without fault, described it in terms of continuity with the Pantera movement. But then what happened? In my opinion this subject revealed its lack of political preparation and its cultural insufficiency. It is very difficult to offer representation for this subject. The idea that some offered of Genoa as its first mass demonstration is interesting to me. It's thanks to Genoa that we can retrospectively put together an historical and genealogical reconstruction which goes from the Pantera and passes through

the movements contesting the law. It seems like a shift, and in fact we are here discussing the birth of new movements. Only I propose a critique of a political order: As you will remember after Genoa everybody discussed a "return to the local" [ritorno al territorio]. I believe this is a useful expression, almost a Marxian citation, that of putting one's feet back on the ground after such a spectacular orgy. The only problem is this subject rarely attempted this working at the level of the local, even if this "local," which really is the society as a whole, is the place where it is produced and reproduces itself.

What do I mean by this? Two things: political synthesis in Italy nowadays occurs outside the politics carried out by parties. And that these syntheses, where they really occur, are rarely representative of a more general order of politics. This is an obvious contradiction and one that marks the political level of an entire generation. And it is not an easy one to resolve, one that is internal to the ambivalence discussed earlier where knowledges for the counter-acting and the counter-formation of political subjectivities alternative to capital's order, where they exist, are used with a certain efficacy in the circuit of the reproduction of social capital itself. In other words, this is a contradiction which this emerging movement hasn't matured the necessary strength and lucidity to surpass yet. Is this a deficiency in the project? In political culture? In an idea for the possible transformation of society? All of this and more. What is missing for me is an idea of politics, of a form of political action that is independent of forms of representation, an action in other words that faces the primary contradiction of the decades of our historical conjuncture head-on.

Brophy *How did people in your centro sociale self-identify (ie as marxist, anarchist, feminist, etc.)? How do they see these struggles as related to each other, if at all?*

Ciccarelli I don't see any connection between these struggles. Rather, I would like to know what struggles are engaged in by "anarchists," or "feminists," or "marxists," or "autonomists". I don't think that in a centro sociale one relates to others in this manner. It is rather personal acquaintances, group histories that furnish the criteria for an internal dialectic. Nothing to do with the heroic claim to a political identity which does not exist. In the centri that I knew there was never posed, to oneself or to others, the problem of political identity, if anything there was a claim to a generic "antagonism". One of the effects of the new kind of social centres, those of the integrated society of the spectacle, which I personally see in strategic and political terms rather than moralistic ones, is that there has been a complete neutralization of political debate beyond that of physically protecting the space itself against the threat of

an eventual violent eviction (as always occurs in these experiences). The fetishistic attachment to the locale, frequently a miserable one, at the margins of civilization, taken from ancient industrial zones that have been in disuse for decades, which completely replaces the search for experimentation, each insertion into new movements (when these exist) that is not completely opportunistic. This is a grave error, a deeply grave one. My group, which during those years participated in the occupations of the university, of the social centre, always defined itself as operaista or post-operaista. Most of us work in the university, in schools, in publishing houses, in communication, in other words we are subjects of the new knowledge economy, that spread in Italy at the beginning of the nineties, are the first generation of a kind of labour that in the US has been widespread for decades. I believe that it is necessary to deepen our understanding of the relationship between forms of political organization and the transformations of capital, and the *post-operaista* grid, despite the blindness of some of its theoretical points and despite some of its inadequate and fanciful political proposals, can allow us to cobble together a debate that is up to this task. I speak of our internal debate. Our idea was born of the reflection in the individual biographies of Italian militants which today testify to the fact that in order to guarantee some kind of protection to the metropolitan underclass of the excluded, the precarious, the intermittent workers, in other words all that are external to the Welfare State and will never be a part of it, there is a need to expand the confines of political space which at one time was circumscribed by a centro sociale and condemned to dissolution. The volatility, the ephemeral nature that this political subject represents is the theoretical drama we are living and to which we cannot offer a solution. Many comrades exalt the mobility of the new labouring subject, its freedom to change territory, work, profession, and they associate this freedom with the demand for a guaranteed income so as to be able to live with a baseline economic foundation. Interesting, but one cannot fail to recognize that there exists a contradiction, apart from the fact that the way in which the movement will win a battle over income, one that is more a perhaps ineffective battle over public opinion, remains to be demonstrated. […]

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Recovering and Recreating Spaces of Production: A Virtual Roundtable with Protagonists of Argentina's Worker-Recovered Enterprises Movement

TORONTO SCHOOL OF CREATIVITY AND INQUIRY

The following are excerpts from a series of exchanges, during the summer of 2005, between protagonists in Argentina's worker-recovered enterprises movement (*movimiento de empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores*, or ERT) and Toronto School of Creativity & Inquiry. These voices are assembled here, in a virtual roundtable, as a narrative about struggles over spaces of production. This act of assemblage is a contribution to the circulation of critical analysis, joyful affects, affirmative statements, and creative actions.[1]

We hear from: *Pablo Pozzi*, an Argentine labour and guerrilla-movement historian and Chair of US History at the University of Buenos Aires who works as a radical pedagogue in numerous *villas de emergencias* (shantytowns) and unions across Argentina; *Eduardo Murúa*, an organizer of the autonomist ERT collective *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* (National Movement of Recovered Enterprises, or MNER), who is currently in the midst of various workspace recoveries while forging links with the ERT movement across Latin America; *Edith Oviedo*, former journalist, educational book publisher, and member of the Editorial Cefomar workers' co-operative; *Plácido Peñarrieta*, the current president of the Artes Gráficas Chilavert workers' cooperative and a housing-rights activist; *Cándido González*, a Chilavert worker, spokesperson for MNER, and an activist who assists recovered enterprises in their crucial moments of struggle; *Manuel Basualdo*, an experienced book-binding specialist at Chilavert; *Walter Basualdo*, Manuel's son, an apprentice machinist who has worked at Chilavert for three years; and *Martín Cossarini*, an apprentice machinist at Chilavert who has been active in setting up cultural spaces in workers' cooperatives.

With these protagonists our collective shares common questions: How do bodies insulate themselves from reactive forces? What new forms of constituent sociability, subjectivity, in short, composition, are emerging today? "What alliances might be forged while under siege?"[2] What are bodies, in practices of intentional cooperation, capable of? What does it mean to make subjectivity a locus of struggle? What tensions exist between a strategy oriented towards the reclamation of work and one based on the refusal of work? How might creative assemblages keep lines of affinity moving without freezing their fluid material?

We write from Toronto. These voices speak from Buenos Aires. We visit. They stay. We find ourselves recalling a closing line in an email we received from one of the protagonists who speaks in these pages: "the greatest support you *compañeros* from the North can offer us here in Argentina is for you to continue to struggle against the system in your own localities, where you live."

Toronto School of Creativity and Inquiry, 'Recovering and Recreating Spaces of Production' (Interview). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 33-48.

The voices gathered here speak across the theme, "occupy, resist, and produce."[3] The last term is, perhaps, the key term, the catalytic force coursing throughout: production not just of goods, but of desires, of affinities, of communities—all circumscribed by struggle, '*lucha*,' undertaken in response to an urgent need, to produce autonomous spaces.[4]

1976 … 19/20 … 2006

Oviedo I was part of the militant student movement of 1969—the *Rosariazo*.[5] I have conserved my ideals. And, okay, I thought to myself: "My children are grown up now. Now I have time to return to militancy. I can do it again." Now today I'm freed up to take on the activities of recovering an enterprise.

At each crossroads, dilemma, or conflict we have to realize that there are also great opportunities. To confront our challenges, saying, "I can," and finding the ways and means to do it, is both a struggle and an opportunity. Anxieties accompany us along the path of lifting ourselves out of these difficulties. Lifting yourself out of the void is hard.

Most of us in the movement [of worker recovered enterprises] have fallen off the system because, financially, we are not subjects of credit—we can't show that we have sufficient incomes, or because we can't get someone to vouch for us. We can't access credit or funds available to small- and medium-sized businesses because we are a bankrupted enterprise, and, as a bankrupted enterprise now managed by its workers, we are not recognized in the system. So where do you start?

Murúa One cannot understand the movement of recovered enterprises without contextualizing what Argentina lived through. The dictatorship (1976-83) that installed itself in our country imposed a neoliberal model with a strategic plan to destroy Argentina's industrial base. Until 1976 Argentina had an unemployment rate of three percent. The dictatorship's implementation of the neoliberal model—and its continuity under the

subsequent formal democracies—provoked the destruction of industry in our country.

Throughout the 1990s the process of the privatization of our state corporations is instigated, together with the modification of our laws, the flexibilization of labour, the loss of union power, and a failure on the part of union bureaucracies to resist the neoliberal model. Unions, it is important to remember, are part of the business of the state and don't represent the interest of workers. What this provokes from 1995 to 1997 is an unemployment explosion: an unemployment rate of 35% settles in.

In addition to the changes in the legal framework and labour flexibilization, the national government also proceeds to modify the national bankruptcy law and the process of reallocating credits. Before these changes were made, debts owed to workers were privileged; workers were the first to be paid when a firm declared bankruptcy. But as part of the neoliberal model that was entrenching itself, the law was changed so as to screw the workers by privileging the credits of banks and financial institutions.

Pozzi What happened on December 19/20, 2001 affected mostly the middle-class, some sectors of the upper-class—and the stupid ones who weren't well-connected enough to take their money out in spite of the law.

As a middle-class thing, it was mostly something that was a negative movement, "negative" meaning: "I don't want something," as opposed to "I do want this." "What don't I want? I don't want them to take my money away. I want them to pay me dollars for my deposits. Now, some of those people, my heart goes out to them. But others were real crooks. Some, I really don't give a fuck. Some were people who actually cheered when they were firing workers all over the place. The middle-class is the middle-class. Some were good guys. The lower middle-class–*moi*–we didn't get caught; we had nothing to get caught.

Mostly, for the middle-class, these were symbolic demonstrations. Banging, banging, banging: "We want our money!" TV covered it. Everybody thought it was great. So what? That was the bad part. The good part: the good part is that popular mobilization kicked three presidents out. The good part is that people sought different forms of organization. The neighborhood assemblies were one of them… I believe this affects the collective unconscious. Having lived through the resignation of three presidents, due to popular mobilizations, no matter who caused it, why it happened or whatever, in three months, it's not bad. It's something real; it makes a political impact.

The *asambleas* still exist but more as an open-air market. I participated in a whole bunch of *asambleas*. Some of them were very important. I taught in the Asamblea Dorrego, Asamblea Parque Centenario, Asamblea San

Telmo… I taught in an asamblea in Córdoba. I helped organize neighbourhoods. And what we were trying to do in Córdoba was set up a flourmill, a flourmill that was small enough so that you could mill 46 pounds, enough for several families, twenty families, let's say. …

Oviedo

What happened at our workplace (Cefomar) was that the former owner was transferring shares privately, illegally, in order to shift the debt load onto other businesses he had. He would suspend operations in one locale, transfer shares by cooking the books, and then open a smaller business that had a similar name to this one so that the public would continue to recognize the brand name. At that time Cefomar was called Marymar Sociedad Anónima. He turned Marymar into a holding company responsible for the mortgage and sundry debts that plague us to this day. He then opened another business that he called Editorial Marymar. While he began to recover market share, he started siphoning off cash and didn't pay his debts.

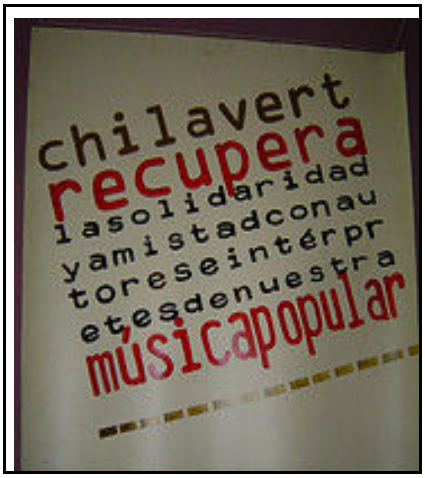
This *vaciamiento* happened over two years.[6] He tricked us into believing that what he was actually doing was preparing our workplace for renovations. That was the excuse he gave in order to take away machinery and move employees around. He then carried out a self-theft,[7] and eventually closed the other publishing house he'd opened up. By that time I was on to him. We didn't have much to say to each other because everything was out in the open.

I started to bring a few *compañeros,* like the warehouse attendant, back to this space, and started to build a new group. This was mid-2000. Since I continued to resist, and since we were seeing some revenues trickle in, the owner started to send the creditors from the other firm that he had just emptied and I ended up with court cases against me, because they still saw me as a manager of Marymar and thought that I was also a shareholder. That was when we started to organize ourselves into a co-operative.

Pozzi

All of these are new and different forms of struggle and organization. They are all attempts; most of them have failed. Eventually some will prosper. But they all help to build a social experience in a new reality we're not used to. This means that all the old forms of organization—unions, political parties, whatever—they don't work anymore. In that sense, the autonomists are right. Their questions are right. Now, social sectors, social practice, people in general, are inventing new things; they are inventing them for the best of reasons: necessity.

Murúa This new form of struggle—or, let's say, the *necessity* for a new form of struggle—appears; a new method of workers' struggle. It was a form of struggle that no longer is limited to the common type of union demands for increased wages or for better work conditions. Rather, it was a struggle to *occupy* the factory in order to operate it *ourselves*—as a *response* to the neoliberal model. It was, in the beginning, a defensive struggle. This is when the first recoveries start appearing, and this is also when IMPA is recovered.[8]



Oviedo When I had first arrived here (when Cefomar was known as Marymar) the firm was under the control of the former owner. The successful years of the firm were waning; we had been recognized as one of the great publishers of educational books in Argentina. When I first came to the firm, we managed to recapture our market share. We had reached a point where we had 2000 schools as clients, with 2000 training workshops set up in each school to apply our educational products. But that market became dormant. The former owner slowly started taking away every aspect of the business that was capable of generating cash, like copies of all of our newest titles. By 2000 we were left with nothing. There were a few books in the warehouse, that's it.

Murúa We recovered IMPA in 1998. In 1999 we gathered at IMPA workers from a few of the other enterprises that had been recovered in other parts of the country. There were only a few worker-recovered enterprises at that time—maybe four. It was from there that we co-founded a movement that was made up of not only recovered enterprises, but also housing co-operatives, mutual associations from the *villas de emergencia*,[9] and micro-enterprises.

At the time our movement was known as the *Movimiento de la Economia Social*,[10] and was made up of all of us who had something to do with the 'social economy.' What we wanted to do was construct a kind of political direction for the concept of the social economy, in order to go out and influence state policies concerning the recovery of employment—beyond the usual formal means. Of course, we brought together *compañeros* who were in agreement with us ideologically and politically, at least with the task of destroying the neoliberal model.

From 1999 until 2001 there was a surge in business bankruptcies. This compelled us to transform this movement, which was constituted by other experiences from the social economy, into one that was almost exclusively a movement focused on going to each conflict where workers were losing their employment, in order to try to see how we could begin to recover the factories. That's how we transformed ourselves from the social-economy movement into the National Movement of Recovered Enterprises.

It was then that we made *solidarity* our central theme. We began our practice of rallying around our *compañeros* in conflict, and we came up with a slogan that communicated what we wanted to do: "Occupy, Resist, Produce." It has to do with *occupation* as a founding practice. When we spoke with our *compañeros* who were engaged in conflict, the first thing we would say was, "Occupy the factory and do not leave!" "Resist," because it was after occupation that the law would arrive. While the workers are being swindled, left out on the streets, and not getting paid, the "law"—and I say this in scare quotes—fails to show up. The reason for the word "resist" is because what the justice system orders is the clearing out of the plant in order to liquidate it. It is then that we have to resist with our bodies, and with the solidarity of our people, so that the police cannot move on the juridical decision. It is this resistance that convinces judges or politicians to seek a solution that will put the factory back into operation.

Oviedo Perhaps we could have used the money we used to begin to pay back the former owner's debt for other things—but, right off the top, we lost this money. In one year we lost 150,000 pesos! That loss wore us out tremendously. But eventually we started to sell things again, just enough to be able to stay alive, mind you. We sold old books as scrap paper—books that had been in our warehouse for forty years. We starting selling off our rights to international titles that Marymar had once owned—the editorial house held the rights to a huge catalogue of important titles, like Machiavelli's *The Prince*. We sold our surplus stock. We were eventually able to form a founding co-operative group in 2002.

Murúa The number of recovered enterprises began to grow until 2001, a year which culminated in the severe crisis of the convertibility model.[11] The

state fails to collect its revenues, the sector of the dominant classes made up of exporters are no longer profitable, and there is a crisis of the system from above and a high degree of conflict from below, with the maximum expression of our people being the struggles of work stoppages and mass picketing. The combination of the experiences of the working class in these work stoppages, plus the experiences that were generated within the mobilizations of the *piqueteros*,[12] made the system reflect on itself and say, "We can no longer continue on this path." This was at the time a country in flames!

Our movement saw growth after these events. Because there were so many factories in crisis, so many closed factories, the growth of the movement was exponential. The fact that the country was in flames and that our workers were mobilizing—and the pressure we began to exert on the government—allowed us to begin to extract public policies from the state that were favourable to the recovered enterprises.[13] Throughout 2001-02 worker recoveries of enterprises continued, and there are now 182 recovered enterprises throughout the country.

Oviedo

When we were in the process of recovering the firm a lawyer friend of mine with experience in the recovered enterprises movement told me to go and see Eduardo Murúa, who was at IMPA at the time. That's how the Cefomar co-operative got started after a long time of trying to deal with the Buenos Aires city legislature on our own. We had at the time a lot of initiative, but little experience in these matters. When we connected with MNER they were busy recovering a metallurgical plant in San Antonio de Areco. But Murúa came to see us anyway. We told him our plight. That's how we connected ourselves with the movement. After that, on my part anyway, because I had a background in previous political struggles that my *compañeras* didn't have, I took on a militant role within the movement [MNER]. I helped build up the militancy of my *compañeras*.

Cossarini

Now I'm a machinist apprentice. Before I arrived here at Chilavert I had been at IMPA for four years working as a cultural organizer. Without a doubt what I most identified with in the movement was the struggle that the IMPA workers were engaged in. From that moment I started supporting other factory occupations that I could support. So, it's not a coincidence, let's say, that I came to work here, understand? At one level, I was looking to work at a place like this. It was an honour for me to get offered a position by the Chilavert workers.

M. Basualdo

Things were very different before, mainly because, before, someone told you what to do, and you did it. Now nobody orders you around. Now you're more responsible, because our work depends on us and nobody else. It's just us. Before, with the owner, it was different, because you would put in your hours, and leave. But now you sometimes have to work a bit harder, or a bit longer, do a little more. Before we were controlled so

much. That's why they built the office with windows as walls. It was their way of controlling us, making sure we were doing something.

Things are much calmer now. There's no comparison with what this place used to be like. Before you couldn't even drink a *mate* during work hours. Now we're all so much more relaxed! We work but we also drink *mate*. Sometimes during the middle of the workday we'll sit down and have a *mate*. It's important to have a chat and drink *mate* with each other. Before we couldn't do this. Even if there wasn't any work to do, the manager would insist that we grab a broom and sweep the floor. We had to always be doing something—picking up a piece of paper, whatever, we couldn't be seen doing nothing.

W. Basualdo

How do we make decisions? Well, here we don't have a *caudillo* who says, "OK, today you'll do this because I tell you so." No, no. Here we take the things we have to do, we put them on the table, and we hash things out amongst ourselves. If the majority of us agree, or better said, if we all agree, then it gets done. But if anyone has a doubt as to what has to get done, or if there are any outstanding issues, then we discuss things so that we can all come to some workable agreement. All of our decisions are made in a group made up of the personalities of this cooperative. Now, if there are certain decisions that have to be made in the moment, a group of us, or all of us, will stop working. We'll get together and discuss what has to get done, what has to get worked out, what we have to set up first, and we'll decide things at that moment, as a group. Sometimes we don't have to get together as an assembly of the entire cooperative. Sometimes a situation requires that only a small group of us to get together, so we stop working and clear things up right on the spot, right then and there. And that's it: we come to a decision right there. But whenever we have substantial issues to clear up we bring these to the cooperative's assembly that we hold each month. That's where we lay out and hash out everything we need to work out as a cooperative, and the decisions are made amongst all of us.

Murúa

We don't want to convert this movement into a movement that's only about recovered enterprises, that only debates the theme of work in Argentina. Our main commitment is to the social liberation of our people. This means the taking of power by popular sectors. We do not want the dominant sectors that manage our country to be made up of private interests or of the export sector. Rather we want the people to run their own affairs. This movement is autonomous from the state and from political parties, and it doesn't want to be converted—as various union movements have—into an organization that is based merely on demands. Although the state might meet the demands that we seek for the recovered enterprises, it will always require us facing them square on, face-to-face, to fight for our liberation…

Oviedo

Cefomar is now starting to publish new books and 2005 editions of books with authors that sympathize with our struggle. The way it usually works is that we take care of part of the costs of producing a book and the author contributes another part. We contribute our know-how as a publishing house, and we also contribute our technology. But there is a portion of the costs of paper and other materials that we can't finance for all of our authors. Educational texts are the main product line for our publishing cooperative and we'll continue to invest our resources into this line. We're more than happy to publish other books, but we have to take them on as co-published works.

When we decided that we were going to publish again we chose two main streams: the educational stream, and a series that I totally fell in love with, the Patagonia Collection. This Collection contains twenty titles focusing on the history of how Patagonia was founded and its indigenous communities.

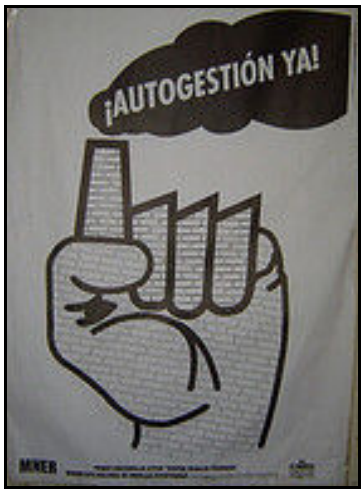
Peñarrieta

Before we were 'workmates.' But today we aren't anymore. We're more like *socios*,[14] where the problem of one *socio* affects us all. And there are times when we have to look at the problem of each *socio* and try to resolve them so they won't affect the entire society we form. Before, if something happened to someone, it was the owner's responsibility. Before, that responsibility didn't affect us individually. We were all just mere acquaintances with each other, nothing more. We didn't have direct contact with all of our workmates. But now we're a much tighter unit. And what binds us together is the fact that we're all responsible for this cooperative as a society, and we all have to contribute to moving it forward. In other words, we have to know everyone's everyday needs and problems for the simple reason that we have to protect our work and each other.

Facilitate … Extend … Connect[15]

Oviedo

I'm sure you've heard the words of Eduardo Murúa, and they are well known amongst all of us: that at the core of this movement is the notion that we must assist all of our *compañeros* in the recovery of their workspaces, their jobs, their means of production. But after a recovery the internal dynamics of each enterprise belongs to the workers that make up the cooperative.



If there are internal problems—and there are many—there is often an important factor that is worth stating: In many cases the formation of the co-operative has been a form of legal protection; this legal framework protects the collective.[16] But to a great extent, the *compañeros* within the movement haven't experienced co-operativism before, or don't, initially at least, have a conception of what co-operativism might be. Generally, each recovered enterprise will have someone who initiates ideas within each group that will say, "Listen, here we have to form a co-operative, one rooted in work." But the rest, the other 80%, remain workers. With all of the love I have for them I have to say they don't know the seven principles of co-operativism, which are like our ABCs. To begin again as a co-operative is to shed oneself of the mentality of being a dependent labourer.

Murúa

IMPA is very important in the process that was later to form the movement: in the middle of Buenos Aires, IMPA is not only a factory that begins to produce, but also a factory that opens itself up to the community as a whole. IMPA, apart from being a factory with workers, formed a cultural centre so that the entire society could participate, and it also had a health centre.

When we took the factory we set out to open it up to the community. That's why we generated the cultural centre. This recovery was carried out by a combination of its workers and a group of militants who, like me, brought with them a background in union and political struggles. That conjunction of forces gave IMPA its new project and its political vision. In the middle of the city, and against the discourse in favour of neoliberal globalization that existed in the country at the time, we said, with this recovered enterprise, "Okay, we're going to dispute this one-sided discourse of globalization." That's why we initiated the cultural centre, which was envisioned as a 'factory of ideas' where people could go to discuss a different discourse, to create new cultural expressions, and to

generate, from this location, a space of resistance against the neoliberal model.

Having a cultural centre in a factory is a unique development in the world of a functioning factory. Yes, there have been experiences in other parts of the world where closed factories have been converted into cultural centres. But the difference with our experience here is that at the same time that the factory was producing it also had a cultural centre that was also producing—but producing culture. IMPA's was the first cultural centre in a recovered enterprise.

We created it for two reasons. The first one is strictly political: to have a space where we could go and discuss the one-sided discourse of globalization from within a factory, to begin to debate the model. We needed a place from which we could generate political ideas. Another important factor in the decision to open a cultural centre was defensive: we knew that constructing and opening the centres to the community surrounding the factory would make impossible, or at least complicate greatly, the shutting down of the factory. We knew that the state and the justice system would not only be getting involved with one hundred or so workers, but they would also have to contend with the entire community. In essence, it was like a shield against the enemies of our initiative.

We became convinced that it is not only the workers who recover the factories, but that they are also recovered by the support of our people. Although only a portion of the politically active population got involved in actively supporting the worker recoveries, the majority of Argentines saw it as a good thing that workers were struggling to recover their jobs. Without this consensus, the state would have acted in another manner and we would not be here today.

Oviedo

At one point I said, "Okay, we have to make a decision and go out and show who we are. We have to start lobbying. We don't have money. But we have to create something in this place. They have to get to know us. We have to position the name of Cefomar in everything that's related to education, to culture, and to the struggle for identity." That's how we started the workshop on oral memory. We also connected with the Historic Institute of Buenos Aires, with the Monserrat Development Association, with the organization for the promotion of culture at the Buenos Aires city government, with educational initiatives, with community libraries. Cefomar began to be recognized within these circles and we insisted and dedicated ourselves to these things. We weren't producing anything at the time but our name began to stick. We also joined the network of cultural and neighbourhood initiatives.

We eventually started to offer a major free service to our neighbours, which is the assistance that we offer to children up to five years of age centred on early childhood education. Because these are very vulnerable

kids that come from families with low levels of economic and cultural means, these children need to be helped so they can have the capacity to learn, otherwise they'll never be able to succeed at the most basic levels. This initiative started from scratch. We eventually built affiliations with the group of schools that focus on caring for children with special needs. While we're not officially recognized as a special needs school, these schools always send us cases of children in need.

Oviedo

Our most immediate dream would be to have total control over the house in which we're located. We'd like to have the tranquility of at least a temporary expropriation for two years. [17] And we'd like to have the mortgage paid off. We're also renovating the warehouse in order to be able to open up a cultural centre. But first we must fix the roof, the leaks, the walls—basically starting little by little.

We have a group of workers taking on the tasks of getting the cultural centre up and running. And this September we'll be holding our Literary Conference again, where poetry is read, where we invite authors. This is an experience we've already had. We also hold debates and discussions throughout the year, we show films that MNER has been involved with and that have to do with the recovered enterprises.

We also have a constant stream of visitors here. Last year we hosted a group of German interns, a young woman from Portugal who is studying in New York and doing her thesis on the recovered enterprises, a French fellow that came to shoot a documentary, and, at the moment, there is a group of Germans shooting a film out of IMPA. These visits have become a daily occurrence that we absolutely love. I guess we're writing history here, something that is very powerful for us.

Murúa

One of the things we want from the state is the creation of various funds for recovered enterprises, because the state—when it should have been defending the interests of its workers—failed to keep watch over business owners to ensure that they were paying workers' social security contributions.

What we're also proposing is the financing of our cultural and educational centres. This is about the community development that we do from the recovered enterprises, together with the community. We know well that in a dependent country like Argentina, where there is a certain economic model in place, that that model is certainly accompanied by cultural and educational policies that complement that model and that obliges the working classes to be submissive to that model. That is why an organization that fights for the social and national liberation of our people is obligated to construct its own cultural and educational spaces. It is not just about having our own production. It is also about having our own education and our own culture.

Oviedo We communicated the existence of the free special needs school throughout the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood of Monserrat, where we find ourselves, is part of the historic heritage of Buenos Aires. Seventy percent of its population is in vulnerable situations. There are many hotels for long-term stays that are financed by the city government here. There are many tenants with little means, and many houses that are being squatted. Many of these kids don't have toys, they don't have spaces for playing in. They'll never be able to learn. In response to this, Cefomar put together a play area with toys, a library for kids, a centre for early childhood education. Last year, coinciding with the Day of the Child,[18] we organized, together with MNER and other co-operatives, a festival for over 300 kids here in the local plaza in Monserrat. We had balloons, chocolate, and presents for all of the kids, and games that went on all day. We also held a *murga*.[19] They lived a truly beautiful day. It was the kind of day that most of them had never had before.

González Early on in the fight to reclaim our work we started fighting for our salaries, for getting out of our severe debt-loads that the owner had left us. But now I know, looking back on our struggle three years on, now I can see where the change in me started, because it begins during your struggles. First, you fight for not being left out on the street with nothing. And then, suddenly, you see that you've formed a co-operative, and you start getting involved in the struggle of other enterprises. And you don't realize it at the time, but within your own self, there's a change that's taking place. You don't see it directly at the time. You realize it afterwards, after time has passed. But there is definitely a change in you that's been produced—and it's a very big change. It's so big that you don't see it. Then, suddenly, you find yourself protesting in the local legislature, you find yourself fighting, yelling inside of the legislature to the point where you're actually stopping the official proceedings from taking place, influencing change—something you would never have imagined yourself doing.

Oviedo With the passage of time in this journey, internal problems do arise. So what MNER tends to do is counsel these workers, or perhaps hold an assembly of workers so issues can be heard. But the movement doesn't interfere with any final decisions that are made. We have always preserved the independence of each place of work.

Cassarini Obviously, I am personally in favour of the liberation of workers, of workers' organization as a political idea. And I try to contribute wherever I can. And, without a doubt, working in a place where the group of workers that you're with has been through a tough struggle means that you have a responsibility to communicate what was lived. If one commits oneself to this struggle, one has to be committed to communicate everything that was suffered, so the things that happened here under owner-management will not happen again. There's a responsibility to strengthen each other, to inspire one another. When a factory is going through its moments of occupation it is so tough for those going through it. And so it is necessary for those workers who have already gone through an occupation, and who are now working, to go to the workers that are going through an occupation and encourage them. This acts as an inspiration for those who are in the struggle. For someone who's been through it to tell you, "Come on, man, yes, it is possible, you can do it, we did it!" That's what we need to do in those most vulnerable moments of struggle.

Oviedo And we have other struggles to consider. I often speak to Eduardo [Murúa] about needing to go out and denounce how the "gifts" of our country are being given away: our natural resources, our land, our water. There are many other struggles that we have to get involved in…

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Notes

[1] The excerpts of the voices assembled in this piece are part of a greater archive of interviews, conversations, and presentations. These voices were recorded in Argentina by a member of Toronto School of Creativity and Inquiry in the summer of 2005 with the assistance of the Argentina Autonomista Project. While these words first found expression at different moments and in different encounters, they were uttered by individuals with common experiences of recovering production, who live within shared conjunctures, who collaborate in the struggle against the enclosures of everyday life and fight collectively for the liberation of work and their society. We want to express our gratitude to the many workers, organizers, and *compañeros* in Argentina, Canada, and the US for facilitating these encounters.
[2] Blackwell, Adrian and Thorne, Kika. (2004) "1:1 over 1:300," *Public 29: Localities*. (Liinamaa, Marchessault, Shaw Eds.) Toronto: Public Access, 209.
[3] The slogan "Occupy, Resist and Produce" was adopted by MNER to resonate across collective practices of resistance.
[4] For an historical overview and analysis in English of the worker-recovered enterprises movement in Argentina, see Marcelo Vieta, "The Worker-Recovered Enterprises Movement in Argentina: Workers' Self-Management as a Struggle Against Capital-Labour Relations and Social-Economic Crisis " (forthcoming). For a collection of interviews with protagonists of the myriad bottom-up, grassroots movements that have emerged in Argentina in the past decade and their adaptation of horizontal forms of social organization, see Marina Sitrin, "Horizontalidad in Argentina" (Oakland, CA: AKPress, 2005). For an analysis of the impact of autonomism in Argentina's worker-recovered enterprises movement, see Graciela Monteagudo, "Autonomism in Argentina in a new Governmentality" (forthcoming).
[5] *El Rosariazo* was a student and union uprising that occurred in the city of Rosario between May and September of 1969. It occurred during one of the most creative times for Argentina's movements of the left.
[6] *Vaciamiento*, refers to the "emptying" of a closed or bankrupted firm's machinery and assets by returning owners or court trustees.
[7] During the economic crisis of the late 1990s and 2000s, many owners illegally confiscated and hid their moveable constant capital in order to prevent debt collectors from seizing them.
[8] IMPA, *Industria Metalúrgica y Plástica Argentina*, one of the first recovered enterprises of the ERT movement, is a medium-sized metallurgic co-operative in the neighbourhood of Caballito in Buenos Aires. It currently dedicates part of its space to an art school, silkscreen shop, theatre, and cultural centre.
[9] Colloquially, *villas de emergencia* are called *villas miseries* (towns of misery) in Argentina, commonly known as shantytowns in English. It is telling that Murúa chooses to refer to them using the more empowering term *villas de emergencia* instead of the rather derogatory term *villas miserias*. The term *villas de emergencia* in Spanish has a double meaning: "towns of emergency" and "emergent towns."
[10] The Social Economy Movement.
[11] The fixed-rate exchange policy that pegged the Argentine peso to the US dollar was known as the "law of convertability." It was introduced by the administration of President Carlos Menem in 1991 in order to stem the tide of acute inflation and hyperinflation that plagued much of Raúl Alfonsín's government, Menem's predecessor, throughout the 1980s. While inflation was curtailed, an overpriced peso caused exports to gradually decline throughout the 1990s. As a result, a chronic trade deficit took hold by the middle of the decade as cheaper imports saturated local markets. Unable to do business in such an economic environment, an escalating number of once-profitable small- and medium-sized businesses, faced with dwindling national and international markets, declared bankruptcy.

[12] A *piquetero*, or picketer, is the commonly used term for a member of the myriad groups of organized unemployed workers that started to emerge since 1996. *Piqueteros* usually, but not always, belong to the *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (Movement of Unemployed Workers)*.
[13] These policies include the legal recognition of worker-recovered enterprises that become co-operatives and a redefinition of each provincial legislature's laws of expropriation. The latter legal reform being spearheaded by MNER would permit workers' co-operatives to control and use a bankrupted business' machines and buildings when such recoveries are deemed by local legislatures to be beneficial to the local community. These reforms would see the immediate application of these laws to all workers' co-operatives instead of requiring the co-operative to have to go through months and years of legal battles in the local courts and legislatures, which is currently the case.
[14] The word '*socio*' translates into English as 'a member' or 'partner' of a club, a society, a group, a cooperative, or a collective. It is not to be confused with the English word 'associate.'
[15] See also: Nate Holdren and Sebastian Touza "Introduction to Colectivo Situaciones," *ephemera, 5*:4 (2005) 595-601.
[16] Becoming a legally recognized co-operative is, in part, a pragmatic move taken on as a protective measure against state repression and unfavourable laws. The co-operative model also frames the horizontal form of decision-making that most worker-recovered enterprises adopt.
[17] Before definitive expropriation is granted to worker-recovered enterprises, worker co-operatives are usually granted a two-to-five year window whereby the co-operative can control the firm under a law of "temporary" expropriation. Under this law, worker-recovered enterprises are ensured temporary control of machines, customers, trademarks, patents, and real estate while the application of the definitive expropriation law is being heard in the courts and regional legislatures. These temporary reprieves are usually granted after much lobbying, but are never guaranteed. Since this interview was conducted, Cefomar, after years of lobbying and precarious business conditions, had finally been granted the temporary law of expropriation for two years by the legislature of the city of Buenos Aires.
[18] Argentina's Day of the Child (*El Día del Niño*) is celebrated on the second Sunday in August, when it is customary to give children presents.
[19] A *murga* is a popular form of musical theatre using a chorus and colourful costumes.

Autonomous Capacity Building: Zapatista Bases of Support, Radical Commercial Corridors, and the Battle for the Horizon in the Urban U.S.

RYAN HOLLON and KAREN LOPEZ

Methodology / Disclaimer

What follows are the reflections of two US urban activists on their month-long stay in a rural "autonomous and rebellious" Zapatista political center known as a Caracol. Our paper draws from the personal relationships, journal notes, and informal analysis that resulted from our stay. Importantly, formal interviews were not conducted, we engaged in no official research activities, and certain potentially sensitive information has been omitted from the analysis. As participants on a delegation with the Mexico Solidarity Network, our month in the Caracol was full of meetings, interpersonal exchanges, and visits to surrounding indigenous Zapatista communities. Though offering no directly transferable models, our experience was rich with ethnographic insights that we feel are invaluable to our respective community-based organizing practices in Chicago and Brooklyn.

This paper is offered as a contribution to ongoing activist dialogues about the meaning of "development" and the methods of community organizing in US movement-building efforts. In the vein of post-development theory, we recognize the profound need to move beyond the post-WW2 development paradigm.[1] Like the Zapatistas, we view social movements and the capacity to challenge neoliberal hegemony as central components to widespread positive social change. Mainstream development – driven by the state or the market – has little or no accountability to the values or social networks of the communities it seeks to change. Due to the inescapable problems with and ambiguities of the term "development" (whether referring to the transnational, national, or local scale), we focus our attention and our language on radical capacity building. What we term 'Autonomous Capacity Building' views indigenous customs, identity, and community strength as resources for growth rather than targets for destruction. By capacity we mean collective human agency, and those physical spaces that both result from and enable its progression.

Growth, in this sense, can only be measured by the ability of a movement's community bases to achieve their own vision for their future. Progress becomes a question of social solidarity, built on mutual aid, shared long-term interests, and collective strength. In the authors' own political work, we engage regularly with the contested terrain of narratives and practices that comprise 'community development.' We feel the Zapatista bases of support provide an invaluable example of an alternative to development, an example that holds autonomous space, indigenous knowledge and grassroots community improvement as

Ryan Hollon and Karen Lopez, 'Autonomous Capacity Building: Zapatista Bases of Support, Radical Commercial Corridors, and the Battle for the Horizon in the Urban U.S.' (Article). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 49-68.

primary values. Though written primarily for those studying and organizing in Urban America, we hope this article will resonate with all those involved in the struggle to build unified communities in resistance. As we discuss below, it is often the strength of these communities that gives birth to autonomous spaces and sustained force to social movements.

Drawing from Cultural Resources: The Caracol and the Indigenous Cargo System

The political, cultural, and economic centers of the Zapatista movement, known as Caracoles, embody what we will later describe as autonomous capacity building. The spiraling symbol of the Caracol (literally translated as snail shell) is central to Mayan beliefs, and is thought to mirror the shape of both the universe and the human heart. Asserting the rights of the indigenous people of Chiapas to express their cultural autonomy, the physical spaces of the Caracoles are the centers of a Zapatista movement which itself starts from the inside and spirals out. In Chiapas the indigenous peoples share a 500-year history of struggle and resistance, and this history is passed from generation to generation within the present Zapatista movement. The sharing of this history provides the foundation for the contemporary social memory of resistance, and fuels the fires of individual and collective dignity within indigenous processes of political socialization. Today, the movement's indigenous bases of support are comprised of five Caracoles and the autonomous municipalities spread across the mountains of the Mexican Southeast. Each of the autonomous municipalities is tied to a different Caracol, and there is coordination among all of these communities at the regional level.

The Caracol where we stayed is in many ways the most physically mature of the five. It is a gathering place for seven of the surrounding autonomous Zapatista municipalities and home to their corresponding Junta de Buen Gobierno (Board of Good Governance). Among this Junta's chief responsibilities are the equitable distribution of resources and the oversight of community building projects within this region. Constructed through the collective efforts of hundreds of indigenous men, women, and children in 1996, the Caracol near San Andres is an example of the mutually constitutive nature of the physical sites and the socio-political relationships that make up community. Located on a road between two military bases and under intense military surveillance since first constructed, the Caracol demonstrates the dynamic relationship between place-making and people-making in a region of Southeast Mexico where the indigenous populations continue to face systematic oppression.

In their fight against this oppression the autonomous rebel Zapatista communities are regenerating the ancient indigenous cargo system as a way to appoint duties within the movement's support bases. Consequently, for the Zapatistas personal identities are intimately connected to one's community and the way

the individual serves the movement. Within the collective practice of cargo, traditional social structures are built from community-determined and service-oriented responsibilities. In the cargo system individuals are given a role that reflects their capacity, their potential, and the necessary operations of the community as a whole. An individual's work is enacted as a service to the community, viewing service as an expression of commitment and dedication. Once a cargo is selected an individual cannot deny the responsibility, and collective survival is based on the inner-workings and abilities of each person in the community. Drawing from observable abilities and virtues, the community selects a person's role in a way that serves the greater whole.

In the case of the Zapatistas and the indigenous cargo system, individual roles are determined by people's needs, duties, and rights, rather than marketplace relationships and profit potentials. This is a system deeply embedded into indigenous culture with a history of thousands of years, and it is not realistic to think about how it can be transplanted to the US. However, it is certainly possible for communities in Urban America to develop systems of mutual support and commitment that provide the cornerstones of community building. Compared to US notions of individually determined life paths, the cargo system challenges the commodification of human relationships. As it is being deployed by the Zapatistas today, the cargo system offers a social economy based in a political movement. Working without any monetary compensation, the collective struggle mediates social ties in the lives of indigenous Zapatistas. In Chicago and Brooklyn, where mainstream development is grounded first and foremost in the market, community relations often begin to mirror market relations concerned primarily with competition and visions of economic growth. In the autonomous municipalities of Chiapas, economic progress is only meaningful if it makes a community stronger by stabilizing the lives of residents and improves their capacity to resist neoliberalism's co-opting influence. For the autonomous rebel Zapatista communities the value of resources is determined by their use for the community and the rebellion, not by their speculative value.

While the meaning and shape of "development" practices are as contested as they are global, it is undeniable that the post-WW2 development paradigm has laid the foundation for processes of neoliberalization over the past three decades. As growing numbers of resources are privatized and corporations gain increasing levels of influence over people's lives, the Zapatistas demonstrate an alternative to development that strengthens their communities' capacity to determine their own future as well as their ability to challenge neoliberal hegemony. The State of Chiapas, home to all of the Zapatistas' indigenous bases of support, has both the greatest abundance of Mexico's natural resources and the poorest of the country's indigenous populations. Today, over twelve years since the Zapatistas began their rebellion by occupying the town of San Cristobal de Las Casas, those indigenous communities still aligned with the struggle are living independent of state assistance and largely without capital investment. While they receive various forms of support from international solidarity organizations, the autonomous municipalities are driven by the capacity of the women and men who live there to care for one another. As the

community bases of support within the Zapatista movement demonstrate, alternatives to state-led development are a critical component of movement building. When claimed for strengthening communities in resistance, capacity building projects can improve the material realities of daily life while advancing people's collective ability to construct autonomy over the long-term.

As witnessed in our visits to the Zapatista communities in the mountains of the Mexican Southeast, *autonomous capacity building* (where autonomy is both a means and object of the process) is a weapon for combating the intricately intertwined hegemony of neoliberalism and coercion of the nation-state. What we refer to as autonomous capacity building, means those systems, places, and practices that build independence from this hegemony. It is an alternative to development that resists and attempts to dismantle the co-opting influence of global capital over community futures, and desires much more than a world where every corner of the earth is turned into a site for productive investment. Paving the way for the next generations of Chiapas' indigenous to continue the rebellion, autonomous capacity building for the Zapatistas means *investing the future in those who will live it*. Autonomy can thereby be viewed in terms of the social relationships that allow for the creation of alternatives to capitalist and state-dependent development. In this sense, autonomy is a project rooted in both community and rebellion, where community-based resistance redefines the terms on which relationship building occurs.

The Caracoles and indigenous autonomous municipalities are an active attempt to build independence from the community of money, the coercion of the state, and the destructive impacts of neoliberalization. Rather than capital or the state, the Zapatistas effectively put the capacity to sustain themselves and advance their struggle at the center of their agenda. Thus capacity building for the Zapatistas should not be evaluated by abstract measures of growth, but by concrete improvements in their ability to care for and govern themselves. Autonomous space are the sites in which people build this ability, and where resolutions to conflict are found within the struggle, not outside of it. Within these spaces, internal interdependence is more important than outside investments and mutual aid is more vital to survival than the market. The Caracoles and autonomous municipalities are the current manifestation of a community-based resistance that sees the construction of self-sustaining change as a long-term project. As will be discussed later, these autonomous spaces are critical to a revolutionary process that publicly emerged with an offensive army and is now working towards a decentralized and community-based form of self-guidance.

While the examples of autonomous capacity building modeled by the Zapatistas are specific to the mountains of the Mexican Southeast, their approach is full of lessons for those working to construct autonomy and build social movements in starkly different environments. Looking at the way the natural and built environments inform the organizing practices within the Caracol and surrounding communities, we explore the role of autonomous space in community capacity building. *We posit that autonomous spaces are uniquely capable of creating new generations of social actors for community-based resistance, especially*

when the interplay between place-making and people-making is mediated by long-term struggle. Autonomous space provides what the Zapatistas have termed an antechamber, a site for the creation of new political relationships and for seeing the next steps of struggle that lie ahead. In the US if our practices do not work towards independence from state coercion and neoliberal hegemony, then from the onset they have failed to challenge the very terrain that all too often determines the conditions of possibility for social movements. For US organizers as for the Zapatistas, autonomous space can provide us with a site for defining social relationships, community, and struggle on our own terms.

Reshaping Conditions of Possibility and the Practice of Autonomous Community

This section looks at how autonomous and rebellious communities within the Zapatista movement care for and govern themselves on a day-to-day basis. Focusing on the Caracol where we stayed and nearby autonomous municipalities, we examine practices of autonomy at the community and interpersonal levels. We posit that the way Zapatista social actors develop their collective human agency is fundamental to how they are building their rebellion, and is based on generating mutual commitments in the struggle. We then explore how the human capacity for self-governance and rebellion is maximized through processes of political socialization occurring within the autonomous space of the Caracol. The construction of autonomous space is presented as a cornerstone for the Zapatista's independence from the state and for their continued struggle towards "un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos" (a world where many worlds fit). It is vital to note that the practices of self-governance and self-care within these communities rely on a grasp of interdependence within resistance, so that communities must support one another's struggle in order for any of them to move forward. In this sense, autonomous capacity building in the Zapatista bases of support confronts the pitfalls of both isolatory communitarian ideology and capitalist social relations immersed in competition.

As was made clear during one of our visits to an autonomous municipality, the objective of the people in the rebel Zapatista communities is not to take power but rather to take care of their people. At both the autonomous municipalities we visited the consejos (comprised of collections of adults in charge of key community duties) asserted their community's right to implement their own justice system, to educate themselves, to cure themselves and most principally to obey themselves. Central to the practice of autonomy in Zapatista municipalities is a community's ability to handle its own problems, and to sustain itself ethically on available resources. Building from this intention, capacity building within the Zapatista movement is focused on a three-pronged agenda of healthcare, education, and cooperative economic projects. The still unfolding health and education systems provide a means for the Zapatistas to assume responsibility for

their own social reproduction, critical to a context of struggle that is reliant on the regeneration of leaders at multiple levels. Meanwhile, cooperative economic projects, such as traditional weavings, enable indigenous Zapatistas increased management over their own finances. Complemented by community-based militantism and indigenous justice systems, the Caracoles and autonomous municipalities are actively replacing four of the key functions of the state: the implementation of justice, economic management, defense and security, and social reproduction.

The health system in the Zapatista communities is a network of community micro-clinics, and one full-sized clinic equipped with ambulances and the capacity to perform basic surgeries. Born in 2004, the Zapatista education system was begun with primary schools in indigenous communities. Zapatista schools provide sites for children and youth to gain academic skills, to study the history of their people's struggle, and to learn about the continued threats to their communities. The Zapatista justice system reflects a culturally sensitive method of maintaining justice where there is no specific written law, where those with positions of influence do not receive a salary, and where the highest authority is the community. In those instances where there is a conflict or violation of justice between a Zapatista and non-Zapatista municipality, the autonomous municipality's consejo will involve the state affiliated municipality in the resolution process, and when necessary will involve the Junta de Buen Gobierno. It is not uncommon for all members of a community to be involved in a resolution process that at first may only seem to impact a limited number of individuals.

All of these projects are run by extensions of the indigenous cargo system, and made possible by the extremely high level of responsibility Zapatistas assume for their communities. It is this militant sense of commitment that enables the continued maturation of Zapatista communities despite the lack of outside capital investment or an abundance of formal assets. Social responsibility provides the foundations for how alternatives to development can be sustained on limited resources. For the Zapatistas militancy is only in part a matter of taking arms. Among the non-army Zapatistas, militancy is indicated by the degree of commitment to their communities and their shared struggle. For Zapatistas, revolutionary action is normalized and the practice of struggle has, in many ways, transcended individual notions of sacrifice. Militancy appears as a disciplined way of being that creates its own energy, and that invests this energy in co-constructing the collective willingness to mobilize behind anti-oppressive ideology. Militancy thereby denotes a non-negotiable political ethical dimension in how we prepare for the future given both the immensity of injustice and the scarcity of resources.

Importantly, Zapatista capacity building occurs in opposition to the state government and to capitalism, not in opposition to those indigenous people who receive government assistance. In Chiapas, Zapatistas view their efforts as part of a struggle to support all those indigenous communities living in a shared context of poverty and isolation. Meanwhile, a key separating factor between the Zapatistas and their indigenous neighbors is the autonomous municipalities' relative independence from the money economy. In our conversations with the

autonomous consejos they shared that when envisioning the future of their pueblo, money is not a significant factor. This is both because of money's relative non-existence and because of the dependence that it often implies. Rather than being mediated by money, within the Zapatistas' bases of support *social relations are mediated by shared understandings of dignity, collective responsibility, and the rebellion*.

Meanwhile, the Mexican and state governments are increasingly using mainstream "development" as a mode for the political and social control of indigenous communities in the region. State-led development projects reinforce indigenous dependence on the state, seek to weaken the attraction of the Zapatista movement to other indigenous communities, and provide a more subtly coercive force than paramilitarization for dealing with Zapatismo. The state-created artisans building near San Andres was built to draw business away from the nearby Zapatista Caracol, and is just one example of how the state uses development projects to draw support away from the material realities of Zapatismo. A more obvious example of how the state masks coercion as development is the health workshops wherein the government pays women for their sterilization to prevent the birth of future indigenous generations.

Autonomous Municipalities and the Use of Resources

Notions of autonomy for the Zapatistas are fundamentally tied to the expression of indigenous customs and culture, and the indigenous right to self-governance recognized by the San Andres Accords.[2] As declared by the autonomous municipal consejos we visited, the autonomy of the Zapatista communities was made legal when the government signed the accords on February 16th,1996. These Zapatista consejos view the evolution of their pueblo's autonomy as central to where the struggle is today.

Twelve years after the rebellion began and ten years after the signing of the accords, the autonomous municipalities are a key example of how the Zapatista movement is evolving in the contemporary moment. From the time when the government betrayed the promises made on the 16th of February 1996, one of the central distinguishing characteristics of autonomy for the Zapatistas has become complete independence from government resources. Moreover, Zapatista communities live without paying for water, electricity, or the use of land. They view these basics of daily living as already theirs and community members have specific technical roles for ensuring sustained access to these resources.

Since declaring themselves as autonomous municipalities in 2002, these communities have developed methods for accessing water and electricity without paying the exorbitant rates charged by the companies producing them. Electricity in particular is a field of struggle for communities with minimal resources

across Mexico. The use and maintenance of resources not only involves a broad array of people from the Zapatista community, these resources are an issue that draws non-Zapatista indigenous people to consult with their indigenous neighbors. As one of the consejos noted during a visit, non-Zapatista neighbors are increasingly coming to them to ask how they can also access these resources without paying for them. These inquiries are received with open arms. Declaring "somos el mismo pobre" (we are all poor) the consejo sees their indigenous neighbors through a shared poor people's frame that encourages them to maintain cooperative relationships. This cooperation is vital in the face of government attempts to use state-led development as a coercive force. Yet while they recognize the critical difference of their government at the local level, the consejos of the communities we visited feel that what's needed is change at a greater level, and they posit that widespread change can't happen if they are just working at the level of the municipality.

The Statistical Zapatista Subject and the Co-existence of Governments

Each of the indigenous municipalities in Chiapas experiences its own internal divisions over questions of politics and the use of government resources, and the autonomous Zapatista consejos often work side by side with official party governments. When we asked one of the autonomous consejos what percentage of the residents in their pueblo are Zapatistas, they replied with an official estimate of 40% Zapatistas and 60% non-Zapatista. However, as they indicated, it is vital to problematize the idea of the statistical Zapatista subject. Members of official political parties can be seen as brothers and sisters, and in many cases they literally are family members. Drawing from our conversations in the bases of support, there are those indigenous "non-Zapatistas" who are highly critical of the movement (to the point where some become involved in paramilitary activity) and there are those who have an admiration for the Zapatista struggle but are unable to liberate themselves from structures of control (e.g. government assistance, state-led development projects).

Tensions between the indigenous communities are most intense in areas where non-Zapatista indigenous have been recruited as paramilitaries by the Mexican army, and are violently working to destabilize the Zapatista struggle. While the influence of paramilitarization continues to grow, its intensity depends largely on what part of the Chiapas region one is examining. In one of the municipalities we visited the activity of existing paramilitaries is very low and was said to be relatively non-threatening in the town. In the case of this pueblo there is a degree of internal unity that allows for the functioning of two separate governance structures within the same space. In the case of the autonomous justice systems, this degree of cooperation within pueblos allows for conflict resolution to occur across lines of political affiliation. The operations of

autonomous municipalities are thereby regularly recognized by the state-affiliated government at the local level.

Human Agency as a Resource for Challenging Capitalisms, Not Extending Them

In contrast to contemporary academic and policy discussions that view human and social capacities in terms of capital, this section examines social relationships and networks as resources for anti-capitalist practice. For the Zapatista bases of support we visited, it is the nurturing of social relationships and interpersonal bonds that provide the networks in which the movement's anti-capitalist frame is based.[3] It is fruitful to compare contemporary understandings of capital investment, where outside financial resources are committed to a place or project, with the Zapatistas' use of the Spanish verb "capacitar" (meaning "to capacitate" or "to build capacity"). Whereas capital investment involves resources that are purely material or monetary, "capacitar" was frequently used in the caracol where we stayed to describe the intentional shaping of human potential through education. Meanwhile, use of the term 'capital' in much of the Western world is in fact becoming looser. Concepts of human capital and social capital are often deployed to analyze the capacities of people living in areas with relatively low levels of capital investment (most notably, economically depressed urban areas). When applied to human abilities, the term 'capital' economizes the relational powers of people by prioritizing those parts of human agency which serve as signs for a safe investment in a project or place.[4] Any advances in the human and community capacity for collective challenges to threats of neoliberalization are largely lost by such a measure.

The approach to human development within the Zapatista spaces is interwoven with the political socialization of new generations of social actors in the struggle. As seen within one of the communities we visited, when young people are capacitated to be educators then future generations will directly benefit. In the words of one man highlighted in a video on the Zapatista education system, "if they learn, another teacher is born." In many respects the system of training educators is a particular response to the general question posed by Zapatismo: *what does our community need and how can we provide that for ourselves?* As in the case of the Junta de Buen Gobierno, the capacity for self-care is developed directly among those people and families composing the Zapatista bases of support. Each person within the Zapatista movement is seen with a role and each has a part to play in completing a struggle which advocates a multiplicity of weapons and of tactics. For example, every community member has a role in the justice system, young people greatly influence the still unfolding education system, and women continue to change how they perceive themselves and how their communities view their involvement in the movement. The fact that the autonomous rebellious schools do not have teachers, but rather

promoters, is meant to reveal that in the classroom ideas flow from all directions and there is no singular fountain of knowledge. Though various criteria for and levels of participation are certainly present within the Zapatista movement, the autonomous capacity building model is based on an active understanding of interdependence and inclusiveness within struggle.

The Zapatista struggle is largely determined by the strength of the relationships Zapatistas have to each other. It is this strength that keeps the movement progressing, and which fuels the construction of autonomous spaces. Strong social relationships allow the movement to address its internal challenges, and are the catalyst for the revolutions internal to the revolution that are necessary for the struggle's continued growth. Two examples of internal transformations are the Revolutionary Women's Law and the creation of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno. As a result of the collective organizing efforts of women within the movement, the Revolutionary Women's Law was passed in 1993 and spawned what has become widely known as "the revolution before the revolution." This law laid the ground for the transformation of both the place of women within the movement, and consequently the ways they view their own lives. Banning alcohol and challenging domestic violence, the law asserts the power of women to reshape their living environment. Projects like the women's cooperatives lining the streets of the Caracol near San Andres, mark the ways that Zapatista women are relating with the outside world, financially supporting their families, and strengthening social ties among themselves. While these cooperatives make women the owners of their means of production and their relationship to the market, they also create networks of women in the struggle between and within communities. In addition to these woman-run spaces, Zapatista women are increasingly represented in decision-making positions within the community bases of support.

The Juntas de Buen Gobierno, which have elected women representatives, are the highest civil authority within the Zapatista movement. The birth of these governing bodies in August of 2003 marked what may be considered another "revolution within the revolution." These good governance boards were developed to challenge the military-community hierarchy that had been present in the Zapatista movement up till that point. As stated in the Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona:

> [W]e also saw that the EZLN, with its political-military component, was involving itself in decisions which belonged to the democratic authorities, 'civilians' as they say. And here the problem is that the political-military component of the EZLN is not democratic, because it is an army. And we saw that the military being above, and the democratic below, was not good, because what is democratic should not be decided militarily, it should be the reverse: the democratic-political governing above, and the military obeying below.[5]

Passing actions and decisions to the civil authorities within the movement, this creation of the Juntas separated the political-military functions of the movement

from the autonomous and democratic components of the Zapatista organization. While the Sexta declares this was a very difficult transition in practice, it has allowed for a more equitable distribution of resources among the Zapatista communities. Participation in this still relatively young system of self-governance happens through rotating temporary positions, and those who do not govern well are removed. The Juntas have sought to level the authorities within the movement and to distribute incoming aid in a way that evens out the material realties of the autonomous municipalities.

These internal shifts in the movement's social relationships open up the rebellion to broader participation, and increase the number of roles available for those looking to make active contributions to the struggle. Fundamental changes in the social dynamics of these long-term revolutionary processes have widened and diversified the collective human agency available to the movement. In a context of extreme dedication among the movement's participants, social spaces allowing new forms of participation make the struggle more dynamic. As the movement develops at the community level, there is increased capacity for improving living conditions among the indigenous communities. As an effect of an anti-capitalist movement undergoing steady evolution, the increase in collective human capacities for self-care and governance means not more human capital, but stronger communities for fighting today's capitalisms.

Anti-Capitalist Planning and the Radical Commercial Corridor

Formed around a radical commercial corridor of community-based experiments, the Caracol near San Andres demonstrates how active place-making is fundamental to personal and community growth within the formation of a social movement. Within the fences surrounding this Caracol, autonomous space is an arena for generating and expressing the non-capitalist values and identity that are the foundations of Zapatismo. The physical site of the Caracol provides the terrain needed to reshape the conditions of possibility for resistance, and to create the transformations in social relationships necessary for the collective realization of that resistance. Made largely from nearby wood and building materials, the construction of the site by hundreds of indigenous families in 1996 was itself a powerful act of resistance. The Caracol's presence as an international site of resistance was solidified later that year when it helped to host the Zapatista's first International Encounter.

Originally named Aguascalientes, the political and cultural centers of the Zapatistas have faced government repression from the very beginning. After the first Aquascalientes was destroyed by the Mexican military, the site near the indigenous community of San Andres became the next of five built to replace it. At the time of its construction over 32 tanks and army vehicles slowly cruised by until being driven away by the men, women, and children making up a human barricade. Having survived continued state repression, the Caracol is rich with

organizational resources for both its corresponding communities and for allies from civil society.
Along the inclined street that lines the Caracol there is: an auditorium, a building for the Junta de Buen Gobierno, a building for the Commission of Explanations, two cafes and stores, three Women's cooperatives, a Spanish and Mayan language school, a basketball court, an internet spot, a chapel, a music building, the indigenous and modern health facilities, a volleyball net, an outdoor stage, as well as several buildings for organizations from nearby communities. Directly across the street from the Caracol gates are an autonomous primary school, more stores, and the Zapatista boot factory. Taken as unit, the Caracol is a model of an anti-capitalist alternative to development that addresses the political, economic and cultural aspects of how to organize society. It is a gathering place for all those playing a role in the continued creation of Zapatista autonomy, a site for members of indigenous communities in resistance, international solidarity workers, and those working to challenge capitalism from below and to the left. Given that autonomy for the Zapatistas is in many ways an interdependent project with others involved in struggle, place becomes a tool for not only gathering but also the coordination of resources, the distribution of products, the provision of services, and the training of future generations of movement actors. Such place-based resistances are made possible by the creative organization of the human resources of indigenous actors and, in part, by the material contributions of civil society. Place-making and autonomous capacity building can thereby be seen as interactive processes challenging the hegemony of the neoliberal order by redefining social relationships within and between communities.

Battle for the Horizon

In the case of the Caracol, the construction of the autonomous geography is premised on a place-based process of collective self-determination. A clear implication of this is that a space cannot be at once imitative and autonomous any more than it can be both duplicative and self-determined. Efforts to copy the dynamics of an autonomous space can only happen at the expense of the unique possibilities offered by a community's physical and relational context. Any transplantation runs the risk of destroying the specific social and spatial conditions of resistance contained in a site. It is in many ways these socio-spatial and geo-relational dynamics that provide the basis for radical place-making in the first place. Moreover, the very notion that models are transferable seems, in part, a symptom of those place-destroying characteristics of neoliberalism that seek to homogenize space in an attempt to open and protect investment terrains. Hence the beauty of the Zapatistas call for, "a world where many worlds fit." In order to create lasting cultures of resistance it is vital that every community is built from the uniqueness of its residents, its geography, its social dynamics, and its particular history of oppression and struggle. This means an approach to autonomous place-making that nurtures the distinctness within all our struggles,

where communities learn from each other so that they are better able to guide themselves, and where we build from the unique dynamics of our own contexts so that we can transform them.

Examples of radical place-making serve as inspirational sites wherein we can advance visions for a movement without limits, without borders, and without prescribed formulas. They are spaces determined by people's needs and abilities, in which we can reevaluate the way we understand and talk about our own practices of resistance. In a US environment where the programs of social change organizations are often informed by policy climates and foundation funding categories, autonomous community spaces can help us to realize the ways in which our political agenda is itself shaped by outside forces. Places are inhabitable sites where the values of life in resistance can be reinforced by daily experience. Autonomous sites are designated areas for confronting the subtle oppressions within our own practice, for envisioning the next steps of our movement building, for solidifying our commitments to one another, for enabling our learning from one another, and for strengthening our subjectivities of struggle.

For the Zapatistas the question of movement subjectivities is intricately connected to continued engagement with 'the other,' with those outside of their immediate sphere of resistance. Among many other things, the Caracol is a designated space for those outside of Chiapas' indigenous communities to come and visit an autonomous and rebellious Zapatista space. Not content to only receive visitors, in January of 2006 the Zapatistas launched their campaign to travel and listen to the struggles of groups across Mexico. Called "La Otra Compana," literally the Other Campaign, the national tour coincides with the presidential elections held in July 2006. Critiquing the idea that electoral democracy in Mexico offers hope for any real changes, La Otra is an alternative campaign that is building relationships with groups across Mexico who work "below and to the left." Addressing the question of "how do we open ourselves up to the other?," La Otra is centered around listening instead of speaking, grassroots democracy in place of polyarchy, and radicalized political subjects rather than citizens who view voting booths as the pillars of democracy.

Rather than presuming a shared context among Mexico's grassroots left, La Otra creates a context for sharing. In communities where La Otra has visited there are stencils on the streets and walls declaring "La Otra Compana: No para dividir comunidades, Si para unir rebeldias," translated as "The Other Campaign: Not for dividing communities, Yes for uniting rebellions." Knowing that Mexico and the world must change in order for the situation in Chiapas to improve, La Otra is an effort to build a new civil society that is both grassroots and anti-capitalist. The campaign is a response to the Zapatista's realization that Mexico is neither politicized nor unified enough to bring about fundamental transformation, and is an attempt to create the types of political relationships necessary to dissolve rather than obtain state power. For those working to challenge the hegemony of the state and the neoliberal order, La Otra is a powerful lesson in how a

movement cannot put the question of what needs to be done ahead of the level of politicization needed to do it.

The autonomous rebel Zapatista communities and La Otra Compana are reminders that the horizon is a highly contested terrain and that resistance is in many ways a struggle over the conditions of possibility for radical change. Both are instructive, teaching that unless our movements challenge government power and capitalism at deeper levels, our struggles are largely already framed for us. The battle for the horizon requires a shift beyond "the politics of the possible", and calls into question the circumstances in which movement objectives are determined. In US cities today, neoliberal urban policies are actively destroying community networks and shifting resources towards social control rather than social reproduction. As the post-millennial US state invests even fewer resources into ensuring the healthy maturation of each successive generation, the state's energy is used more on disciplining the very populations that were once the targets of liberal urban policy.[6] This shift marks a transfer of state resources from human development to instruments of oppression, exemplified by the substantially higher rates of construction for prisons than colleges in the US.

Urban America is increasingly marked by widespread displacement of the poor from the urban core to the periphery, immense waves of immigration amidst global economic shifts, and mass detainment and incarceration of low-income people of color. Brooklyn and Chicago are certainly no exception to these patterns, and like many other US cities, private developers and government representatives are implementing a vision for these cities that does not include working class people or poor people of color. While these issues provide a shared organizing context among impacted populations across cities, each issue is tremendously complex and could be approached in countless ways. As low-income communities and communities of color are increasingly left to develop their own resources, their own governance structures, and their own defenses, it is crucial for US activists to act on the strategic opportunities that arise from structural change. One struggle for urban activists is to create openings for "radical democratic reappropriations of city space," [7] wherein we can build reflective spaces and new political relationships, similar to what the Zapatistas have termed the antechamber.

Autonomous space does not exist until it is constructed. Because no community can effectively struggle in isolation, we need to create the spaces for building a shared agenda and mutual preparedness out of our shared context. Communities must proactively create places for the conception of new strategic opportunities amidst contemporary structural change. Given the intensity of connections between urban lifestyles and grids of capital investment and social control, it is necessary to create the physical and relational spaces for enacting our radical struggles at the level of the everyday.

Practicing Autonomy in Daily Life

As has been discussed in the case of the Zapatistas, we would argue that strong community networks and collective commitments to struggle are preconditions for constructing and maintaining autonomous spaces in low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color in the US as well. It is in the practice of everyday life where these networks and commitments are formed and reinforced. Moreover, discussions of daily life highlight the vitality of social relationships at the local level. Community life is an arena for connecting regular personal investments in one's surroundings with those emerging channels that link struggles across place, thereby building dynamic networks and support structures both within and between community enclaves. In order to support such dynamic networks within communities it is imperative to confront those internal tensions among fellow residents that result largely from systematic oppression over time. In the case of women's rights and the struggle against patriarchy among the Zapatistas, this manifested as the "revolution before the revolution."

Meanwhile many US cities are full of neighborhoods where social networks are being destroyed by gentrification, crime, and high incarceration rates. The prison industrial complex, like gentrification, destabilizes urban communities targeted by race and class. Ending the cycle of crime and incarceration itself requires substantive community building processes. As second and third generation incarceration are on the rise, the stakes for rebuilding community trust and strength are immeasurable. Capacity-building efforts must look towards what activist-academic Beth Richie calls "the daily work of community building," which entails residents standing with people being released back into their community and accepting responsibility for non-biological children.[8] Daily community building is a space for nurturing relationships with the homeless, with single mothers, with youth, and with all those who are the most marginalized within marginalized communities.

Inclusive organizing campaigns and open community support structures can work to challenge the shame and segregation that often result from internalized oppressions within communities. At the same time, the Zapatistas must deal with prolonged internal divisions in the communities they call home and this is a central part of the colonial legacy. In the US – from immigrants moving into low-income communities to formerly incarcerated individuals returning home from prison – there are powerful stigmas at play within receiving communities that reflect larger societal processes of "alien"ation and criminalization. Moreover, the internal diversity and complexity of neighborhoods in the urban US makes it difficult to identify any singular revolution that is needed "before the revolution." Communities' internal divisions are serious obstacles to the potential dynamism made possible by the diverse lived experiences held within low-income urban neighborhoods. At the same time, the diversity of lived experiences among community members can become a source of strength rather than division.

Given that community-based organizations frequently end up with issue-based campaigns targeting a specific subset of people within a community, it is vital to build discussions of how broader community integration can be made to fortify our struggles and our victories.

One thing that is clear among US activists is a pattern of turnover and burnout that all too often accompanies social change lifestyles. Activism in the US is often only lived within designated spaces, is interwoven with the culture of the non-profit industrial complex, and is often not transferred into other spaces like the home. Even for those US social change agents who do not map their practice onto a 9-5 schedule, the space of one's organizing and one's residency are frequently disconnected and as a result activists are separated from the support structures made available by strong community. Serious cultural transformations are needed in order to find better ways of supporting one another and sustaining our struggles amidst the inevitable stresses that movement building entails. It is fruitful to examine the level at which the Zapatista struggle is embedded into the daily lives of the movement's social actors, and to note how this integration of struggle and everyday life contributes to the movement's sustainability.

For those living in the autonomous rebel Zapatista communities the spirit of resistance is present in every aspect of life. As we observed in the Caracol, Zapatismo is there in the interpersonal exchanges of those fighting together, in the alternative economy projects, and in the school system. Radically practical ideas of democracy, autonomy, justice, anti-capitalism, and equality are discussed regularly, and are consistently reflected in the language of Zapatista social actors. The culture of resistance is present in the murals that decorate nearly all of the Caracol, in the artisanry that is made and sold, and in the revolutionary songs that are a normal sound in the homes where people live.

Another key function of autonomous political centers is connecting disparate militant practices so that they are more tightly linked in the shared struggles over contested futures. Together these are the defining characteristics of place that are generated in autonomous space and that make resistance culture inhabitable. The Caracol points to how reaching a higher political consciousness is possible by making one's resistance more fully integrated into daily routines. Thus an integral part of our capacity building goals and our strategies for making struggle more sustainable, is the integration of our various life spheres and the creation of life-affirming cultures of resistance.

Leadership Across Generations

The indigenous Zapatistas view their struggle as an explicitly long-term project, with no end to the rebellion in sight. To keep the movement alive the Zapatistas are continuously preparing their people for future leadership, and are actively cultivating a politics that values the role of every generation in the rebellion. For

the young people raised in the movement, resistance is very much a naturalized part of life and today's Zapatista leaders declare that the struggle's younger generation is much stronger than they are. Preparing future generations to lead this rebellion requires securing young peoples' attachment to their pueblos and creating spaces for them to help guide their communities. This vision of politicization, rooted in long-term community building rather than isolated campaigns, aligns well with the Zapatista saying, "caminamos, no corremos, porque estamos viajando lejos" ("we walk, we do not run, because we are going far").

Like today's Zapatistas, we believe that the leadership most needed for US movements already exists within those communities on the receiving end of oppression. For us, a primary objective of community experiments in autonomy is collective self-realization, whereby communities combating oppression believe in their own potential and find daily ways of supporting one another in struggle.[9] Rather than focusing on bringing in leaders from outside of marginalized communities, it is vital that movement actors come from all sectors within these communities and that bridges are built between generations for sharing both the histories and the responsibilities of struggle.

In developing our community building methods, we feel it is crucial for communities in the US to intentionally re-root their youth to their struggles and movements. Youth in particular need the support of their communities in order to find ways to proactively contribute to their surroundings. Wherever possible, it is important for youth to be involved in the construction of their neighborhoods and to have spaces within their community to make substantive and meaningful contributions. For the Zapatistas resistance is largely a relational project, where the ways that community members know and support one another are reclaimed. Politicization can then be seen as a process embedded in community, one that can be tailored to the particular needs and potential of young people and the blocks they call home.

Today the systematic oppressions impacting neighborhoods in the urban US are intricately tied to social divisions between generations and within communities. Multi-generational family residences in countless US neighborhoods and housing projects are being threatened by the widespread displacement of the urban poor. As a result of the growing devastation caused by the US prison system it is increasingly common for the children of the incarcerated to themselves end up behind bars, a phenomenon known as second- and third-generation incarceration which disproportionately impacts urban neighborhoods of color. A growing number of observers are declaring that a generational apartheid exists between today's youth and their elders in many low-income urban neighborhoods of color. In the US, it is unclear what resources for struggle today's youth will inherit. We must ask how the situation would look if youth were growing up in strong communities of struggle, and their family members and neighbors were actively supporting them as they sought out ways to contribute to building a social movement. It is as important as ever for communities to create physical

spaces for de-isolating generational enclaves and for more thoroughly connecting community residents.

Walk Questioning:
Framing Movements and Moving Frames in the Urban US

Self-sustaining social changes are the product of struggle over long periods of time. Before the Zapatista rebellion started 12 years ago, there were 500 years of anti-colonial struggle among the indigenous people in the Chiapas area. Calling on their history of oppression and legacy of resistance, the Zapatistas demonstrate both that social memory is a major resource for movement building and that resistance must be built to last if it has any hope of effecting revolutionary changes. As expressed in the phrase "caminar preguntando" ('to walk questioning'), one of the keys to the survival of the Zapatista movement is the value placed on self-learning. Putting self-learning into practice, the Zapatistas show us how claiming autonomous space is a critical tool for asking ourselves tough questions about the ways we hope to create lasting change.

We would like to end with some concluding questions about how US movements look at NGOs, in an effort to spur the type of radical introspection that we feel makes struggles viable in the long-term. Among the rarely named dependencies that inform movement frames in the US, are the ways in which the survival of individual NGOs can occur at the expense of social movement growth. Even non-profit organizations with substantial grassroots components have their own distinct identities and are, at best, concerned with both their own survival and the growth of grassroots resistance. While strong social movement organizations are certainly fundamental to powerful struggles, we feel US activists should continue to build on the interrogation of the non-profit industrial complex that began over two years ago with the INCITE! conference "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded." We must look at how political commitments to strong organizations can be different from dedications to community building and radical place-making. Furthermore, we feel it is necessary to explore how non-profit infrastructures in low-income neighborhoods are partial causes for the ways our movements are not integrated into daily community life.

We feel that we need to scrutinize the reasons why communities don't fight for the right to develop themselves on their own terms. It is important to question the possibility of challenging capitalism's destructive impacts, when our movement organizations are in need of regular outside infusions of capital. One of the central lessons we took away from our time with the Zapatista communities, is that it is vital to build an anti-capitalist frame that is meaningful for those residents on the receiving end of systematic oppression. Such grassroots anti-capitalism requires that community leaders challenge mainstream understandings of social issues, arriving at definitions and proposals that make sense for the blocks where they live. In today's ongoing conflicts over urban "development," the outcomes

of our demands (e.g. set aside housing, community benefit agreements) rarely enhance community capacity for resistance, resident power, or social solidarity. Meanwhile, from low-income mothers building a radical child care system in Brooklyn to the movement for community justice in Chicago, the US has powerful examples of autonomous projects that are still unfolding. Due to the unique dynamics and geographies of daily life across places, it is neither possible nor desirable to prescribe solutions for one another. Yet it is essential that we continue to find better ways of supporting one another, exchanging ideas, sharing resources, holding each other accountable, and building concrete expressions of autonomy in order to win the battle for the horizon.

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Notes

[1] For a brief review of post-development theory, see Siemiatycki, 2005.
[2] The San Andres Accords resulted from the dialogue process between the EZLN and the Mexican Federal Government, a dialogue which began in January of 1996 and focused on Indigenous Rights and Culture. These discussions centered around respect for the diversity of indigenous communities; the conservation of natural resources; the participation of indigenous communities in determining their own development plans, as well as their own judicial and administrative

affairs; and the autonomy of the indigenous communities in relation to the state framework. When both the EZLN and the Mexican government signed these accords, a peace and dialogue process was supposed to have started. What actually occurred was the escalated infiltration of indigenous communities by military and paramilitary units. For a more complete summary, see: http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/americas/mexico/SanAndres.html

[3] For a more thorough understanding of anti-capitalism within the Zapatista movement, refer to Section 3 of La Sexta Declaracion de La Selva Lacandona on "How We See the World.". Available in Spanish at: http://www.zeztainternazional.org/esp/ezln-mundo/declaraciones-de-la-selva lacandona/sexta/sexta-mundo.html

[4] A solid introduction to the critiques of the social capital discourse is provided by Mayer, 2003, 114.

[5] La Sexta Declaration, Ibid.

[6] Smith, 2002.

[7] Brenner et al, 2005.

[8] Richie, 2002, 148.

[9] Meanwhile we feel there are crucial movement building roles for new social actors not from communities with a legacy of oppression and resistance, so long as those roles are always in support of communities actively constructing the ability to guide themselves.

'Outlaw' Bicycling

CHRIS CARLSSON

> [In] this bike subculture there's no person who is the best, who is winning, or getting the most money. It's a pretty equal community in that everyone can excel, but not have to be the top dog...
> (Robin Haevens)[1]

A funny thing happened during the last decade of the 20th century. Paralleling events that transpired a century earlier, a social movement emerged based on the bicycle. This so-called movement is far from a unified force, and unlike the late 19th century bicyclists, this one does not have a ready demand for "good roads" to rally around. Instead, "chopper" bike clubs, nonprofit do-it-yourself repair shops, monthly Critical Mass rides, organized recreational and quasi-political rides and events, and an explosion of small zines covering every imaginable angle of bicycling and its surrounding culture, have proliferated in most metropolitan areas. Month-long "Bikesummer" festivals have occurred in cities around North America since 1999, galvanizing bicyclists across the spectrum into action and cooperation.

This curious, multifaceted phenomenon constitutes an important arena of autonomous politics. The bicycle has become a cultural signifier that begins to unite people across economic and racial strata. It signals a sensibility that stands against oil wars and the environmental devastation wrought by the oil and chemical industries, the urban decay imposed by cars and highways, the endless monocultural sprawl spreading outward into exurban zones. This new bicycling subculture stands for localism, a more human pace, more face-to-face interaction, hands-on technological self-sufficiency, reuse and recycling, and a healthy urban environment that is friendly to self-propulsion, pleasant smells and sights, and human conviviality.

Bicycling is for many of its adherents both a symbolic and practical rejection of one of the most onerous relationships capitalist society imposes: car ownership. But it's much more than just an alternative mode of transit. A tall, rugged blonde man in his mid-thirties, Megulon-5, an inspirational character in Portland, Oregon's CHUNK 666 group, declares, "We are preparing for a post-apocalyptic future with different laws of physics."[2] It sounds off-kilter at first, but there is a rising tide of local activists in most communities who accept the Peak Oil[3] frame of reference. Many are already organizing themselves directly and indirectly towards a post-petroleum way of life. It may not alter physics exactly, but it certainly implies a radical change in our relationship to energy resources and ecology.

Chris Carlsson, 'Outlaw Bicycling' (Article). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 86-106.

This explosion of zany and whimsical, practical and political self-expression via bicycling comprises a deeply rooted oppositional impulse that challenges core values of our society. The bicycle has become a device that connotes self-emancipation, as well as artistic and cultural experimentation. The playfulness and hands-on tinkering in the subculture is spawning new communities, gatherings that can be framed as potential sites of working class re-composition.

The "outlaw" bicycling subculture has no hierarchy flowing from wage differentials and ownership because most of the culture takes place outside of monetary exchange or the logic of business. Instead, these bike hackers are all about *doing*, tinkering with the discarded detritus of urban life, inventing new forms of play, celebration, and artistic expression. Theirs is a culture that is re-produced in action, not affirmed in acts of passive consumption. Not just an isolated geek culture, it exists in real spaces and brings people together across age, class, race and gender boundaries.

I call it an "outlaw" bike subculture because it goes against the kind of 'good behavior' norm that a lot of mainstream bicycle advocates promote. The outlaw subculture is not particularly concerned with wearing helmets (or even safety in general), having the latest gear, following traffic rules set up for cars, or seeking approval from mainstream society. A 2003 *Christian Science Monitor* article described a "mutant bike" culture[4]. Critical Mass rides have been important arenas for staking out these counter-norms in the bike scene. Crucially, this counter-sensibility has attracted legions of youth, and is eroding the nerdy image that has helped reinforce bicycling's reputation as unhip (recently emphasized in the film "40 Year Old Virgin").

It has long been a curiosity that mainstream, "middle-class" bicyclists have been obsessed with law-abiding behavior and have been so quick to denounce other cyclists for flouting their sense of propriety. Mainstream bicycle advocates maintain that cyclists as a group must demonstrate angelic behavior, in order to reinforce the self-congratulatory fantasy that bikes are angels in the transit universe, compared to the (automobile) devil… Once again, even among bicyclists, we run into a neo-Christian moralism that seeks to impose a black and white, good and bad dichotomy, warmly embracing those who shop and ride correctly, and casting the rest of us into a purgatory of illegality and disrespect. It's reinforced by an ideology called "effective cycling" developed by a Stanford rocket engineer (and bicycle enthusiast) that essentially advocates bicyclists should strive to behave like cars on the streets of America.[5]

The bicycle has been enjoying a resurgence in the past 15 years. Daily bicycle commuting has expanded dramatically in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and other cities where the monthly seizure of streets by bicyclists known as Critical Mass has opened space and imaginations, and given people a safe and enjoyable way to reconnect with urban bicycling before venturing out on their own. For most of these new bicycle commuters, the choice is self-reinforcing. Once tried, bicycling is much more pleasant than sitting in traffic in a car. Moreover, it is much cheaper. Meditative, physically engaged cycling to and from work also improves mental and physical health.

'Outlaw' Bicycling

Underneath this broad move towards bicycling is a burgeoning subculture that is reaching down to kids and teens, welcoming and embraced by women, and making bicycling and things bicycle-related hip in unprecedented ways. This subculture is largely a do-it-yourself (DIY) phenomenon, based on word-of-mouth, homemade zines, informal parties and events, and a deliberate sharing of basic technical know-how. The zine explosion, a quintessential DIY movement based on increasingly available reproduction technologies in copyshops and at corporate jobs since the mid-1980s, was crucial in spreading the new bike subculture.

Robin Haevens moved to San Francisco in 1996, knowing no one and not yet a bicyclist. But thanks to her roommates she found herself immersed in the bike messenger scene, and before long she was publishing her own occasional zine, *Rip It Up!,* about "bikes, beer and boys." Eventually she became a bike mechanic, founded a bike repair workshop for kids in San Francisco's Hunters' Point, and now teaches bike repair as part of a public high school curriculum.

She declares,

> "The underground bike subculture represents self-sufficiency, self-sustainability, and responsibility… [qualities that] could definitely be attributed to other kinds of ecological activism, e.g. community gardening. I also think that the bike or the garden culture (really healthy cultures) allow for a kind of giving and receiving that you can't get in the broader society … It breaks down the anonymity of the city.[6]

The mental space opened up is one of bicycling's best kept secrets. For many, choosing to bicycle is a public act of individuation, reinforcing a self-reliant and critical mentality. Often it is the most individualistic cycling "rebels" who invest the most time and effort in new communities and institutions.

Jessie Basbaum of San Francisco's Bike Kitchen says,

> Riding a bike is a very independent act. Just riding your bike around fosters a lot of self-reliance and comfortableness being alone. Riding by yourself gives you a lot of time to think, to look at things around you, so in that sense it's going against the grain a little bit.[7]

Ted White, long-time bike activist and "bikeumentarist" says,

> People who are into bikes tend almost always to be in some way independent thinking and self-sufficient… I think bikes are a positive response to almost everything that is wrong with American mainstream society today. Bikes are cheap, simple, and democratic and sexy in a very different way than riding around in a car. Bike transportation is about individuality but not about excess. Bikes are congenial and social. Bikes force us to be in our bodies and help us to know and love our bodies as they are.[8]

By contrast, there are glossy magazines and plenty of upscale marketers selling bicycles and *frou-frou* lycra clothing, helmets, bike accessories and all the things you would expect a prolific consumer society to promote. But that mainstream bicycling culture is largely separated from the grassroots upsurge, even if there are crossovers aplenty in the form of messenger bags, headlights, and other mass-produced accoutrements that trickle through the permeable membrane between the two worlds. As Stephen Duncombe eloquently put it, "Contemporary capitalism needs cultural innovation in order to open new markets, keep from stagnating, invest old merchandise with new meanings, and so on. Far from being a challenge to The Man, innovations in culture are the fuel of a consumer economy."[9]

Chicago's "Rat Patrol," a self-described "anarchist group," articulates the subcultural rejection of commodification and marketing, and with it, underlines the outlaw assault on marketing efforts to co-opt the bike culture:

> The pathetic sports junkie on a bicycle is no more free than a motorist trapped in an SUV in a traffic jam… There is a void of self-doubt which athletes attempt to cover with spandex outfits and titanium objects of veneration. The sporting goods "user" is compelled by nervous guilt to look down upon those who do not ride as fast, or as far, or as often. Persons exhibiting the following behaviors are best regarded as covert operators of the capitalistic conspiracy to further co-opt and defuse non-fossil-fueled transportation movements:
>
> * Abnormal concern with perfect finish and perfect operation of the bicycle
> * Keeps glossy bicycling magazines under the mattress
> * Suggests you should buy new equipment instead of repairing old bicycle
> * Always rides in superhero tights
> * When riding, is more concerned with speed and distance covered than scenery or places visited
> * Unable to hold a conversation unrelated to bicycles or biking
> * Paranoid delusion that he/she is being persecuted for his/her hobby
> * Speech is sprinkled with component brand names
> * Constant desire to witness to bicycle's transforming power in his/her own life
> * Believes that biking is a morally superior choice, therefore befitting a morally superior attitude
> * Attempts to bring bicycle-related issues into every conversation
> * Awkward duck walk caused by wearing cleated bike shoes into roadside businesses
> * Easily impressed with expensive equipment and celebrity endorsements
> * Wears helmet even when not on bike
>
> As you can see, these easily-identifiable symptoms of sporting goods addiction are identical to the symptoms of capitalist-driven automobile addiction. They are caused by the fetishization and worship of lifeless objects. What was once viewed as a useful tool, a means to an end, becomes the end in itself.

> Should your comrades seek to impose these dangerous ideas on you, or should you find yourself believing them, stay on your guard, and remember that these innocent-sounding ideas are in actuality part of a sinister plot to coopt the velorution. Do not let the greedy multinationals once again derail progressive attempts to save our Earth from global warming and environmental disaster![10]

The outlaw bicycling subculture is distinctly anti-consumerist. It is a tinkering culture that spontaneously re-uses and recycles in ways environmental advocates of recycling can only dream about. It is a culture that often merges bicycles with art and performance. Portland's CHUNK 666, an exemplary and probably typical group of bicycle hackers, "acquires whatever bicycles we can ethically without spending, [or] spending as little money as possible. We cut them into pieces and weld them back together again in different configurations."[11]

In the first issue of the *CHUNK 666* zine, a feature on one of the legendary early groups, the Hard Times Bicycle Club in Minneapolis, described how it has no dues, no regular meetings or rides. "Part of the HTBC aesthetic is anti-money and anti-retail… A mechanic and artist, 38-year-old Per Hanson, is president of the HTBC… He lives 'minimally,' having few possessions and no real job."[12] The Hard Times Bike Club spread the word that they would recycle used bike parts and as a result, parts were dropped off at their garage regularly.

Martin Leugers founded Chopper Riding Urban Dwellers (CRUD), a San Francisco-based group that also puts bikes back together "artistically".

> I like the punk rock ethics of not wanting to make money from my art… I decided I'm going to make money at my job, and I enjoy what I do (industrial design), though it's not my perfect ideal. But it gives me the ability to make crazy bikes that basically nobody wants. The bikes I make I view as a kind of sculpture… It's my totally creative outlet where I don't have to worry about selling them.[13]

Class doesn't often enter into the identities being created in these new subcultural spaces, and yet, a resilient anti-capitalist instinct runs through much of it and gets expressed in various ways. Echoing Leugers, a recurrent theme is the refusal to allow the wage-labor relationship to define one's engagement.

Jessie Basbaum (25 years old, works as a private investigator) and Catherine Hartzell (24, immunology lab researcher) co-founded San Francisco's Bike Kitchen in mid-2003. The Bike Kitchen quickly became a favorite haunt adjacent to Cellspace in the Mission District (It has since moved to Mission and 9th Streets near San Francisco's Civic Center). Covered in wildstyle graffiti, the Bike Kitchen sits in a former truck rental facility surrounded by asphalt, and on weekends, a neighborhood flea market. It's an all-volunteer space and deliberately refuses to provide paid services. "It's part of our policy not to do repairs for money… we're here to show people how to do it," says Basbaum. "It's definitely not a job," emphasizes Hartzell. In fact, if it were to become a job, Hartzell wonders "how I would feel. I don't think I would love it as much. When it's required of you, and you're not making the decision, you lose some sense of enjoyment."[14]

Basbaum described a cultural critique of wage-labor without naming it as such: "[People have] this idea that you have a job, but whatever you really care about should be your hobby, it shouldn't be your job, because then it becomes more mundane."

Bicycling subculture activists routinely work long hour hours for free. But they also see wage-labor's reduction of their full engagement with work as an oppressive and unfortunate distraction from their "real work." Ben Guzman, co-founder of the Los Angeles Bike Kitchen (no direct relation to the San Francisco Bike Kitchen, but the same name), works on television commercials for a living. But

> …my work the last few years has just been a way to get to be able to do the things I want to do… all my jobs, are just a means to get back to doing what's important. While I'm at work I'm taking a pause from the rest of the stuff I'm doing.[15]

Robin Haevens explains how doing her teaching job, even though it's similar to what she was doing before for free, changes the nature of it.

> If you're somehow making enough money to live, it's easy to use your extra energy on these projects, whether it's writing a zine—where I didn't make any money—or starting a bike program in Hunter's Point. … I started that with no feeling that I needed to be paid for it. Just a feeling that there were kids out there that would like to work on bikes, that had NOTHING else going on, and really needed to be doing something. But after a year, I was broke! The fact that it's my primary source of income and that I'm being paid a teacher's salary, puts extra pressure on it. It makes it different from just doing things because I want to do them and I see a need. It's no longer me independently doing something that I can change at will.[16]

Rides

…all you habitual motorists are suckers. You've been hoodwinked. Your automobile is expensive, annoying, and anti-social. My bicycle is cheap, fun and at times, a traveling party."
—Resist #42

The bicycling subculture is action-oriented. A lot of energy can go towards fixing and acquiring bikes, but finally it always comes down to riding them. There are countless recreational bicycle clubs around the United States but those clubs have been remarkably apolitical, except for occasional forays into lobbying for a rare road closure for a race or ride. Moreover, their members are not famous for hanging out together, working together, or having any other existence together beyond the club rides themselves. But the outlaw bikers have forged

new communities out of hundreds of theme rides, "derbies", races, rodeos, even bicycle polo and bicycle ballet in San Francisco. Messengers in New York and San Francisco spontaneously asserted their strength in large group rides in the late 1980s to avoid municipal regulation and harassment.

The New York Independent Couriers Association swung into action in 1987 when Mayor Koch announced a 90-day experimental ban of bikes from central midtown Manhattan. Groups of 30-400 messengers organized 'work to rule' rides up 6th Avenue and down 5th.[17] These courier rides took place fifteen years after large rides in 1972 demanding the elimination of cars from Manhattan, in the first late 20th century upsurge of bicycle activism.

In San Francisco the 20th anniversary of Earth Day was celebrated in 1990 with a big ride through the city, under the slogan "Bicycles Aren't In the Way, Bicycles Are the Way!" Months later cyclists converged on the big anti-Gulf War marches in January 1991, acting as scouts and roving bands of cycling protestors. A group of 50 cyclists even rode 65 miles from Santa Cruz to join in. Later that year the Bay Area Bike Action Winter Solstice People-Powered Parade rolled through Golden Gate Park on Dec. 21, protesting the prevalence of auto traffic in San Francisco's premiere public park. Cyclists have been campaigning for over fifteen years now *for* a Park and *against* a Parking Lot.

Critical Mass erupted out of this years-long climate of politicized bike rides and direct action. The first "Commute Clot" took off from the foot of San Francisco's Market Street on September 25, 1992, about 50 riders strong. After a couple of months of the "organized coincidence" growing steadily, riders dubbed it "Critical Mass" after a comment in Ted White's "bikeumentary" *Return of the Scorcher*. It has since spread throughout the world and has appeared in over 400 cities on five continents. It is still a magical monthly occurrence in San Francisco, routinely drawing over 1,000 riders, and sometimes several thousand.

The full history of Critical Mass has been told elsewhere.[18] Among the different threads of the outlaw bicycling subculture, Critical Mass represents the most public demonstration of the subculture's existence, and its most overtly political expression. The monthly drama of a mass seizure of the streets by bicyclists is unique in many ways. It has no official organizers or leaders and thus is a monthly experiment in spontaneous self-management. It has more of a celebratory tone than one dedicated to protest, but both realities coexist. More subversively, it is a *prefigurative* demonstration; it puts into practice a new type of public commons, created and animated by human conviviality, the kind of life usually promised "after the revolution." It escapes the logic of commodification entirely. No one has to buy anything to participate, and there is practically no hawking of wares around the event. Rolling down the street in a new mobile community, Critical Mass has pioneered network swarming[19] as a political tactic, albeit a tactic employed to no instrumental purpose. Critical Mass's amorphous and prefigurative qualities militate against making demands, declaring an agenda or seeking specific goals (at the same time, hundreds of political ideas, campaigns and slogans have been distributed during Critical Mass rides, including e.g. "Bicycling: A Quiet Statement Against Oil Wars"). Instead, an unpredictable

number of citizens come together freely each month in cities large and small to begin living the life they can only dream about the rest of the month.

City life based on bicycles, walking and well-developed public transit is a dream in America, but it's a dream that becomes real every month during the brief minutes Critical Mass fills the streets. The right to assemble and to engage in free speech also get exercised each month, highlighting a diminishing public life through dramatic public action. Critical Mass exceeds simple civil libertarian behavior though. In gathering dozens, hundreds or thousands of cyclists month after month for over a decade across the world, a social space has been opened up in which further networking has flourished. The bike ride is the premise, but the deeper transformation of imaginations and social connections is hard to measure.

Clearly bicycling is on the rise, and the public manifestation of a grassroots embrace of cycling and a whole range of cultural alternatives is most visible in Critical Mass. But other bike rides have emerged in its wake, as have dozens of new associations and initiatives. In Chicago a campaign to "Depave Lakeshore Drive" bubbled out of the Critical Mass community. Chicago has also staged a "Bike Winter" festival, held annual auto-free art shows, and organized dozens of theme rides, including a lengthy ride along the old canals and railroad right-of-ways. In Bloomington, Indiana, cyclists have held midnight full moon rides over the past few years. "Midnight Ridazz" take over the streets of Los Angeles in the middle of the night, too, on themed rides for more than a year now, slowly mapping the entire city of Los Angeles.

In August of 2002, the New York Bike Messengers Association hosted the first annual Warriors fun ride—all night, from the Bronx to Coney Island. Maggie Bowman described the scene at the beginning of the ride, a rainy night.

> The park is filled with approximately 500 warriors, loosely sectioned off by gang, 83 gangs in total… We make our way around the park checking out the competition. The Fearleaders, Los Banditos, the Aliens, the Turf, the Ridge Street Wrenches, the Pelham Park Tennis Pros, the Flatbush Dandies, the Electric Vikings, the Ghost Riders, the Furies, the Killer Clowns, the Riffs, the Rotten Apples, the San Francisco Cutters.[20]

In San Francisco, inspired by Critical Mass, an ongoing series of Cultural Bike Tours were started in 1993. The first ride visited three-dozen community gardens (out of a citywide 110 or so) in the southeast part of town. After a few more informal tours, the local bike advocacy group began sponsoring them, and has had a wide variety of rides over the past decade, including tours of ice cream parlors, gay history, labor history, a Freeway stump tour, and more. In Los Angeles, a Tour de Tamal took riders to a half dozen tamale parlors around the town. And so on.

Annual Bikesummer festivals in San Francisco, Portland, Vancouver, New York and Los Angeles have brought thousands of people onto bicycles and into contact with the whole gamut of bicycling culture—from mainstream to decidedly "outlaw." In Los Angeles, some of the Bikesummer organizers put on a

event in March 2004 called "More Than Transportation" which centered around bicycles and DiY punk culture, which in important ways set the stage for 2005's Bikesummer there.

Zany clubs and their events have created their own cultural whirl. In San Francisco, the motley crew of Cyclecide have developed a full-scale Bike Rodeo, including pedal-powered rides, derbies, races, bike toss, and more. CHUNK 666 in Portland is famous for their Chunkathlon's, with tall bike jousting and beer-soaked races, while other outlaw cyclists have developed what's become known as "zoo bombing," hurtling down a major local hill, often in the dark on various altered bicycles. The wild creativity of the Cyclecide mechanics and their ilk in Portland and elsewhere underscore a profoundly creative engagement with bicycling technology.

Contesting The Technosphere

From the early ruminations on future shock and the problems of too much leisure that would come in the wake of widespread automation, popular culture has tended to treat developments in science and technology as automatic processes, almost natural, that proceed independent of human choice or will. The elevation of expertise onto an unchallengeable pedestal has been an important means by which the juggernaut of capitalist modernization has been imposed on society. Most of us are plainly mystified about science and research and the choices that go on behind the scenes that in turn lead to the technologies that shape our everyday lives. Changes wrought in workplace technologies and entire industries have repeatedly left people unemployed, or at best finding their work much more tightly controlled and regulated.

Ironically, this much-touted modernization has consisted overwhelmingly of a systematic process of deskilling human labor. In pursuit of profitability and competitive advantage, capitalists and technologists have focused their efforts on controlling the labor process, turning living humans into cogs in a much larger machine, and to the greatest extent possible, taking the skills and knowledge out of the workers heads and hands and implanting them into the machines. The time-and-motion studies known as "Taylorization" after their early 20th century inventor, Frederick Taylor, have reached such extremes that labor processes now seek to extract 56 productive seconds of each 60-second minute in the workday. And of course the workday itself has been lengthened in addition to being intensified. During the past 25 years the eight-hour day has been lost to most people.

Humans make the technosphere, of course. Though people may be deskilled on the job and turned into keyboardists and dial readers and "checkers," they retain a great deal of creativity outside of the workplace. Additionally, the

dissemination of practical technical knowledge has become much more widespread with the Internet, and many people are hybridizing and inventing new uses for the detritus of modern life. A key piece of that process is the cultural rejection of expertise that we find prevalent among DiY (Do-it-Yourself) youth. Nowhere is this more apparent than among the outlaw bicycle subculture where the proliferation of skill sharing and repurposing is rampant. Objects made to be used in one way are constantly being re-imagined and re-purposed to new uses.

Eric Welp of Washington DC's Chain Reaction:

> We're dealing with a self-sufficient, efficient, simple motion machine; not a perpetual motion machine. It's a pure, simple technology... I appreciate the use of bikes in terms of benefits for the community, human well-being, self empowerment and all that, and those are good values to apply to the idea of technology, but I think that sometimes technology has lost sight of its basic purpose in terms of those values. So the shop is an important reminder of how technology *should be*.[21]

In an issue of *CHUNK 666*, the whys and wherefores of "gear" are addressed at some length. "The corporate slimelordz of America have fixated upon gear as an easy method of sponging money from yuppies and yuppy wannabes." Though they refuse the marketing juggernaut knocking at the edges of their culture, CHUNKsters have developed their own argument for "gear" that also eschews the total rejection position that some have adopted.

> Rising from the homebrew gear kit, we have the refunctionalized gear, gear which has either been adapted to its purpose or which would normally be retired. The majority of headwear fits this category. Garage-sale bicycle and motorcycle helmets, football, army, and construction helmets, and even Viking helmets with added straps have served to encourage dwindling collections of brain cells to retain their coherent mass. Ski or aviator gogs with a handkerchief taped to the bottom protect the sensitive face when diving (or being thrown) through plate glass windows.[22]

Many of the prominent activists in the outlaw bicycle subculture turn out to be newly adept at working with tools and mechanics. "I didn't become a mechanic until after I'd become a bike nut," says Robin Haevens:

> Technology can empower people because they can use it as a problem-solving tool. I see technology as being much more useful to me than I did before. When I say 'technology,' I mean in a limited sense, I mean tool use and such.[23]

Ben Guzman tell us that:

> it was through bicycling that I developed tinkering. In college I did an art piece about how my father didn't teach me about cars, because he didn't know about cars, but how that's so *not*-male. But it was through bicycling that I learned how to do things.

Jesse Basbaum has a similar tale:

> I was not previously mechanically inclined… to someone who has never put a wrench on a bike, it's this utter mystery, it's like magic. But after having some basic skills everything makes sense, it all fits together in a logical way.

In New York, Bill diPaola helped start the bike activist group Times Up! He became a plumber after becoming chastened at his own lack of practical skills.

> I realized if you want to do something, you just can't be sitting in a room and talking about the philosophy of it. You have to know how things work and you have to be able to get your hands dirty. I'm not very happy with a lot of the new activists I see, that don't really understand mechanics… I'm happy whenever I see a new person in the group who's got a skill.[24]

In the dissident subcultures that bicycling touches, there is a common undercurrent of anti-technology ideology. Basbaum explains:

> … A lot of the people in the bicycling community and a lot of the people coming to our shop, and who love bike mechanics, really have an anti-technology bent, you know? These are people who don't like cars, who don't like television, that kind of thing, [but they] like organic food and all that. It's healthy technology I guess, to put a term on it. Gardening and bicycling versus automobiles and monoculture. Those are two types of technologies, technology that's in theory sustainable and environmentally friendly.

But Megulon-5 of CHUNK 666 debunks that idea as simplistic. "It's a technology that a lot of people don't see involves steel foundries and rubber plantations and oil extraction." His own experience of the recurrent anti-technology line leads him to argue,

> I'm not only pro-technology, I'm anti-anti-technology… I'm willing to make distinctions about the use of technology. I'm willing to distinguish between cutting your tofu jerky with a knife or stabbing me with a knife! That's technology… Technology is not a thing, it's a process. And I'm for the development of technology… there's a lot of people who want to turn to a pastoral, neolithic, paleolithic, level of technology, and they're "against technology." But what they're really against is a certain level of technology… the plow is ok, paper clips are ok, the telegraph maybe, bicycles yes, but no steel refinery. Wooden bicycles are good. They've never ridden a wooden bicycle, but they want to… As I got more hands-on I became more realistic. I don't think of bikes as the cure for society's ills so much anymore,… everyone's living in a factory that moves people. So I see bicycle technology as a way to escape, or help escape that…

Technological know-how, and the sharing of information, creates new circuits of knowing, of trusting, of social verification, and finally and most importantly, of self-confidence. In Los Angeles, Ben Guzman had a typical experience with someone who had no knowledge of bike repair, but also felt alienated culturally.

> This guy didn't want to talk to me, and he didn't want to really ask me for anything, but he's like, "yeah man, I need a tool to do this thing," and you're like, "yeah, man, well you can come in and do it." He's like, "oh man you have to show me…" and I'm like "That's what we do, come on in." So he comes in. Once he pulls off the crank arm, he walked outside the door to his friend, and he's like "Check it out!" Removed his bottom bracket and swapped it. And then he came back the next day. On Thursday he's back going, "Oh man I want to do this, and I want to do that!" And then what's cool is you have him interacting with this woman, that he would never interact with, but [now] we're all buddies because we ride bikes.[25]

An unexpected, but perhaps unsurprising, result of bike tinkering is the emergence of new communities. One common glue in working class cultures, especially but not exclusively among males, is the ability to engage in tech talk. Bike Kitchen's Basbaum concurs: "Talking about bikes, absolutely, I've made friends through the shop and so have other people, strictly based on bikes. Of course it bleeds into other things. You can talk about bikes for a long time, but eventually it's like "so, where do you work?"

Eric Welp in DC describes the role of shop talk this way.

> Shop talk sort of gives us all a common ground in the shop working with each other… it gives the kids working in the shop confidence to be able to communicate and talk knowledgebly about bikes with these folks who they might not otherwise interact with. It gives them a sense of pride to be able to help other people in their neighborhood with repairs and explain things to them. Self confidence: It's amazing, you see it everyday working with innercity youth.
>
> For example, Jimmy, he was one of the kids we had in a class. When he started, he was just a really skinny, shy kid. Now, it's amazing, you can talk to him about bikes and he is actually passionate about it, and he is extremely articulate with customers. I think he's really developed confidence as a mechanic, so he's a great example.[26]

Not content to buy and ride a bicycle, outlaw bicyclists have banded together to reconstruct hybrid bikes in all kinds of shapes and sizes from the junked bikes littering any city. The widespread rehabilitation and sharing of discarded bikes is common in many cities. Bike co-ops have institutionalized outside of economic logic, through skill-sharing, training, and experimentation with technology that have given rise to a whole subpopulation of tinkerers and appropriators. Ultimately their practice portends a practical engagement with the technosphere more broadly, perhaps eventually addressing the shape and direction of scientific research itself.

Autonomous Spaces or Small Businesses?

The new DiY bicycle shops are trying to bridge class and racial divides. Facing

daunting problems of sustainability they exist on the verge of co-optation. Everyday rent and survival confront DiY bikeshop staffers with the necessity of making money. This in turn pushes them towards converting cooperative spaces based on sharing and mutual aid into small businesses. Even when officially not-for-profit, cash flows inexorably begin to shape decisions and behaviors. Moreover, by providing training and experience to kids (and adults), one of the ironic outcomes is to help them open the door to a "real" job.

Chain Reaction in DC is trying to survive without

> becom[ing] a chain with a bunch of locations around the city. I think we'd just like to be stable and not have to rely on any donations or grants. It'd be great to be self sustained and sustainable. We're not going to save the world with bikes, but we can change it by changing a kid's outlook. If we can change things to help them better understand the effect of their actions and how they can function in society, then changing our principal mode of transportation is just the beginning.[27]

Ted White recounts his own experience at the Center for Appropriate Transport in Eugene, Oregon.

> When I worked at the CAT we worked specifically with so-called "at-risk" youth. I think most of these kids loved being in our bike workshop--what they did there was tangible, it related to something real. They took metal and rubber and plastic parts, put them together, fine tuned them, and then--voila!-- they had literally made themselves a vehicle for both external exploration and self-discovery.[28]

At San Francisco's Bike Kitchen "someone volunteers six hours of time to our shop and they learn, hopefully, a set of basic skills and contribute a little bit to the shop, and then they earn a frame, and build up the bike on their own. … When someone does the earn-a-bike program in earnest and with enthusiasm I think it's very self-empowering," Basbaum told me.

Earn-A-Bike programs are running all over the U.S. Often supported by local governments and police departments, they are widely recognized as programs that help kids learn basic skills and bicycle safety, get involved in their community, and give them a means of transportation they can keep at the end of the program. The Boston-based Bikes Not Bombs is one of the organizations that have done a lot to promote the model, and they make available on their website an Instructor Training Manual.[29] Often starting with donated bikes from the police collection of recovered stolen bikes, there's no telling how far afield some of these programs can go.

In the case of Bicas in Tucson, Arizona, kids who have been arrested can work off their misdemeanors and infractions by enrolling in the Earn-A-Bike program. To fulfill the terms of their "penalty" they must select a broken bike from a room of over 1000 such rusting hulks, and then go about learning to bring it back to life. Once the bike is properly rebuilt, fixed, and tuned up, they have completed their "sentence" and may ride it home.

SF's Bike Kitchen, along with the Bike Hut Foundation and some other San Francisco shops, give kids a chance to earn bikes too, but without the involvement of local authorities. Often enough, once kids get involved with a bike shop experience where they are treated with some dignity and expectations, they come back for more. Viktor Veysey's Pier 40 Bike Hut has been mentoring poor kids for almost a decade. Pedal Revolution in the Mission District started as a bike shop to provide training and work opportunities for homeless and runaway youth. It has since evolved into a more mainstream bike shop, but still has training and job opportunities for youth in need. In all these programs, kids in trouble get to interact with engaged and interested adults and other kids. It doesn't always "save" every kid, but hundreds of youth across the country have gotten a new start thanks to these kinds of hands-on training programs. Often enough, a seriously motivated youngster can learn real skills and go on to find employment in the growing local bicycle repair business, as, for example, DC's Chain Reaction has seen with a number of its "graduates."

The backbone of this network of underfunded, barely sustainable co-op and DiY bikeshops is provided by the outlaw bicycle subculture's shock troops—the men and women who find a way to survive on very low incomes, or who work at these shops after (and in addition to) their paid gigs. They are altruistic, politically engaged, and passionate. They challenge the transit and energy systems shaped by capitalism but crucially, they are making connections *in practice* between race, class, gender and urban life, city planning, technology and ecological reinhabitation. Ironically, by teaching kids to work for their bikes, these programs also reinforce the core values of a capitalist, work ethic culture.

John Gerken, writing in New Orleans' *Chainbreaker* zine, describes why he is involved with the local bike co-op, Plan B (which survived Hurricane Katrina without damage, and re-opened by late October 2005).

> This place is a working example of how I think things could be different. It's a place where people can share resources, skills and knowledge, and not have to pay for every single thing. I think people can help each other out more than we're led to believe, and it feels good to also learn so much while I'm doing it.
>
> Plan B is the New Orleans Community Bike Project. It's a DiY bike shop located in a huge warehouse near the French Quarter that also has shows, Recycle for the Arts, trapeze practice, Food Not Bombs, yoga, art shows, and other stuff. We're all volunteer, and have all kinds of tools and resources for people to use, as well as piles of parts and old frames and bikes… We don't fix your bike at Plan B—we're there to help you learn how to do it yourself… A broad mix of people does come in. It's a measure of success in any community project that gets beyond its own specific community—in this case, for the most part, scrappy young white people… I'm proud that, while it is rooted in the ideals that are formed within my specific community, Plan B interacts with a broad cross-section of New Orleans. Yuppies, college kids, European tourists, homeless folks, and street performers, clowns and circus freaks, neighborhood kids. Really people of all ages and walks of life come in.

Class Composition And Community

> There's very little doubt in my mind that the way our society works is dictated by corporations. Ultimately our lives are run by commerce and corporations that drive it, and the politics that shape corporations' behavior. It's all capitalism I guess, it's all an exchange of money… I'm definitely not working class. I mean I work but, I don't work a blue collar job… My upbringing was probably upper middle class. My parents are scientists at UCSF. I don't know what economic class I would fall in.
> (Jesse Basbaum)[30]

The vast majority of Americans work for a living. But they are divided in countless ways, primarily by race, gender and income. Combined with an amnesiac culture that disdains history, the American working class is unaware of itself as such. In fact, a majority of American workers think of themselves as "middle class" irrespective of the color of their collar or their relative income or security.

This process is further complicated by the fact that there is no desire to embrace being a worker. Self-definition is increasingly established *outside* of wage-labor, and given the stupidity and pointlessness of a great deal of the work people do as wage-laborers, this is a very healthy response. Instead of looking for a movement to embrace an obsolete and denigrating self-conception of "worker" as a starting point, we might have better results by looking objectively at what people are *doing*, regardless of how they define themselves in class terms.

The fragmentation of daily life due to workplace and residential transience has been well-documented. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* provides sociological evidence for what most of us know in our bones: the fabric of sociability is seriously frayed. The institutions that once knit together communities and daily life in America, from unions to Lion's Clubs to Boy Scouts and even mainstream religion[31], have all suffered a precipitous decline in membership and participation during the past 40 years. Activities such as letter writing, participating in local politics, joining with neighbors or other parents at school to effect change, have all dropped dramatically. Most people interact with others primarily through economic relationships (work and shopping), and otherwise retreat into the isolation of family and home.

Leftists and labor organizers have been trying to "organize the unorganized" for decades, but unions are at historically low numbers. A crucial factor underpinning this dynamic is what might be called a 'rear-view mirror' conceptual framework. Many organizers and leftists are still committed to political models that depend on steady employment, state guarantees and long-term residential stability. In fact, the bicycling subculture is but one of numerous examples of people assembling themselves into new constellations, creating new ways of associating that escape the familiar bounds of mid-20th

century, "middle-class" America.

The new bicycling subculture is one of the preeminent examples of the gradual re-composition of the working class in the North America (the emergence of the bicycling subculture is also a European phenomenon, and can be glimpsed in South America and urban centers in Asia too). This claim does not mean that self-aware workers are embracing bicycles as a strategy of class resistance in a capitalist world (although it may be largely true that these are wage-laborers who are deserting the economic constraints imposed by car ownership). What it denotes is a process by which people who survive through selling their time and skills in "normal" jobs are connecting *outside* of that process through association with the bicycling subculture.

Bike Kitchen's Jessie Basbaum says

> [w]e've created a space where all different people come through; people that wouldn't normally associate with one another. You meet people and other people meet people and friendships are made… we've created a space that fosters people helping one another"

> **Megulon-5**: "Everyone in the Chunk 666 community for whatever reason—cheapness or ideals or just bike obsession—has [escaped] being a chump about the car culture. Usually they have the same kind of nonsubordinate [attitude] to [The Machine]. Part of my view of the role of Chunk 666 in the bike community is we do what we do because we love it. Hopefully we can get people together to have a fun time involving bicycles, low technology or high technology, and drinking beer, hanging out on the street. Like the Family Truckster, a long bike with a grill on the back. We'd park it somewhere on the sidewalk and start grilling burgers and drinking beer, and people come over and hang out with us. One of the best things about the Chunkathlon [a zany gathering of bikers on improvised choppers who participate in beer-soaked races, jousting matches, and fire-leaping stunts] is that we own the street. We have a block party to close off the street, but long after our permit expires we are drinking beer around a bonfire in the middle of the street. [32]

Los Angeles's Ben Guzman sees the new community as central.

> The community is so much fun. We hosted a *Tour de Tamal*. Everyone chipped in some money, and we went on a ride and ate tamales all over the place… Riding a bike is part of a community, and you wave hello to everybody you see that rides a bike. It's the biggest punk rock thing to be a community… The giant city of Los Angeles is saying 'don't be part of a community, don't interact with each other, don't be happy, don't commute on a bicycle'… If you do those two things, interact with each other well and ride a bike, those are the biggest extremes you can pull off in LA.[33]

Bill DiPaola of New York's Times Up! gives community a similar importance.

> Community means a lot to me personally. It's everything. I'm surrounded in

> the East Village… we actually help save the community gardens, and we have community spaces. We are nothing, the bicycle community in NYC, unless we can organize. We cannot organize unless we operate in community spaces. There's a big public space issue in New York, and we're using a lot of the community gardens, the community spaces, the parks, to meet and talk about these things… With class we try to say "everybody is acceptable in our group." So when I hear the word 'class' I think we need to break that down, but not in a negative way."

As a long-time activist on the left, DiPaola struggles to overcome the baggage of past efforts. He rejects outright the labels "working class" or "middle class": "Those are just labels that are created by the corporate media."[34] But in the next breath DiPaola quickly agrees that there is a ruling class. For his part, Ben Guzman says:

> I've heard and seen the statement forever, that 'there's no war but the class war.' In the last six months, I finally figured it out, and it's TRUE!! I grew up in a middle class neighborhood… I choose to ride a bicycle and then people say 'oh, you choose to ride a bicycle because you're allotted the choice to ride because you come from a certain class.' Everybody in my class is NOT riding a bicycle by choice. Everybody else in my class is driving a car because they haven't even thought that there's a different choice… what's happening with the Bicycle Kitchen, is we're breaking down the classes. Everybody rides a bike. Or if they want to, everybody CAN ride a bike.

Portland's Megulon-5 explains why outlaw bicyclists' values are distinct from mainstream America's.

> Being a bicycle person turned me into the kind of person who saw the value of spending a lot of time doing something I liked, as opposed to spending more money… yeah, it changes what you do, and also it often involves your doing it with your comrades… [it creates] a social process, not necessarily 'all for one and one for all' … but a competition and cooperation together for resources, mostly cooperation. I'm a craftsman. I think most people are surprised if they meet me in the context of C.H.U.N.K. I'm a very anal retentive, uptight and stable type of person. I'm a computer programmer.
>
> I don't even know how I define 'class' myself, because I'm not much of a political thinker… a lot of the people riding bikes don't want to be riding bikes. They are not excited about the fact that they're riding a bike to work. I recognize that it is class that puts them there.... [and] that our class is what gives us the opportunity to be Chunk 666. Most, but not all, have an upper middle class background. They all have a comfortable enough life that they can spend time doing this. They can play. They can live in Portland and have jobs that involve riding their bikes to work, for example, or spend time looking for a job that will give them that. Mainly, we're all just young slackers without kids, so we can mess around. Lots of us are broke, but I don't think any are poor. Someone might not be able to buy the beer one night. Most of us are living in cheap rooms in rundown houses, but nobody's worried about being homeless.[35]

Martin Leugers

> "grew up really poor and my parents always tried to appear, not well off, but like they had no problems when they clearly had HUGE financial problems. My dad was unemployed most of his life but too proud to ever get public assistance, which they probably could have got, and my mom was a teacher at a Catholic school." Now Martin is a well-paid industrial designer at a small consulting firm in Silicon Valley and has the freedom to work on bikes for fun. "I avoid any appearance of being wealthy. I definitely do identify as déclassé."[36]

Jimmy, a young African-American man working at Chain Reaction in DC, explains his own sense of class:

> "I'd say I'm probably in the lower middle class. You gotta work, and if you're makin' it all right and the work's not too tough, you're sorta in the middle. Lower class means you don't have nothing. And middle class pays the upper class by consuming all the upper class's goods made by the lower class. But nobody is better than anybody. I don't think about it at all."[37]

No one wants to think of themselves as low class. The dignity of being "working class" is a lost cultural concept and no amount of demands for "respect" can overcome the abject stupidity and routinization that has destroyed the dignity of work itself. So first, most workers don't want to think about class. We each examine our own lot in life and reasonably conclude that we're somewhere in a sprawling "middle" between Learjet luxury and total destitution. And given the fact that the poorest 10% of Americans are still "richer" materially than two out of three of the world's population, that idea has some objective truth.

But this so-called middle is in fact a broad working class made up of wage-laborers in innumerable occupations and paid a wide range of salaries and benefits, under many different conditions. The micro-stratification of the U.S. working population puts everyone into the subjective position of being able to imagine falling down or climbing up a notch or two (or several). In that daily life, people see themselves as "middle class" as a way of avoiding the plain everyday truth of living in class society. But the shared reality of wage-labor and basic powerlessness is the overriding truth of most people's lives. The steady dilution of class consciousness with the successful implantation of the "middle class" idea is part of how people's identities came to be defined by shopping choices more than occupations. But insofar as people are creating meaning by *doing interesting things* outside of the job, they are slowly creating new ways of understanding their own lives and the communities in which they are lodged.

The common resistance to thinking about class shows up again and again in assertions that in the bicycling subculture they are "breaking down" class, that "everyone's welcome" and so on. In fact, the subculture demonstrates a healthy impulse towards free association and mutual aid. Going back to Marx or even Kropotkin, we can see that in a real sense these are the stirrings of individual and social revolt against being reduced to mere 'workers', to being trapped in the

objectified and commodified status of labor power.

The invigorated subjectivity of outlaw bicyclists is apparent in their full engagement, their humanity and their urgent need to define their own culture, to make their own lives' meaning directly and cooperatively. From these myriad experiments new ways of living are being created in the here and now, which not only make life better immediately, but in crucial ways are laying the social and technological foundations for a post-capitalist life. Resilient individualism insisting on a cooperative shared future illuminates the subjectivity that might finally overthrow a society that has reduced us all to mere objects.

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Ted White: Bikumentarist, 41, filmmaker, gardener
Jessie Basbaum, 25, Bike Kitchen SF, private investigator
Catherine Hartzell, 24, Bike Kitchen, SF, Immunology lab researcher
Robin Haevens, 31, Rip It Up!, bike mechanic, bike repair teacher, public school teacher
Eric Welp, and Jimmy, Chain Reaction, Washington DC bikeshop at Shaw Ecovillage
Ben Guzman, 30, Bike Kitchen, Los Angeles, film editor
Bill di Paola, 30s, Times Up! NYC, political organizer
Jay Broemmel, 30s, Heavy Pedal/Cyclecide Bike Rodeo, SF, metal fabricator
Karl Anderson, 31, C.H.U.N.K. 666, Portland OR, computer programmer
Jarico, Cyclecide

Bike Co-ops (not comprehensive)

Bicas (Tucson AZ), Bike Kitchen (SF), Bike Kitchen (LA), Chain Reaction (DC), Center for Appropriate Transportation/Eugene Bicycle Works (Eugene, OR), Recycle-A-Bicycle (NYC), Pedal Revolution (SF), BikeHut (SF), Bicycle Community Project (SF), North Portland Bicycle Workers (Portland, OR), Re-Cyclery Bicycle Collective (Ashville (NC) Community Resource Center), Bike Church @ Neighborhood Bike Works (Philadelphia PA), Santropol Roulet (Montreal), La Voie Libre/Right To Move (Montreal), Third Ward Community Bike Center (Houston), The Hub Bike Co-op, (Minneapolis), Oberlin Bike Co-op (Oberlin, OH), Bike Church (Santa Cruz), Ciclofficina (Rome: Exsnia, Macchia Rosa; Milan: BULK), Plan B (New Orleans), Blackstone Bicycle Works (Chicago), Ohio City Bicycle Co-op (Ohio City), Recycle Ithaca's Bicycles (Ithaca, NY)

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Sin on Wheels, Cognition, Bike Pride, CHUNK 666, Voice of Da, Giddy Up!, Resist, Mudflap, The Illiterate Digest, Rip it Up!, Chainbreaker, bike.not, Operation: Courier, Moving Target, the derailleur, V.jer

Bike Clubs (not comprehensive)

Cars-R-Coffins, SCUL, Choppercabras, Bike Rodeo (San Francisco), Rat Patrol (Chicago), Chunk 666 (Portland), Hard Times Bike Club (Minneapolis), Heavy Pedal Cyclecide (San Francisco), Pedal Camp At Burning Man, Klunkerleaguenow, Bikerodnkustom, Dead Baby Bike Club (Seattle), Zoo Bombers (Portland), Chopper Riding Urban Dwellers (CRUD) (SF)

Notes

[1] Robin Haevens, author's interview, Dec. 20, 2003.
[2] Megulon-5, author's interview, Feb. 5, 2003
[3] For one of many analyses see Kunstler, James. (2005) *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-First Century*. Kunstler: Grove/Atlantic.
[4] "Rise of 'mutant bike' culture", David Buchbinder, *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 24, 2003.
[5] Forester, John. (1992). *Effective Cycling* (6th edition). Cambridge: MIT Press.
[6] Robin Haevens, author's interview, Dec. 20, 2003.
[7] Jessie Basbaum, author's interview, Sept. 25, 2004.
[8] Ted White, email interview, June, 2004.
[9] from Duncombe, Stephen. (1997) *Notes from underground: Zines and the politics of alternative culture*. New York: Verso. p. 192.
[10] Rat Patrol. "Rat Patrol Manifesto." URL: http://www.geocities.com/ratpatrolhq/Manifesto1.html (September 11, 2006).
[11] Megulon-5, author's interview, Feb. 5, 2003
[12] *CHUNK* 666, April 1997, Portland, Oregon.
[13] Martin Leugers, author's interview, March 22, 2004
[14] Jessie Basbaum and Catherine Hartzell, author's interview, Sept. 24, 2004.
[15] Ben Guzman, author's interview, Dec. 7, 2003.
[16] Robin Haevens, Ibid.
[17] "Bike Messenger Strike in NYC?" *Processed World* #20, Fall 1987.
[18] see Carlsson, Chris (Ed.). (2002) "*Critical Mass: Bicycling's Defiant Celebration*. Berkeley: AK Press.
[19] David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla characterize Critical Mass as "an unusually loose netwar design" in (2001) *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy*. Rand Institute.
[20] Sin on Wheels #1, "Bicycle Cherry Throws Down at the Warriors Ride…" by Maggie Bowman.
[21] Eric Welp, Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Robin Haevens, Ibid.
[24] Bill DiPaola, Ibid.
[25] Guzman, Ibid.
[26] Eric Welp, Ibid.
[27] Eric Welp, Chain Reaction, Washington DC, interview conducted by Jasmine Chehrazi, Dec. 23, 2004.
[28] Ted White, Ibid.
[29] Bikes Not Bombs (2006). "The Earn A Bike Program." URL: http://www.bikesnotbombs.org/eab.htm (September 12, 2006).
[30] Jessie Basbaum, Ibid.
[31] The evangelical and fundamentalist mega-churches are a notable exception.
[32] Megulon-5, Ibid.
[33] Ben Guzman, Ibid.
[34] Bill DiPaola, author's interview, July 23, 2003.
[35] Megulon-5, Ibid.
[36] Martin Leugers, Ibid.
[37] Jimmy, Chain Reaction, Washington DC, interview conducted by Jasmine Chehrazi, Dec. 23, 2004

Latin America's Autonomous Organizing

MARIE TRIGONA

In February 2006 activists met in Uruguay for the fourth Latin American Conference of Popular Autonomous Organizations. Over 300 delegates from Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay organized this year's annual event as a space to strategize autonomous organizing and coordinate direct actions. This year's conference, held February 24-26 in Montevideo, focused on building popular power in Latin America among organizations autonomous from the state, political parties and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Galpon de Corrales, a community center in a working class neighborhood in Montevideo, coordinated the conference. The Galpon features a community radio station, a community library and a large indoor space to hold cultural activities. Activists from the community center take pride in the fact that the Galpon is completely self-managed and sustaining, and several times a week they organize a collective meal.

The participating organizations were generally oriented towards class struggle and libertarian practices such as grass–roots organizing, direct democracy and mutual solidarity. Within the debate of how to build popular power, delegates discussed strategies for communities to solve their own problems independently of the state or-other institutions.

The current context offered by Latin American state politics emerged as a focal point during the two-day meeting. In each of the nations represented, social organizations have faced new challenges due to the resurgence of "progressive" social democratic governments. Take, for example, the case of Uruguay's social movements, where–many of these have demobilized after the inauguration of Tabare Vazquez. At the conference all eyes were therefore on Bolivia due to the recent victory of the Movement to Socialism's (MAS) leader, Evo Morales. In all of the workshops, participants discussed how to prevent the growing expectations populations have of their social democratic governments from impeding the accumulation of popular power.

Everything at the congress was *auto-gestionado* (self-managed), from the *olla popular* (collectively cooked meal) to cleaning and maintenance. Artists performed spontaneous theatre and Afro-Uruguayan popular music, *Candome*, into the wee hours of the night. The 200 participants represented a diverse array of activist work and focuses that included human rights groups, community centers, alternative media outlets, anarchist organizations, unemployed worker organizations, student groups, popular education teams and movements of cardboard collectors.[1]

Marie Trigona, 'Latin America's Autonomous Organizing' (Article). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 107-114. No copyright.

Beyond each group's particular focus, activists within each country are working to create venues for political formation and popular education as part of a larger plan for an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist Latin America.

The workshops focused on the construction of popular power at a grass–roots level on each front: human rights (impunity for police and military accused of human rights violations and historical memory, the ongoing problem of political prisoners, and the criminalization of protests); labor organizing (worker movements, class struggle tendencies, democratic union organizing and recuperated enterprises); barrio (neighborhood organizations, community organizing, unemployed worker organizations and community radios); student (student movements and student autonomy); and environmental (land and production and the privatization of natural resources).

Neighbourhood Organizing

For decades social movements have taken on the task of organizing in their *barrios* (neighborhoods). Historically, neighborhood organizations have mobilized to improve basic services in the barrio, for example potable water, paved streets, sewage installations and schools. With growing unemployment and poverty levels in the 80s and 90s, many neighborhood organizations took on the role of demanding work or subsidies for basic survival. The unemployed, who have no access to labor unions or tools to protest in their workplace, have organized in Latin America's *barrios* for work and dignity.

Within the workshop on neighborhood organizing, participants concluded that the working class needs to reverse the fragmentation and build popular power within neighborhoods. The barrio has become a territory where all sectors of social movements come together. The workshop focused on creating a new working class subjectivity so that the working class can identify the oppression they must survive, and create tools for struggle.

The Galpon is an excellent example with respect to the problems and possibilities offered by organizing on a community level. Its members work with residents from the surrounding barrio, including children and many unemployed adults. One of the challenges facing the Galpon is meeting urgent needs of participants while moving away from traditional forms of social work.

During the conference I interviewed Gustavo, who helped build the Galpon de Corrales as a political space. Gustavo advocates a platform similar to that of anarchists like Errico Malatesta, who believed that anarchist organizations need to carry out a political agenda based on autonomy and independence, and therefore take on full responsibility. In his 1897 essay, "Anarchism and Organization" Malatesta argued that organization is necessary, and that anarchists are able to come together and arrive at an agreement without

submitting to authority. He also advocated mass organizations building popular power rather than orthodox anarchist groups. Malatesta writes: "To become a convinced anarchist, and not in name only, they must begin to feel the solidarity that joins them to their comrades, and learn to cooperate with others in defense of common interests and, by struggling against the bosses and against the government that supports them, they should realize that bosses and governments are useless parasites and that the workers could manage the domestic economy by their own efforts."[2]

In the interview, Gustavo summarized expectations for the conference and expressed a desire for groups to work on a territorial level because of diverse needs within working class struggles:

> We've organized this congress as a way to see other experiences and exchange ideas with social organizations in Latin America, to familiarize ourselves with another global reality in Latin America. This practice is needed so we can put into practice the central focus of this Congress: popular power. The first congress was held in Brazil in 2003, the second in Cochabamba, Bolivia and the third in La Plata, Argentina in February 2005.
>
> During the fourth congress we will discuss the theme of building popular power. We need to create a strategic perspective of social struggle, while bringing this perspective from all the popular fronts where social movements are organizing. It's fundamental that the people exercise popular power and that they raise class-consciousness as part of this strategic perspective. During the congress, we debated how to build popular power: to create participatory spaces and an atmosphere for struggle. We also need to adopt a new political concept, which is that of territorial struggle. Resistance on a territorial level is fundamental because the working class is very diverse and fragmented. A territorial struggle implies building a space for construction, participation and socialization. We look to the historic banners from society in the beginning of the century, taking from historic examples like the worker councils where they built popular power and values from our class.[3]

Human Rights

The workshop on human rights focused on the increasing criminalization of protests and campaigns for the release of political prisoners. Throughout the conference, participants noted that progressive governments are increasing their attacks against forms of social protest and autonomous organizing.

Delegates described the situation of human rights in their own countries, mentioning the situation for activists facing growing repression and political arrests. In Uruguay, thousands rallied last year for the release of four prisoners detained during the Anti-Bush demonstrations in Montevideo that took place during the fourth Summit of the Americas held in Mar del Plata, Argentina. They

were held for over six weeks. Currently the Patagonian city of Las Heras, in Argentina's southern province of Santa Cruz, is under siege. Striking oil workers stormed a police station, killing a police officer and injuring 15 others, to free a jailed union leader in February. The government sent over 300 national guardsmen to Santa Cruz to disperse protestors in response to the clash. Oil workers have reported that the situation is very tense, with regular attacks and threats against unionists. Reports from Chile suggested that, social activists and the indigenous Mapuche people face permanent repression, imprisonment and killings on part of the Chilean state. Since the return to democracy in 1990, hundreds have been arrested for struggling against injustice. More than 30 activists have been murdered since Chile's return to democracy.

According to Maio, a Mapuche activist from the Encuentro Por la Libertad (Gathering for Freedom), social organizations in Chile need to work at both the macro and micro levels in order to confront this repression. Maio has worked for many years for the release of political prisoners in Chile:

> Our organization is building a space to fight for the freedom of the people, freedom for social activists. We are working against the anti-terrorist laws implemented in Chile and against the criminalization of protests because working for the release of political prisoners isn't enough. If we don't get to the root of the problem, political repression will continue to be a revolving door.
>
> In Chile, a large number of political prisoners were released after the dictatorship. However, Chile's first democratic government of Patricio Aylwin (1990-1994) arrested a large number of new political prisoners. While everyone said that democracy returned to Chile, it wasn't the case. They built a high-security prison to imprison social activists from Frente Patriotico Manuel Rodriguez and the MIR. We've come to this congress to strategize how we can effectively fight for the release of political prisoners. First we have to break with the image of political prisoners as terrorists, so that the population doesn't imagine a hooded criminal. We want the people to associate the term terrorist with torturers, those who are in government and politicians ordering police repression. The government accuses social activists fighting against oppression of terrorist acts and they throw us in jail.
>
> In the workshop on human rights we talked about the criminalization of protest. We strategized over how we can reverse human rights abuses in our daily organizing efforts. How can we stop the system from advancing? We always talk about this on a macro level, we talk about neoliberalism and capitalism. But how do we deal with oppression on a day to day basis? We also need to strategize how to deal with the aggressions, when we don't have food for our collective meals, when we don't have shoes to put on our children's feet when they go to school, when there's no jobs.

Labour Organizing

During the workshop on syndicalism, participants debated strategies for workplace struggles. Argentina has witnessed a resurgence of struggle inside the workplace, using the working class's historical tools for liberation: the strike, sabotage and the factory takeover. Argentina's labor struggles in the Buenos Aires Subway, public hospitals, public universities, bank sector and recuperated enterprises have resulted in new visions and victories for the country's working class.

Social movements, especially unemployed worker organizations in Argentina, have ended up in a deep state of fragmentation. With unemployed worker organizations fragmented and some co-opted, even the most radical experiences closed their doors to the forms of resistance used during the late 90's: direct action, popular assemblies and the road blockade. However as living conditions in Argentina continued to deteriorate, many compañeros began to regroup to fight for campaigns unheard of in the 90's, the decade of privatization and destabilization of the working class. During Argentina's crisis demands were limited to increased unemployed subsidies. Today, workers have organized in internal commissions functioning autonomously from traditional unions to demand livable salaries and improved social conditions.

Alex, from Brazil's National Movement of Collectors of Recycled Material Movimento Nacional dos Cartadores de Material Reciclavel (MNCR) says that workers organizing need to develop new tools against exploitation. He said that workers clearly can't depend on state-run unions or bourgeois labor laws to protect workers from unsafe conditions or firings:

> During the congress we've met with compañeros who are struggling, people who discuss strategy and at the same time are truly fighting. The bourgeois control most of the unions, but they are disguised as union leaders. They are paid a lot of money to run a union. I'm talking about Latin America as a whole. Most of the bureaucratic unions are allied with the government. The union decisions don't come from the workers. The government works so that workers can't unite. We've agreed with a lot of what has been said here at this conference.
>
> We concluded during the workshop: first that all workers should be unionized, even the workers who don't have jobs. Unemployed workers and informal workers also form part of the working class in struggle. Second: for the unions to be completely independent from the government. We also talked about how the labor laws are developed to favor the capitalist. The laws are all pro-bourgeoisie. Laws are used to institutionalize unions. The laws are all bourgeois which is why we can't look to them as tools for struggle.

Worker organizations throughout Latin America are proving that they can organize themselves effectively and democratically. Argentina's subway workers along with public health employees, public school teachers, telecommunications workers, train workers, and unemployed worker organizations have formed a coalition of grassroots worker's organizations —the Movimiento Inter-Sindical Clasista (MIC, or the Class Struggle Union Coalition Movement). MIC is working to coordinate struggling workers throughout Argentina. MIC's 14 principles state a commitment to democratic organizing and unity among workers struggling against exploitation. Workers participating in this coalition self-define themselves as class-based, antagonistic and critical of union bureaucracy. This coalition has gone so far as to create a long-term syndicalist school in Buenos Aires. MIC's first education workshop focused on "companies' strategies for flexible labor standards and unions."

***Autogestión*: Self-management**

The phrase "*self management*," derived from the Spanish concept of "*auto-gestión*," means that a community or group makes its own decisions, especially those kinds of decisions that fit into processes of planning and management. Latin America's recuperated enterprises are putting into action systems of organization in a business in which the workers participate in all of the decisions.

Many organizations participating in the Latin American Conference of Popular Autonomous Organizations have initiated self-management projects in their own communities. The Galpon de Corrales is a prime example of *autogestión*. The cultural center solves problems within the community and provides infrastructure for cultural alternatives. They have built the cultural and social center on the principles of autonomy and *autogestión*.

While no representatives from Latin America's recuperated enterprises attended the conference, there was much debate about the importance of the some 300 businesses and factories currently run by worker self-management in Latin America.

Latin America's occupied factories and enterprises represent the development of one of the most advanced strategies in defense of the working class and of resistance against capitalism. The experiences of worker self-management and organization have directly challenged the structures of capitalism by questioning private property, taking back workers' knowledge, and organizing production for objectives other than profit.

This new phenomenon catching hold throughout Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela continues to grow, despite market challenges. More than 30,000 Latin

American workers are employed at cooperatively run businesses, which were once closed down by bosses and have now been reopened by employees. The occupied factories and enterprises are proving that they are organizing to develop strategies in defense of Latin American workers susceptible to factory closures and poor working conditions. While these experiences are forced to co-exist within the capitalist market, they are nonetheless forming new visions for a new working culture.

The conference was organized carefully, with participants divided into random groups to ensure diversity in the discussion and participation. Organizers developed a list of central themes or topics for each workshop for focused and productive discussion. During the simultaneous theme workshops, attendees participated in the workshop based on their organizational focus. In many of the workshops, participants discussed how racism, homophobia and sexism relate to class-based oppression. The discussions however, did not focus on reforms like abortion rights or same sex marriage. The workshops discussed integral ways to fight against all interlocking forms of oppression on each front (human rights, neighborhood organizing and labor union organizing for example).

During the concluding discussions, participants agreed to coordinate a number of actions against the Free Trade Accords throughout the region that the Uruguayan, Argentinean, Chilean, Brazilian and Bolivian governments are eagerly awaiting to sign. Even in the face of progressive continentalism among so-called "Leftist" governments, popular autonomous organizations continue to resist imperialism and struggle against the denials of basic rights such as food, education, health and shelter. Progressive governments in the region have not only continued with the neoliberal economic model, but have strengthened their embrace of neoliberalism. This fact will prove to be a considerable challenge for autonomous organizers in Latin America, and will be a main point of discussion and strategizing at the Fifth Latin American Conference of Popular Autonomous Organizations which will be held in Chile next year.

The Fifth Latin American Conference of Popular Autonomous Organizations promises to go beyond sharing ideas, but also developing a sense of shared commitment to action and community. Chilean libertarian organizations have taken on the task of organizing the upcoming conference, which will bring a new characteristic to discussions. The theme will continue to focus on building popular power, but will surely focus on the struggle of the Mapuche and Tehuelche communities against the rise of nationalist attacks on their land and people.

References

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Notes

[1] In Argentina and Brazil, several groups of workers (*cartoneros*) who collect paper and other recyclables from the streets to survive have formed organizations to fight for their rights. From Argentina, the UTRACA (Union de Trabajadores Cartoneros de Argentina) participated in this conference. From Brazil the Nucleo de Apoio ao Movimento dos Catadores, an independent organization of cardboard collectors that formed in Porto Alegre in the late nineties, also participated in the conference. In Brazil, the National Movement of Collectors of Recycled Material- Movimento Nacional dos Cartadores de Material Reciclavel (MNCR) has become an important social movement, challenging the government's ability to provide solutions for the working class. The MNCR helped to organize the first Latin American Conference of Popular Autonomous Organizations in Porto Alegre in 2003.

[2] Malatesta, Errico. (1897). "Anarchism and Organization."

[3] All interviews were conducted and translated by the author of this article.

*Is Slash an Alternative Medium? "Queer" Heterotopias and the Role of Autonomous Media Spaces in Radical World Building**

NATHAN RAMBUKKANA

> The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without ships, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.
> (Michel Foucault, 1986, 27)

> Slash is a wonderfully subversive voice whispering or shouting around the edges and into the cracks of mainstream culture. It abounds in unconventional thinking. It's fraught with danger for the status quo, filled with temptingly perilous notions of self-determination and successful defiance of social norms.
> (Joan Martin, 1992, 101).

Introduction: The Crisis in Alternative Media

This paper stems from two assertions. The first is that of John Downing who, on the occasion of a keynote address for the 2006 Media Democracy Day in Montréal, stated that what radical media truly needed to catch more of an audience than the already-converted was to start reporting more than just the cycle of protest and repression, to be more aware of what radical media forms *do* for the subjects that consume them, and to not be imbricated in the notion that the "counter-informational model" is the beginning and end of radical media production.[1] What he meant by these statements is that rather than assume (and rail against) the dominance of mainstream media, radical media should self-consciously take part in building an alternative public sphere that could then grow to rival the mainstream. In mediating more than just reports on protests or oppressive, hegemonic forms of governance, and by including aspects that addressed humour and emotion (for example), a radical public sphere (as Downing considers it) could catch the attention of the general public, who would then be exposed to the more significant radical messages therein. In short, his suggestion is that perhaps the way to real change is through a radical alternative world-building that, in its breadth and subtlety, might have the force to shake an oppressive media system to its foundations more effectively than the blunt force of oppositional media incursions alone.

The second assertion is a more diffuse one made by various activists and academics who have held up the example of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (hereafter, TAZ) as a possible model for such a world-building. The assertion, which stems from the writing of the elusive Hakim Bey[2], is that through

Nathan Rambukkana, 'Is Slash an Alternative Medium? "Queer" Heterotopias and the Role of Autonomous Media Spaces in Radical World Building' (Peer-Reviewed Article). *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Vol. 1 No. 1, Winter 2007 pp. 69-85.

autonomous media spaces—spaces that attempt to bracket various oppressive qualities of mainstream media—the progressive circulation of messages and ideas has at least a provisional degree of freedom to occur.[3]

But if we accept these two assertions for the sake of argument—that to be more effective, radical media need to speak to broader concerns and audiences, and that one way to accomplish this is to take up the potential of autonomous space—must we not also ask if this is already happening? Perhaps the frame with which we view radical media (and alternative media more broadly) is so conditioned to only see certain things (things, for example, keyed as radical due to motive and content, like protest reporting) that we are missing the bigger picture: a slowly encroaching counterpublic (to use Michael Warner's term[4]) that is becoming less "subaltern" by the year. Perhaps the variegated radical contents and methods in multiple media spheres are growing daily and are all but aggregated as such. Perhaps the current crisis in the media is no longer the hegemony of the mainstream; perhaps it is that the massive amount of radical media content already circulating is not viewed as part of a similar movement for changing the way we represent reality to ourselves, circulate meaning, and communicate ideas.

This paper will explore the above propositions in two interlocking sections. The first section will explore the notion of autonomous media space as related to Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopic space (or space that functions as "other"), and assess how such spaces could be seen as progressive venues for those with a view toward the notion of radical world-building. The second section is an abbreviated case study that tries to tie some of these issues to a material example. The specific example I have chosen is that of slash fiction networks.

I'm going to make a fairly radical assumption that knowledge about slash and slash writing has seeped far enough into both academic and popular culture that I can move right into using it as a case study without much of the usual expository explanation of what slash is with respect to mainstream popular culture. A few aspects of it are worth highlighting however. The term "slash fiction" (male-male sexual fan fiction that appropriates characters from pre-existing fictional narratives) is derived from the "/" between K/S (or Kirk/Spock), the first recognized such fan community. Though the meaning of "slash" sometimes drifts to included female-female pairings or groupings and even heterosexual sex-related fan fiction, the more proper fan terms for such forms are "lesbian slash/fem(me)slash" and "het" (or "shipping"—short for "relationship fiction") respectively. For the purposes of this paper, I will be using slash in the broader sense as denoting the range of various types of counterpublical fiction engaged in under the sign of "slash". Though any insights from these arguments could be applied to "het" and other non-slash forms of fan fiction, such extensions would likely have diminishing returns the closer the sites discussed (and narratives therein-produced) stayed to the originary, and mainstream, media texts. If for anyone the general contours of slash fiction are less familiar, I suggest you take advantage of the rhizomatic nature of online texts to follow the link to

the rough, but evolving and engaging, popular history and definition of slash on Wikipedia, or simply explore Whispered Words (fictionresource.com), a popular slash site. For additional context, you could also consult the useful glossary of fan-fiction-related terms compiled in The Fan Fiction Glossary at <subreality.com/glossary/terms.htm>.

I chose this example for two reasons. The first is that it strikes me that the networks that circulate slash might have affinities (if not overt alliances) with the alternative world-building project that Downing endorses. The second is because some of the theorizing around slash fiction communities arcs into considerations of alternative media—especially in relation to its roles and functions for subjects. Though a full consideration of these connections is beyond the scope of this paper, as a preliminary work it might act as a *rapprochement* from which both streams of thinking might gain some insight.

This is more an inquiry to see if in considering these two phenomena (one theoretico-ideological, one empirco-practical) together we might see something new, than a position paper proffering slash as the ultimate in alternative or radical media. Through considering the autonomous media spaces that accrue to what I will term the "*queer*" *heterotopias* of slash writing, I am attempting to mount an argument for broadening our perspective, in line with Downing's proposition, of what it is radical media can or should be (or are) doing. Call it a journey through a varied landscape, call it an experiment in paradigmal affinity, call it an *essay* (in the French or formal sense of the word: an attempt) at isolating the meanings that might be held in common between these two somewhat broad and disparate (though as I will come to argue, somewhat continuous) fields of endeavor.

From Autonomous Media to Heterotopias

To begin, I think it is worth considering how the project of radical or alternative world-building might already be happening (and might, in fact, be a mode of societal participation that has been existent for as long as humanity). To speak of alternative media as if they are the results of a new process that arose whole out of a reaction to mainstream media (i.e., to treat them as co-extensive with the growing movement and discourse that shares their name), is to treat the world as if it came already formed in one big hegemonic lump that contains no process, no history, no alterity. Similarly, to treat the concept of "radical media" as if it originated with John Downing's 1984 collection of the same name is to ignore that what these ways of conceptualizing media (or mediation) signify, more than anything, are modes of interaction with the social.

In this light, we can then define the desire to engage with alternative media (and remember, 'media' is a plural term) as the seeking of modes and spaces of representation that speak to matter—and allow *us* to speak to matter—perhaps

not otherwise present in (or differently compiled—or represented—in) more conventional media forms. Similarly, we can define radical media, in line with Downing, as forms of media that seek to get to the root of various oppressions or distortions in society and re-build a more nuanced and democratic portrait of the world for itself.[5] Such a way of acting can be seen as a mode of inhabiting space, of creating spaces where certain types of activity can occur. Two ways of elucidating this spatial angle of the issue are to mobilize the concepts of the TAZ and the heterotopia.

Though Hakim Bey resists defining the TAZ, intending it more as inspiration than "political dogma", as "a suggestion, almost a political fancy" that would be understood through its workings rather than as a strict philosophy,[6] those who take up its derivative concepts are often happy to make concrete propositions about them. For example, in the introduction to their book *Autonomous Media: Activating Resistance and Dissent*, Andrea Langlois and Frédéric Dubois define autonomous media as follows:

> Autonomous media are the vehicles of social movements. They are attempts to subvert the social order by reclaiming the means of communication. What defines these media [...] is that they, first and foremost, undertake to amplify the voices of people and groups normally without access to the media. They seek to work autonomously from dominant institutions (e.g., the state, corporations, the church, the military, corporatist unions), and they encourage the participation of audiences within their projects. Autonomous media therefore produce communication that is not one-way, from media-makers to media consumers, but instead involves the bilateral participation of people as producers and recipients of information.[7]

In this conception, autonomous media are forms of alternative media that perform a sort of "active resistance", which is to say, they resist mainstream media forms by being "other" to them. In as much as mainstream media forms are hierarchical, autonomous media strive to be horizontal; in as much as mainstream media forms are controlled by money, autonomous media attempt to be non-profit; in as much as mainstream media forms exclude voices, autonomous media aim at inclusivity. As such, there could be seen to be as many forms or sub-forms of autonomous media as elements of "mainstream" media one found oppressive.[8] The one thread that seems to hold these various notions together though, is that of inhabiting a phenomenological zone of separation or otherness from those spaces where what they contest is produced. This sense of operating in a different space (even if it is provisionally or temporarily) has marked similarities to Michel Foucault's concept of the heterotopia.

In "Of Other Spaces" (1986), Foucault defines the heterotopia as follows. In contrast to utopias, Foucault writes:

> There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.[9]

The fact that Foucault underscores the difference between the concepts of "utopia" and "heterotopia" is significant here (and will be later when we will examine a critique of the TAZ as an overly utopian [and therefore, useless] concept or political strategy). As heterotopias are actual spaces[10], rather than romantic ideals, they have a substantive place in politics as *spaces where actual things can happen*.

Both Foucault and Bey mention piracy and pirate utopianism/heterotopianism as metaphors and models for their respective frameworks. Of the two, Foucault is more directly critical of the idea of the utopia as a by-definition non-realizable space, drawing on one of the formal meanings of utopias as "[s]ites with no real place."[11] But the *hetero*topia is something different, and this difference is embodied in the metaphor of the ship. The idea of a (pirate) ship that has the ability to float beyond the reach of authority and restriction is one that has often found its way into romantic fantasies and anti-authoritarian visions. But the significant thing about pirates and their ships is not the romantic ideal they represent, but rather that they *did exist*. Their ships and enclaves were spaces where certain rules, conventions and assumptions did not apply. This was both progressive in some ways even as it was devastating in others, as pirates—real pirates—created space where, for example, race and class and gender might be redefined, but also where theft, violence, and murder might be *de rigeur*. It is thus vitally important, as both Bey and Foucault neglect, not to romanticize pirates or piracy, but it is equally important to realize that the spaces of piracy were not utopic ones, but rather heterotopic ones: spaces that actually existed, at least partially autonomous or other to the spaces of mainstream society.

But if autonomous media spaces are heterotopic, other, then are they in fact progressive? If it is the case that they receive their autonomy by being apart, removed from society and normative frames, does this form of living actually contribute to a progressive project of changing mainstream culture? There are two, conflicting, conventional answers to this question, and perhaps a third answer that mediates the two.

A first response could be one rooted in an approach to thinking about autonomous media space that takes its cues from Michel de Certeau's engagement with the difference between strategies and tactics in *The Practice of Everyday Life*.[12] According to de Certeau, one cannot simply look at what

powerful actors in society are producing and shaping without also exploring what those with less (or different kinds) of power are doing with those products.[13] From what subversive uses people make of salaried time spent at work, to how they move idiosyncratically through cities, to how they find ways around some oppressive rules in their lives, de Certeau gleans that top-down power is not always successfully hegemonic and that the power of "making do" [14] is a tactical power that, though it might not always be directly engaging the macro structures of society by way of strategies, is doing *something*.

As Igor Markovic elaborates, the use of tactical media forms allows for the circulation of messages and meanings in ways that might not be possible if one were to wait for ideal conditions of production.[15] Markovic sees such media as praxis-oriented rather than ideologically perfect or perfectible,[16] as spaces that can allow certain types of behaviour and organizing, and that as such can be "powerful all[ies] of social movements".[17] Though de Certeau figures tactical intervention as the sort of intervention that steals moments, privileging the temporal dimension rather than the spatial one,[18] he does see in tactical intervention a spatial aspect. It is in the taking of spaces created and specified by others and diverting them to more tactical goals that he sees this spatial power occurring.[19] It is in their "contexts of use"[20] that the placeness of these places becomes significant, even if that use is only a temporary or constrained form of placeness.[21] But not everyone agrees with this assessment of the usefulness of autonomous space.

A second response might be the direct opposite, that autonomous media forms carry little or no progressive potential. John Armitage mounts a direct critique on Bey's early writings and by extension the progressive potential of autonomous spaces. He argues that as Bey speaks to the establishment of a utopian ideal of autonomy, his framework ignores (or simply sidesteps) oppressive realities, and especially the reality of class divisions.[22] He argues that Bey's writings, and especially the concept of the TAZ, work only to retrench oppressive divisions, since those who can already "act autonomously" can do so because they are holding some form of privilege that others do not (122). In this he is not wrong, and there *is* an undercurrent of too-easy libertarian thinking in Bey's work. But what this critique also does is assume that the only form of autonomy framed in Bey's writing (and the possibilities of his writing) is a utopian elitist separatism, rather than recognizing that the TAZ as a more modest, and productive, tactical intervention is possible as well. As such, Armitage mistakenly figures the TAZ as a bid towards an impossible utopianism, one that has no bearing on substantive matters of oppression. He concludes his paper by positing that "the utopian movement of the TAZ has passed [...] and that the new radical politics of cyberculture[23] will, of necessity, have to recognise that the overwhelming force of presence or solidarity really does arise from the reality of class."[24]

Taking both of these arguments back to a media context, the question could be asked as to what the goals of an alternative or radical media should be. Working from the notion of autonomous media-making outlined earlier, their

main goal could be seen as the "ampli[fication of] voices of people and groups normally without access to the media", with a view to furthering social movements.[25] This broad notion of the importance and goals of such media-making shows that Armitage's worthy critique might be limited by a point of view that privileges certain social movements over others, seeing only those with an immediate, direct and revolutionary impact on class inequality as productive. Though these sorts of intervention are crucial, it cannot be argued that other forms of intervention (and we can add for our specific concerns, media intervention) are by extension without importance. As such, the frame for radical media I am trying to articulate here is perhaps closer to Clemencia Rodriguez's paradigm of a "citizens' media". Citizens' media's more modest claims as to where the threshold of progressive social goals begins (including such things as individual and community expression, representation and transformation—*as well as* the goals Armitage speaks of),[26] are perhaps more in line with what autonomous media space seeks to create: a heterotopic space of possibility where new realities and understandings may emerge and be practiced. It is armed with this provisional understanding of what might make up the extended space of radical (progressive)[27] media that we can now move to consider whether it is productive to consider slash an alternative medium.

Slash Networks as Queer Heterotopias

In *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandoms Online*, Rhiannon Bury[28] explores fan fiction communities run by (and catering predominantly to) women. In this project she draws on a tradition of feminist thought that can be traced back to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own,*[29] which sees separate space as an essential pre-requisite for certain types of autonomous action, especially for women in a patriachically structured society. In looking at online fan networks in this way, she forwards an "understanding of such cyberspaces as potentially heterotopic in their reworking and transgressing of normative spatial practices and relations".[30] In her study, she explores two such spaces as "virtual heterotopia[s]:"[31] alternative spatial orderings where gender, power relations, sexuality and even nationality could be differently organized. Though such spaces were not "utopias", and certainly not isolated from oppressive societal elements such as beauty myths, classist stereotypes and traditional gendering in some cases,[32] they did offer a different form of mediation to that which was available as part of mainstream culture.[33] This is perhaps especially true for the slash network she explores as part of her study. Marginal to the already-marginal fan fiction world, slash fiction writing can be seen as a practice that produces an even more rarified space: that of a "queer" heterotopia.

The slash world is a space that actually exists within the frameworks made possible by mainstream culture, but is also a space in which many assumptions and patterns of conventional culture are reversed or parodied. In that many of these inversions are in relation to traditional sex and gender pairings and

orderings, such a space can be seen as a queer space.[34] It is also, like many radical media spaces, a space of controversy and risk.

According to Kelly Simca Boyd, being a slash writer has a lot to do with negotiating the risks involved with producing and sharing such forms of writing: those of censorship or legal action by copyright holders, censure and misunderstanding by friends and family members, even potential loss of employment or social status.[35] Perhaps then these practices might be best understood as forms of tactical media-making, in that the dangers of copyright infringement and discovery don't allow these (mainly) women to own their spaces outright, forcing them to use tactical strategies such as disclaimers and pseudonyms to protect themselves from the potential negative connotations of their work. Edi Bjorklund seems to concur with this perspective when she writes: "Slash is not just a new kind of women's literature. It is a means whereby we may defy a wide variety of social conventions and taboos.[...] Slash fandom is, to sum up, a tactic of subversion for women".[36] From this perspective, slash could be seen as meeting the requirements for an autonomous media form: it is giving women more of a voice in an arena in which they have previously been relatively marginalized (the creation and manipulation of the meaning-laden mediated characters and images that surround them), with a view towards the propagation of a social movement (the redefinition of societal conventions around sexuality and gender).

In his *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture,* Henry Jenkins, drawing on Eve Sedgwick's work in *Between Men*, argues that beyond trying to represent desires they would like to see, the writers of male-male slash may be actively working out the taboos they see on the expression of male homosocial desire in popular culture.[37] "[S]uch an account," he continues, "may also explain the relative scarcity of lesbian slash since [...] women have historically enjoyed a more fluid movement through the homosocial continuum."[38] As such, as a non-heteronormative[39] space of reflection, creation and comment, there might be a relatively smaller need to reproduce narratives of women together romantically.[40] Finally, in the essay "Pornography By Women, for Women, With Love," Joanna Russ argues that "[t]he writers and readers of these fantasies can do what most of us can't do in reality (certainly not heterosexual reality), that is, they can act sexually at their own pace and under conditions they themselves have chosen."[41] As such, the participants within this space of media creation are circulating fluid perspectives upon gender and sexuality that are seen as lacking, or are at the very least under-represented, in mainstream media culture.

Others, such as Constance Penley, while still arguing for the highly political nature of slash writing, argue that the majority of the women involved are just getting off on the process. She positions the majority of slash writers as simply having fun with male characters and male bodies by creating pornographic situations involving them.[42] Though she does see the fans' writing practices as exploratory and as "creating pleasures found lacking in original products,"[43] she rejects the view of previous writers that slash writing is searching for a redefined or androgynous masculinity.[44]

Perhaps, though, the comments on the potential androgyny of male characters in slash fiction are more valid than some commentators (such as Penley and Boyd) might allow. The concept of "androgyny" here might often be read by individual slashers as still within a heteronormative frame. Within this frame if a man were coded as "androgynous" he could no longer be "masculine", "active", or a "man". But if we look within these stories, as do, for example, Russ and Jenkins, one can see male characters that articulate active and passive, traditionally male and traditionally female roles, but in ways that are de-linked from their normative codings. As sexual "subjects" they are simply that: sexual, rather than playing pre-determined roles. To this some earlier authors attached terms like "bisexual" (Jenkins) and "androgynous" (Russ), but we might re-articulate those observations by calling them fluid practices[45] within a queered figurative space, where the play of non-heteronormative intimacies, using material poached from the mainstream public sphere, becomes possible.

But if this case can be made, and the spaces of slash production are partially autonomous zones—"queer" heterotopias of specific scope and interest—doesn't that just make them limited realms of social action, rather than alternative or radical media spaces? Put another way, why might we want to consider these spaces as part of an alternative media movement? What is so compelling about slash that might deem it part of a radical world-building effort?

Bury argues that sometimes these spaces (which usually double as women-only spaces)[46] are less about the slash *per se* than about women having a space free of certain heteronormative conditionings in which to converse and share meaning, reflect on life, politics, the world.[47] As such, a shared appreciation of stories where the (gay) male body is being, one might even argue, objectified, acts as a shield that keeps other aspects of normative culture at bay. Because these spaces are queered, they are non-heteronormative and therefore are (for certain subjects) safer spaces of connection and reflection.

Another perspective that might see these spaces as significant is that of figures such as Nancy Fraser and Michael Warner, who argue for the importance and maintenance of spaces in the public sphere where alternative identities can be reflected. It is necessary to the maintenance of subcultural formations to have spaces and zones—physical or otherwise—that one can inhabit with certain identities, or that allow for the circulation of messages and meanings with a view to the cultural propagation, enjoyment, political presence, or circulation of subcultural capital with reference to that specific culture.

Warner, for example, analyzes how zoning laws in New York that would limit the number, size and proximity of sex-related businesses in any area that also contained residences were threatening the gay neighborhood around Christopher Street. [48] But his argument goes beyond simply valuing easy access to porn and bathhouses. He argues that such zoning laws—ones highly steeped in heteronormative figurings of sexuality, publicness, and what is appropriate for residential neighborhoods or citizenship—limit and constrain those with non-

heteronormative identities to the margins where no-one lives: to outskirts, the quayside, out of site and out of mind.[49] For Warner, "[a] public sexual culture changes the nature of sex, much as a public intellectual culture changes the nature of thought."[50] In line with this argument, I have argued elsewhere for the importance of the Internet in the circulation of subcultural capital with relation to modern BDSM[51] identity. The Internet-mediated sadomasochistic public sphere, itself a queer (or at the very least, non-heteronormative) heterotopia, allows the freer circulation of sex-radical discourse, and changes the dynamic relation between sexual subcultures and the mainstream public sphere.

Taking such arguments into consideration, it is perhaps easier to see how slash could be considered part of a radical world-building effort: as a space in which non-heteronormative figurings of desire have more freedom to circulate. But is this enough to consider it as a useful ally in the struggle for alternative media?

One could argue that no, it's not, because it is a set of individualistic projects that does nothing but mobilize the power of certain elites to move "outside the system", or else because it is a conglomeration of the powerless—the weak—who continue to be nothing but powerless. This is certainly in line with Armitage's critique of Bey and those who use his thinking as political strategy.

But slash writers *are* producing something significant: a proliferation of non-heteronormative spaces. As Penley puts it, they are not just "making do" but *making*,[52] engaging in original and impactful cultural production that in fact influences the mainstream and the types of images and messages dominant cultural producers are circulating.[53] This space is protean, and within protean space a new kind of thought emerges.

Anti-normative thought is a powerful tool that can be mobilized in other quarters. So, in addition to autonomous or heterotopic spaces being not-necessarily-closed with respect to their potential use for practical and engaged politics, even such spaces that have no specifically-progressive political ends—and slash communities might be seen as a case in point[54]—might be part of an anti-normative world-building effort that makes them part of something progressive nonetheless. Similarly, one could argue that this is just another libertarian thread of alternative culture—and it might be that too—but who is to say that energy for change cannot come from multiple quarters, or that certain quarters might not be the source of multiple types of action? As with anything, it is what is made with the consciousnesses formed and nourished—allowed to grow—in such spaces that counts; and isn't this one of the major reasons why alternative media are important in the first place?

Thinking of such models as alternative media allows for acknowledging what can occur in imperfect systems—in enemy territory, as it were. Using such a tactical perspective it is important that major social issues such as class not fade from the horizon of analysis and engagement, but they should also not obscure the fact that there are multiple struggles being fought that are variously using and refusing "the master's tools" to forward their projects. It is also important to

recognize that not all of these things are, in fact, even struggles, or are struggles only in as much as they come up against resistance. A case-in-point is the relationship of slash-producing to feminist identification and practice.

Penley writes about the original K/S slashers diligently making do and circulating their cultural productions by using office equipment from their workplaces to produce their zines. Many of these women did not identify as "feminists", even though their writings and practices were often very feminist ones. They encountered oppression, and fought against it, yet they did not identify with their oppression nor were they (for the most part) self-consciously political.[55]

They were however bucking the heteronormative system of desire, introducing a fog of particles, movements, ideas and stories-in-motion that have been reinserted into the "mainstream" social in numerous ways. This set of collective tactical movements—what de Certeau calls "Brownian motion"—is exactly the form of chaos that Bey speaks about. A creative chaos, a chaos of non-pre-determined action and reaction that is not the antithesis of order but rather the raw stuff that order is built out of.[56] As touched on earlier, Penley picks up on the idea of Brownian motion to posit that such making do (in the hands of slash writers) is not making do in a soft sense of "making the best out of a bad situation" but a *making* in its own right.[57] As cultural producers, slash writers don't so much transcend feminist (and one could add by extension, queer) politics as complement them, through "finding alternative and unexpected ways of thinking and speaking about women's [and one could add, men's] relation to the new technologies of science, the body, and the mind",[58] not as a "pre- or protopolitical language that could then be evaluated from the perspective of "authentic" feminist thought",[59] but as part of this very same radical world-making that some are groping for through alternative mediation projects. Boyd writes that:

> It is important that feminists participate in slash fiction. Writers of slash are women on the frontlines of the pornography debates. Every day they look at what popular culture gives them and twist it around until they create something that they like better. While [many] slash writers do not set out with a "feminist agenda," their writing works to resist, and reconceptualize popular notions of sex, sexuality, pornography and romance.[60]

One of the most significant movements in Boyd's thesis is when she notes that regardless of the way they identified,[61] the women surveyed in her study believed in the equity of women in social, cultural and economic spheres.[62] This is worth dwelling upon. It seems that *regardless of ideology*, slash seemed to promote a space for progressive affinities. As such, though we might, in the final analysis, be wary of calling the space of slash production a queer space (as that could have identitarian implications), it is certainly not heteronormative space. Though we might not be able to call it a feminist space, or a space devoid of all sexism, it is a space that has strong affinities with feminist principles.

Is Slash an Alternative Medium?

Conclusion: Alternative Media and Radical World Building

As Donna Haraway reminds us, the politics of affinity have strong potentials to move us beyond some of the limitations of identity politics.[63] As spaces such as those of slash media production are "other", or heterotopic, they do offer a potential as zones where other practices, discourses, and consciousnesses can form or circulate with partial autonomy from the constraints upon those practices, discourses and consciousnesses in other societal spheres.

It is in this way that such practices might be seen as having affinities with an alternative media movement—perhaps not in "pure" ways that are completely autonomous or other, that seek a utopic solution to all major problematic aspects of society *at once*—but partially, tactically, and modestly, gaining some ground on the monopoly of life images and messages shown and circulated in mainstream media.

Perhaps there is not one "alternative", just as there is not one world-societal problem that needs to be addressed. If this is the case then maybe there are specific modes of struggle for specific battles which are variously radical, reformist, tactical, citizen-oriented, democratic, or identity-political as the specific case requires. And just as a unitary "alternative media" is not the answer to all social issues, perhaps the variegated types of alternative media (understood in its proper sense as a plural term, as the collective term for multiple, different, media alternatives) do not all point in the same direction. And perhaps, just perhaps, this is their strength.

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Notes

* With special thanks to Monika Kin Gagnon for her enlightening Ph.D. seminar on Alternative Media, which was the venue where many of the considerations contained in this paper originated. Thanks also to Monika for her thoughtful comments on an early draft of this paper, and to the rest of the class for productive conversation and argument.

[1] Downing & Rodriguez, 2005.

[2] A writer who may or may not be just one person, or several people, or a name of convenience for certain radical writers, but certainly is at the very least the pseudonym of writer Peter Lamborn Wilson.

[3] Though this "assertion" is gleaned from several places, the most sustained version of it can be seen throughout the 2005 collection *Autonomous Media: Activating Resistance & Dissent*, Andrea Langlois and Frédéric Dubois, eds.

[4] Warner bases his term "counterpublic" on Nancy Fraser's mobilization of the term "subaltern counterpublic" as a conceptual way to account for public spheres that exist outside, adjacent or tangentially to the unitary mainstream (bourgeois) public sphere of Habermas's writing. For more detail see Michael Warner's (2002) *Publics and*

Counterpublics and Nancy Fraser's (1992) essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy."
[5] Thanks to Fabiana Pereira for this insight about the root of the word "radical" being, well, "of or related to roots."
[6] Bey, 1991, p. 99.
[7] Dubois and Langlois, 2005, p. 9.
[8] A fact which echoes Michael Albert's prognostications in his article "What Makes Alternative Media Alternative?"
[9] Foucault, 1986, 24.
[10] Just what counts as a heterotopic space could be up for debate, but by way of example: pirate ships, rooftop vegetable gardens in corporate neighborhoods, student-run soup kitchens on corporatized campuses, resistance cells of movements, warchalked WiFi space in urban areas, libraries, affinity groups at large protests, protests of all kinds, free stores, marxist feminist reading circles, bike paths, recycling boxes, the underground rave scene, downloading sites on the Internet, a culturejammed or *détourned* billboard, the PIRG movement...
[11] Foucault, 1986, 24. The slippage of the word utopia between its two possible meanings stems linguistically and symbolically from its etymology in the Greek. It could either be a transliteration of *ou topos* (or "no place"), or rather of *eutopia* ("happy" or "fortunate place") (Logan and Adams 1). Thomas More's punning points out the role of such ideal spaces: perfect but non-existent they are as guides without flaws, but could never be inhabitable precisely for that reason.
[12] De Certeau, 1984.
[13] Ibid, 32
[14] Ibid, 35.
[15] Markovitch, 1999, 116.
[16] Ibid, 118,
[17] Ibid, 123.
[18] Ibid, 37.
[19] Ibid, 29.
[20] Ibid, 33.
[21] Which definitely puts de Certeau in line with Bey, since, for Bey, the "Temporary" part of the Temporary Autonomous Zone was the key aspect, in fact the thing that enabled the zone's autonomy. A temporary aspect allowed a zone the ability to operate "under the radar" like a covert resistance cell that moves around and surfaces only when it wants to perform a public action (Bey 99).
[22] Armitage, 1999, 115.
[23] Armitage conflates Bey's use of the terms "Net" and "Web" (in combination with the popular appropriation of his work by cybertheorists), with an understanding of the TAZ and ontological anarchy as being only "virtual" phenomena not connected to real world—and especially, class—struggle (see Armitage 118 and 124). Beyond this literal reading of a metaphor (as Bey points out, he is referring more to societal structures than to any specific technology (Bey 110)), there is also in Armitage a less-than-nuanced reading of the politics of "the virtual" that misses that the virtual is a space of figuring and possibility that bleeds into—and, in part, comes to structure—actual reality.
[24] Ibid, 124.
[25] Langlois & Dubois, 9.
[26] Rodriguez, 2001, 20.
[27] It goes without saying that not all radical, autonomous, or alternative media are progressive. This is one of the internal problematics of people who seek to provide these spaces as fora. For more detailed accounts of issues that arise when confronting the

repressive side of alternative media see Andrea Langlois, "How Open is Open? The Politics of Open Publishing" in *Autonomous Media: Activating Resistance and Dissent*; Les Back, "Aryans Reading Adorno: Cyber Culture and 21st Century Racism." in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*; and John Downing et al.'s chapter on "Repressive Radical Media" in *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*.

[28] Bury, 2005.

[29] Woolf, 1929.

[30] Bury, 18.

[31] Ibid, 167.

[32] Ibid, 36.

[33] And, in certain cases, more than in more male-oriented fan-culture spaces as well (Bury 34).

[34] There is a politics to calling something a "queer" space, and one that I touch on below. Suffice it to say that there is a space between saying that we could "see something" as a queer space, and calling—naming—it as such. This paper inhabits that peculiar and slippage-ridden space. A heterotopia in a different register, perhaps.

[35] Boyd, 2001, 86.

[36] Cited in Ibid, 19.

[37] Jenkins, 1992, 204.

[38] Ibid, 205.

[39] Heteronormative means the normative structures that accrue around a certain conception of what "normal" or "natural" intimate behaviour is or should be about. It includes things like compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory normative gendering and a compulsory "heterosexual" life-narrative (meet-get married-have kids-grow old together-die). It is a handy term because it is not heterosexuality, *per se* (or gendered relations, or monogamy, etc.), which is problematic. It is when those frames for living are imposed on everybody without choice or distinction, it is when social structures and institutions (and people) only recognize one way of being a person as right or proper, it is when those positions are seen as having no fluidity or possible overlap, or when they come with attendant social statuses, that they become cumbersome and often oppressive.

[40] Ibid, 205. Such representation might even feed into preferred heteronormative representations of the desirable, as the controversial "lesbian" television show *The L-Word* (that contains a very heteronormatively slanted view of what "real lesbian culture" looks like, and that is marketed towards men) speaks to.

[41] Russ, 1985, 90.

[42] Penley, 1991, 137.

[43] Ibid, 139.

[44] Ibid, 155.

[45] A terminology also mobilized by Jenkins (189).

[46] Though this aspect might be changing, as more men begin to engage with the practice of slash reading and writing.

[47] Bury, 71.

[48] Warner, 1999, 139.

[49] Ibid, 149.

[50] Ibid, 178.

[51] A shortened acronym for the culture surrounding Bondage and Discipline, Domination and Submission, Sadism and Masochism.

[52] Penley, 1991, 140.

[53] Ibid, 135. This is becoming more and more prevalent as media producers realize that there is a "market" for subversive voices and their inclusion. Such feature films such as the later adaptations of the very-slashed *Harry Potter* book series; and such television

programs such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, and even *CSI* play off of the knowledge of their own slash universes, incorporating threads, plots and scenes that speak to multiple possibilities for their interpretation as texts. (Which is a fancy way of saying they play up the slash premise, often for campy effect, but in ways that promote, rather than hinder, the circulation of alternative messages and meanings.)

[54] Even given some theorist-practitioners such as Penley attempting to key them as deeply political.

[55] Penley, Ibid, 137-140.

[56] Bey, Ibid,18.

[57] Penley, Ibid, 140. Thanks to my students in COMS 240 for showing me how, in a sense, the notion of "making do" contains that ambiguity, and can be read in both ways, depending on if you see de Certeau as a defeatist, or a tactician.

[58] Penley, Ibid, 319.

[59] Ibid,139.

[60] Boyd, 102

[61] Approximately 58% as Feminist; 10% as "humanist/equalist; and 25% as anti or post-feminist, based on an online survey administered to 200 women and 10 men. It is unclear from the methodology how the men's responses factored into the statistics, if at all.

[62] Boyd, Ibid, 71.

[63] Haraway, 1991, 180.