

PERSPECTIVES ON ANARCHIST THEORY

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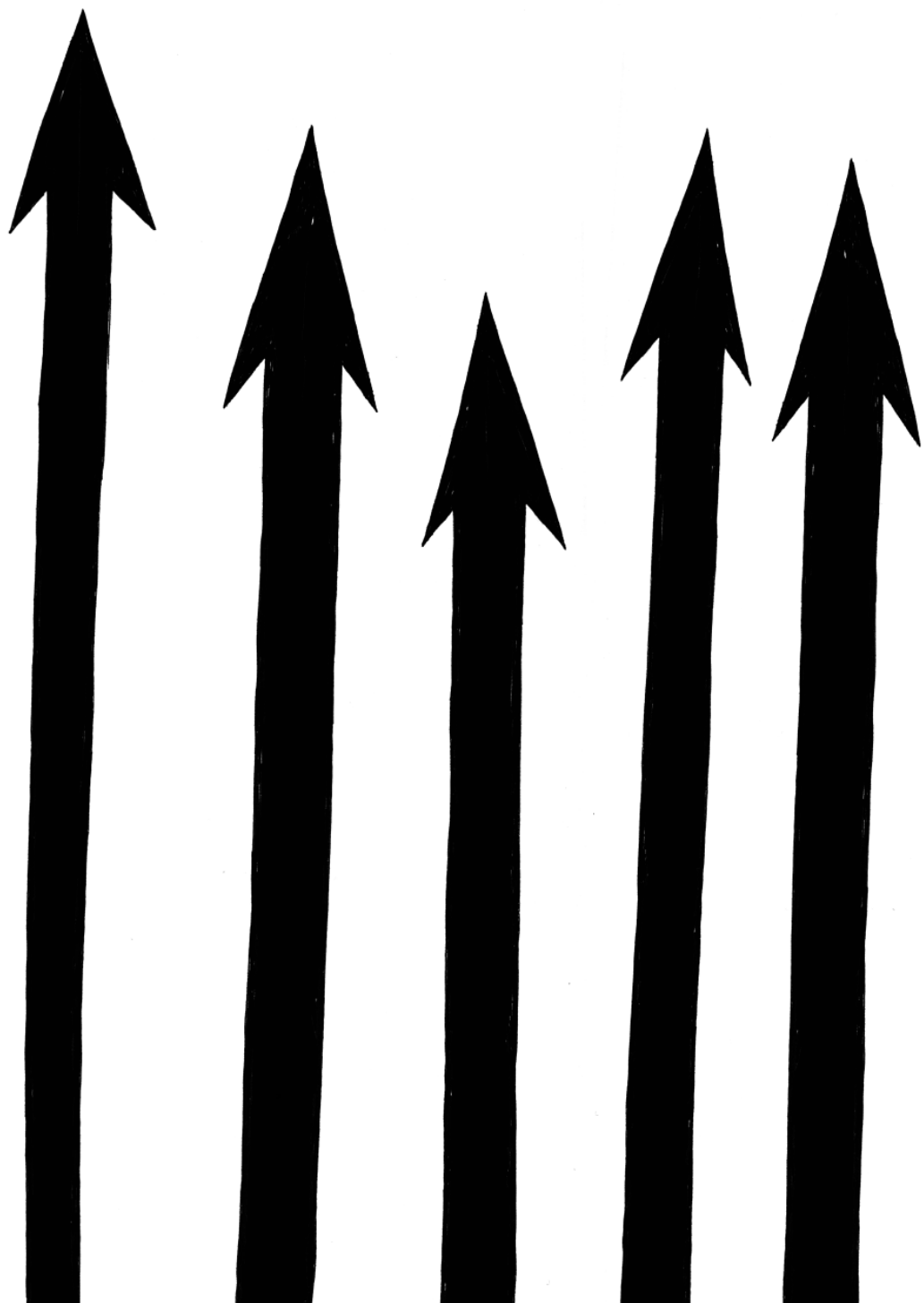
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INTRODUCTION

LARA MESSERSMITH-GLAVIN FOR THE *PERSPECTIVES* EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

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Do you remember the Spirograph? It has a deceptively simple design: a piece of paper and a frame—a plastic ring with ridges on the inside that function as gears, and then other circles or shapes could be set inside the ring and turned with the tip of a pen. The results were dazzling portraits of geometric functions, often in the shapes of flowers or stars, but sometimes looping out into elliptical whorls, describing complex mathematical relationships in neat, concrete forms. Every time I picked up a pen and a new wheel, I would try to guess the shape that would bloom on the paper, and I was often surprised. There was always a system present, something clearly defining the movements that were and were not allowed, but it was difficult to know in advance what boundaries—and beauties—would emerge.

These images of interlocking lines, of space being sliced into ever-shrinking territories according to minute shifts in alignment or orientation, are close to what come to mind when I think of the radical left in my community. My mental image is more chaotic, more full of *noise*, but the feeling is similar. I believe that we share, for the most part, a vision: we see a possible world in which oppressions that are systematically reproduced can be systematically undone. We might share some ideas

about what those oppressions look like; we certainly experience many of them in common—some of us more than others, some of us in different ways. And yet, in the cacophony of critiques, the ease of online chatter, the frustration at the slowness with which we experience (or don't experience) social change, the longing to destroy negative patterns and replace them with positive ones, we often lose our sense of commonality. As we each find our way through history and understanding, it can be difficult to be more than a line pointing this way or that, carving the terrain into one side or another. It can be hard to maintain that sense of collective purpose, to see the pattern of which we are all a part.

How do we get to that possible world that we share in our hearts? And how will we know when we're there? Must we arrive all at once, together, or is it a long, slow journey with a variety of destinations?

I take comfort in the fact that we are not carrying these questions alone. The puzzle of collective transformation is neither new nor unique to left politics. In Mahayana Buddhism, for instance, the notion of the *bodhisattva* is one who vows to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. In some traditions, this entails a profound act of solidarity: a bodhisattva delays their own release from the wheel of suffering until all others are free, as well. Judaic mysticism investigates the notion of *tikun*: a rectification for the soul. In some readings of Kabbalah, once all souls successfully complete the process of rectification for wrongdoing, the holy sparks that were lost when the vessels of the sephirot shattered will at last be reunited, and evil will disappear from the world. In both examples, the

transformation of the self is intimately linked with the transformation of all in order to produce an existence that is free from suffering or oppression. As anarchists, we are part of a long and storied tradition of people seeking liberation not only for ourselves as individuals, but for us all—now, and for future generations. And still, the fundamental question of “how” remains to be answered.

The process of transformation can be both maddeningly gradual and frighteningly quick, similar to Stephen Jay Gould's notion of “punctuated equilibrium,” the idea of slow biological evolution being studded with moments of radical change. Strategizing for and anticipating social revolution in this manner is often little more than guesswork and fortunetelling, as we scramble through history texts to find precedents, models, and lessons to help show us the way forward—to recreate successes while (hopefully) avoiding mistakes of the past. Knowing which moments are ripe, which conditions are met or coming into being, even whether something has *already* shifted, can feel like an impossible task at times. It is in these moments of doubt that our differences loom large, that the noise and static threaten to block out our collective vision of hope.

In his book *Art & Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time & Light*, Leonard Shlain puts forth the thesis that revolutionary changes in human thought take place in fits and starts over time, and that each major shift in scientific thinking (predominately physics, but other disciplines apply) is prefigured by a similar, prognostic change in contemporary art. Cubism, for example, both predicted and explored ideas of relativity

at roughly the same time at which Albert Einstein was developing his 1905 paper “On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies.” The Surrealists began destabilizing viewers’ understanding of space and time well before the general population began to assimilate Einstein’s ideas. It is almost as if we, as humans, share a collective mind, and if scientists are the waking part of the brain that plans and constructs, then artists are the dreaming mind, the one that explores the unknown territories as we—all of humanity—sleep, only to awaken with a brainstorm that feels, to the conscious mind at least, like a sudden and unprovoked stroke of genius, or what Rainer Maria Rilke calls a “conflagration of clarity.” In fact, that idea or change in paradigm has been brewing in our collective unconscious, in our products of culture and our unarticulated views, for quite some time. “The radical innovations of art embody the preverbal stages of new concepts that will eventually change a civilization,” Shlain writes. “Whether for an infant or a society on the verge of change, a new way to think about reality begins with the assimilation of unfamiliar images. This collation leads to abstract ideas that only later give rise to a descriptive language.”

Does this mean, then, that we can look to art and the products of culture to see evidence of the impact of our organizing, of our struggles, before we really start to feel the change on a large scale? At the time of this writing, post-Occupy and pre-whatever comes next, we are seeing a new “anarchist chic” emerging from Hollywood and elsewhere. Films like *Hunger Games*, *Catching Fire*, *The Company You Keep*, *Divergent*, and *The East* capitalize on the echoes of the Occupy movement

and the allure of underground political organizing against corporations and states. Both Beyoncé and Kanye West (with Jay-Z) have music videos that glorify the front lines of protest, trading mainstream memes for molotovs. Many radicals rejoice at this evidence of our influence: no longer is our presence invisible outside of our own communities and cliques. Through translation, the struggle becomes visible to the masses, legitimized by the power of pop. Millions of YouTube viewers watch as cultural heroes give their blessing to smashed windows and police cars in flames; Oscar award winners shoot arrows at the empire. Subversion is sexy again.

And yet where are those ideals we are fighting *for*? Where is the vision of the alternative world, beyond the balconies and the barricades? Have these ideas gotten lost again in the noise?

I am neither surprised to see the recent years of global unrest reflected back to us through cinema, nor do I expect depictions of general assemblies and spokescouncils to have the same zing as armed revolt when translated to the big screen. And I’ll admit: I love Jennifer Lawrence. There were moments of solidarity in *Catching Fire* that brought me to tears. Nonetheless, it is difficult for me to get genuinely excited about these representations of rebellion because they reduce the entire project of transformation into a free society to that insurrectionary moment, to the symbolism of (usually) armed struggle without much framework for alternative possibilities or dreaming. When I think of all the radical ideals that I would like to see seep into movies and music videos, I would rather see imagery of large groups of people learning how

to make decisions together, more fluid expectations of gender, a completely consensual and open sexual dynamic, or the disappearance of the categories of race, to name only a few. I am less excited to see the whole project distilled into a handful of hard-bodied urbanites clashing with police.

On the other hand, what is it like for those viewers who have never conceived of the possibility that perhaps the social order in which they live is neither inevitable nor the best possible alternative? Maybe these images of beautiful people waving black flags in Beyoncé's "Superpower" really do sink in to some fundamental place, planting a seed of doubt, sensitivity to a range of tactics, a small prejudice in favor of the oppressed. Then, given the right conditions later on, this seed sprouts into a new and, as of now, unpredictable form of resistance of its own.

I teach at a community college, and I often talk to my students about such things—What do you see? I ask them. Much of media is a mirror; we see what we are looking for, we see our own desires and dreams reflected back to us, for better or worse. For those who know little of radical politics, who were largely unaware of Occupy and even less aware of recent happenings in Egypt, Greece, Turkey—these products of culture say something else, entirely. They speak to feelings of dissatisfaction and discontent writ large; they recall experiences in the military, in lines for social services, in rehab programs. They do not act as proof of our influence as activists; they are merely whispers of something else, something unfamiliar but potent. If Shlain is correct, then none of us has the answer, not exactly. What we are building is not so much

a set of networks and solutions as it is an embodiment of a collective unconscious urge. There is a longing, and we scramble to find ways to satisfy it, intellectually and structurally.

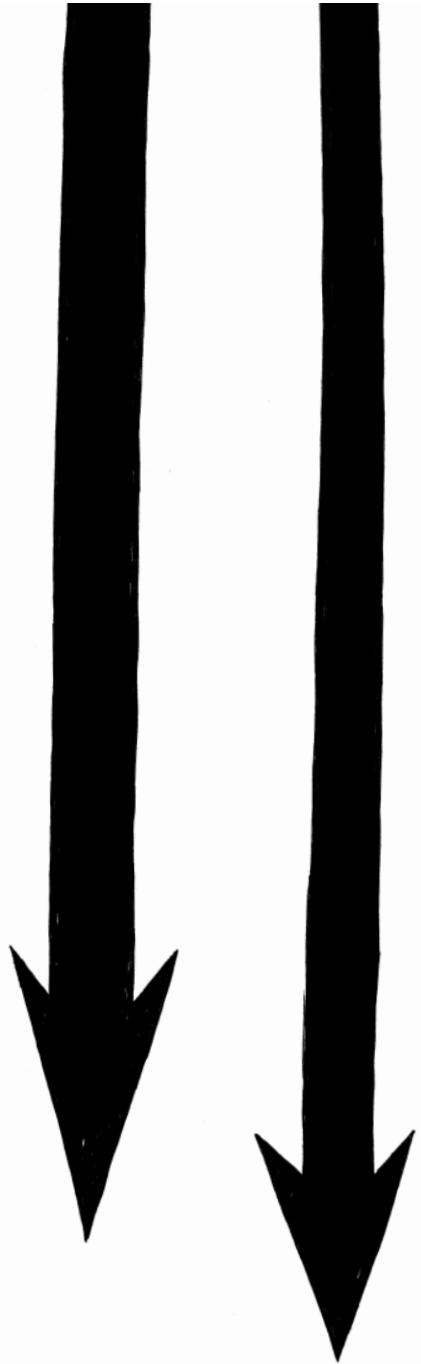
Even as revolutionaries, we recognize that true change, deep change, often happens slowly, punctuated by moments of rapid growth. Much of it develops over time, in the spaces between uprisings, and it is passed down from person to person and family to family, communities creating and recreating meaning for themselves and for others. We cannot hope to control or even influence every aspect of this process. Many things that I still think of as key points of struggle have already become passé and self-evident to many of my students. "Why do people still even talk about gay rights," some have asked me. "Everyone agrees." While this is obviously not yet the case, the fact that so many of them think that it is gives me hope. For them, LGBTQQ equality is no longer a focus of struggle; they have the luxury to take it for granted, to take it as truth. My insistence that we re-examine its history and current importance feels to them as if I am recreating the problem rather than letting it simply be solved. I am an immigrant in this terrain; they are natives, and see no need to point out that the river runs downstream or that the water is wet. What this means to me is that, at a certain point, the struggle becomes less about fighting and more about forgetting, about unlearning the negative assumptions of before.

What if we all woke up one morning from our collective dreaming and decided to act only according to those dreams? What if we were able to shed the sickness and pain and culture of our

current system like shrugging off a set of old clothes? What would that world look like?

We must accept that we may have little control over how things emerge: our visions, our hopes, our goals. What begin as clear and sensible demarcations of one political frame versus another are often washed away in the end, the lessons of both being absorbed and incorporated in surprising and unpredictable ways. Social change happens both gradually and in “conflagration[s] of clarity.” What we need to do is offer the vulnerable and most honest heart of ourselves, the best and highest ideals, in the hope that these are the pieces that are carried on and conveyed, that our intentions are right and our understanding of our situations and contexts flexible and wide-seeing. Our commitment to struggle must include being caring and thoughtful as well as dedicated and brave; we must also commit to seeing our work with clear eyes—we must be nimble and able to shift as our terrain moves beneath and around us, as change happens with and without us.

As we talk strategy, we must remember to carry our dreams with us.





ELSIPOGTOG: RIVER OF FIRE

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THE STAKES



Outside the Canadian province of New Brunswick, no one paid much attention to what was going on near the Elsipogtog First Nation until six police trucks were set ablaze.

They should have. The Mi'kmaq community's struggle to stop fracking before it starts is likely a harbinger of the resource wars to come in Canada.

At the very least, it demonstrates how a nation can stand in the way of government and corporate driven resource extraction projects on land they never ceded.

That's when this story started—not with the burning cop cars, but back before 1779, when the Mi'kmaq signed Peace and Friendship treaties with the British. In those treaties, they agreed, in the spirit of cooperation, to share the land and water with the Europeans, but they never gave it up. And unlike legal contracts, treaties don't have an expiration date.

Fast forward through three centuries of colonialism. Those not familiar with the history of Canadian government policy during this time—the Indian Act, residential schools, the sixties' scoop—could begin reading about assimilation and genocide in the 1996 Report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

Then jump to 2010. That's the year the government of New Brunswick granted a Houston based company, Southwestern Energy, licenses to explore for shale gas in exchange for investment in the province worth 47 million dollars over five years.

The stakes for the province are high: New Brunswick is looking to shale gas extraction to bring jobs and revenue into the perennially struggling economy where unemployment is almost 11 percent, and tax revenue is dwindling as workers migrate West to Alberta's oil sands. If fracking goes ahead on a significant scale, it could double the province's revenue. And the province's most powerful family businesses stand to profit, as cheap and plentiful gas allows Irving Oil to begin refining bitumen piped East from the oil sands and be exported from New Brunswick.

But in spite of the backing of both a Liberal government that green lighted the licenses, and the current Progressive Conservative government, Southwestern Energy has run into sizeable obstacles. In 2011, they canceled three quarters of their first exploration season in response to blockades and protests led by the Maliseet of Saint Mary's First Nation and environmental groups. In 2012, "regulatory uncertainty" and fears that resistance would resurge caused them to hold off, according to an affidavit the company filed in court in November, 2013. In the spring of 2013, having hired a small army of private security, they began exploring in Kent County, on government held land that lies around the Elsipogtog First Nation. (The private security company in question is a subsidiary of JD Irving, which is a distinct business entity from Irving Oil but connected by family ties.)

But some in Elsipogtog had seen the Gasland films. Others had heard of the environmental disasters that fracking has wrought in Pennsylvania and other parts of the United States. They thought of the frequent rivers that flow through this part of New Brunswick and into the Gulf of St Lawrence and the Northumberland Strait. They thought of the Elsipogtog River on which the First Nation sits, and of the summers they spent swimming and catching eels in its waters. They thought, Elsipogtog—L'sipuktuk—translates into River of Fire. And then the parts of Gasland that everyone remembers and no one can forget cast an ironic light, and they didn't like what they saw in the future.

If SWN found the gas they were looking for, they figured, nothing, and certainly not the government, would stop the company from extracting it. Many doubted that their First Nation—where unemployment hasn't been measured since 2006 and is estimated at around 80 percent—would reap much benefit from it. And they couldn't imagine that any amount of money or jobs would be worth gambling on the water that surrounds them and that is crucial to their culture and livelihood. Indeed, they said over and over again, water is crucial to everyone's livelihood. Who can live without water?

So in May, 2013 as SWN began exploring, the community moved into action.

A core of people set up protest camps near exploration sites. Others started scouting for SWN machinery and signs of the impact the seismic testing was having on the land and water. Still others were willing to get arrested, so they stood in front of the seismic testing

trucks (or “thumper trucks” as they’re known) as they advanced, or chained themselves to equipment and vehicles. Over the course of the summer of 2013, more than forty people including elders were arrested. And they won temporary victories, as SWN was forced to stop work for days and even weeks at a time.

For the most part, they didn’t think of themselves as activists. They were social workers and new moms, grandmothers and bus drivers and fire fighters, young men and women finishing high school and figuring out where they fit in. They rejected the term the media used for them—protesters. They preferred to be called protectors, they repeated: protectors of the water.

THE RAID

At the end of September, SWN Resources Canada parked the thumper trucks and other vehicles in a compound off Route 134, just beyond the village of Rexton, about 10 kilometers away from Elsipogtog. Community members lit a sacred fire in the driveway—SWN couldn’t move their vehicles without putting it out. A new protest camp grew up around the lot, which some members of the community invited the Mi’kmaq Warrior Society to help. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police closed 134, so the people put up a blockade for a few days, and soon relaxed it to allow traffic through one lane. It didn’t matter. SWN’s vehicles were trapped—and the company was forced to stop work again.

The site drew lots of activity, especially on weekends when supporters would arrive bearing donations of food, warm clothing and blankets. Supplies and encouragement came not just from the rez or from other First

Nations but from non-native communities across the province—in spite of the fear many in the province had of losing their jobs with the government or the various Irving family businesses for standing against shale gas development. Mi’kmaq, Mohawk Warrior and Acadian flags were all raised on Rte. 134, and the site grew colorful with elaborately drawn anti-fracking banners contributed by a local artist.

At the beginning of October, SWN obtained an injunction against the occupants of the site. Those were tense days on 134, and there were disagreements between different groups engaged there. But through it all, members of the Warrior Society maintained a dialogue with the RCMP negotiating team. Which is why everyone was shocked when at dawn on October 17, one day before the injunction was due to expire, dozens of officers entered the camp with automatic rifles, dogs and shotguns loaded with sock rounds.

The RCMP swept the area, surprising members of the Warrior Society, many of whom were still asleep. Video from that morning shows a volley of molotovs thrown at police from the woods along 134. Several gunshots fired into the air are audible. But then there is relative quiet as the RCMP search the area, dismantle tents, make arrests, and presumably confiscate the 3 single shot rifles, bear spray, homemade fire-cracker IEDs and several boxes of ammunition that they would display to the press the following day.

By mid-morning, however, word was out and angry people started arriving from the rez. The RCMP seemed to lose control as more and more people arrived at the police line. Some drummed and sang. Some yelled at

the cops. Others prayed with feathers, or with rosaries. The elected chief of Elsipogtog and part of the band council arrived and tried to cross the police line. One councilor was tackled so hard the bruises on her biceps were still black the size of small fists several days later. They were arrested too.

As the afternoon wore on, the RCMP brought in an armored car, then they pepper-sprayed elders and women and shot bean bag rounds at the crowd in an effort to secure the site of the raid, which enraged everyone further. That's when the six RCMP vehicles were set on fire.

And while the RCMP was arresting people and using sock rounds to control the crowd, SWN Resources Canada drove their vehicles out of the compound. They were free to start

exploring again.

CONSULTATION AND ACCOMMODATION

According to a legal standard grounded in the Canadian Constitution and forged in courtrooms, the government has a “duty to consult and accommodate” First Nations to the extent that development projects stand to infringe on or impact a treaty right such as access to land or water, or the right to fish or hunt. But it doesn't require that they get community consent for the projects—and as it stands, the “duty to consult” doesn't give First Nations the right to veto them.

From the start, the government told First Nations across New Brunswick that SWN was only exploring, and that the seismic testing they were carrying out would have virtually



no impact on the land or water or their treaty rights. Legally speaking, this more or less left the province off the hook. But they promised there would be significant consultation with First Nations and new regulatory hurdles for SWN to go through before the actual fracking begins—if it begins at all.

At the same time, throughout 2012 and 2013, SWN worked through an umbrella group of New Brunswick elected Chiefs and band councils—including Elsipogtog's—to head off opposition to exploration and persuade people that shale gas would benefit them. SWN hosted an all expenses paid trip for Chiefs to visit Arkansas, where SouthWestern is already extracting shale gas. They subcontracted a handful of "environmental monitoring" jobs to local First Nations people. They held information sessions which community elders were offered two hundred dollar honorariums to attend. The Chiefs' group—known as the Assembly of First Nations Chiefs in New Brunswick (AFNCNB)—calculated that since the government had already gone ahead and given out the licenses to explore, they might as well push for a resource revenue sharing agreement with government in the event that extraction went ahead. They didn't want to be cut out of an eventual cash cow.

But the company's efforts couldn't pacify the grassroots.

While some of the elders who went to the SWN info sessions were convinced by what they saw and heard, others struggled to understand it—the sessions were held in English not their first language, Mi'kmaq. And some left frustrated that there were no formal means of registering their opposition to fracking provided during the meeting.

They felt they were being co-opted a pseudo consultation process designed specifically *not* to listen to them.

The RCMP raid didn't help convince people that the company or the government had their best interests in mind, though it did help to consolidate the grassroots opposition and their band council toward a consensus of sorts.

Motivated by pressure from within the community, Elsipogtog's elected Chief and band council withdrew from the AFNCNB. And the AFNCNB called for SWN's exploration activity to be suspended.

During the weeks after the raid, people regrouped. Those who could get the gas money drove to bail hearings in Moncton, where six Mi'kmaq Warriors were slowly going through the courts. Some people rebuilt the camp at 134, and began winterizing it. The scouts continued keeping an eye on the patterns of SWN contractors and security.

Many people in their thirties and forties talked about having fought these kinds of fights before—they'd fought for the right to log on Crown land. They'd fought for the right to fish in federal waters. As far as they were concerned, the only thing that was different this time was that they weren't just fighting the government for their treaty rights—this time they were fighting a foreign corporation too.

But there was also a new dynamic. Many were emboldened by Idle No More, a movement that took Canada by storm last winter. It started as a hashtag, proliferated across social media, and grew into a full-fledged indigenous resurgence. Its most obvious manifestations were flash mob round dances in shopping malls and other public spaces. And it was sparked by outrage over a piece of federal





legislation that eviscerated protection for many of Canada's waterways. Perhaps most importantly, it called on non-native Canadians to honor the nation-to-nation relationships with indigenous peoples set out in the treaties.

As the summer progressed, members of the local Acadian and Anglophone communities across New Brunswick began to answer that call, bringing their support to the protest camps and direct action. It was a new dynamic for a place where indigenous elders harbor painful memories of being beaten up for being Indian when they went off reserve as young men, and where mistrust, racism and hostility has for decades characterized interactions between non-native and native communities.

By the time SWN began exploring again, a coalition to protect the water had coalesced.

A new camp was set up along Highway 11, on property belonging to a tiny Acadian restaurant. Mi'kmaq and Acadian flags hung at the entrance, and a blue tarp "Do Not Frack in Kouchibouguac—No Shale Gas" was strung up across the lot.

The first time the thumpers came back, protected by rows of RCMP in fluorescent yellow vests, one hundred people stood in front of them, banging steel drums in the hope of disrupting the seismic testing process. In mid-afternoon, the trucks beat their own retreat.

Scared they would lose the final two weeks of their exploration season, SWN Resources Canada went back to court. They filed a lawsuit against five men and John and Jane Doe, suing them for an unquantified amount, and applied for an injunction order against them, which is to say all the protesters.

The arguments and affidavits in support of the injunction application read like a list of what direct action had achieved: more than 1000 geophones and batteries damaged as they lay along the highway; unexpectedly high costs for private security; a drill rig worth almost 400,000 dollars burned to the ground; 54,000 dollars lost for each day work didn't proceed as planned.

The Fredericton judge ruled in favor of the injunction order, referencing the damages incurred and the company's worry that "if the unlawful protests continue, the entire geophysical exploration program is in danger."

The new injunction meant that protesters were prohibited from being within 250 meters ahead or behind SWN's contract workers and their vehicles, and within twenty meters off the side of the road where they were working. Cross into that buffer zone, and they would risk arrest by the RCMP.

They would have been excused for giving up. Most Canadian media had lost interest—the police cars had long since stopped burning. Nights, the weather was dipping below freezing; the mornings dawned frosty. SWN said they only had about ten days of work left to finish before their season was up.

But as the snow began to fall and ice began to crust the rivers' edges, they remained steadfast and refused to back down. Dozens of people, native and non-native, came out to the highway each day, stalking the thumper trucks. Sometimes they would stop hundreds of meters from where the trucks were sending out their sound waves, and the police would block the highway, and work would slow. Sometimes the day started with only five or ten people waiting on the side of the road, and

a crowd would gather by afternoon. Sometimes there were confrontations with the RCMP or SWN contractors, and often the RCMP made arrests, three or four a day.

SWN faced more delays. On the afternoon of December 2nd, 2013, while a judge prolonged the injunction to accommodate the halting pace of their work schedule, some 150 Elsipogtog community members and their allies placed tires across the highway and set them on fire—a defiant flare that put the country on notice once again.

Several people had been injured by police during arrests that day. A contractor had reportedly driven his truck into a cluster of women. People from the community had been pulled over by the RCMP while driving off the reserve. They were feeling harassed and tired. The extension of SWN's exploration season was wearing on people's nerves. It felt like they were close to winning this round—but the finish line kept being moved. "It's frustrating and painful. . . . Our people's health is suffering major . . . I just want SWN to leave us alone so we can be normal again," came a message from one of the most upbeat people there. There were panicked reports that police in riot gear were standing by.

The sun went down. Trees and geophones were piled on the tires to stoke the fire. The RCMP held back. People began a round dance, circling the flames in the middle of the highway. As thousands of viewers overwhelmed a live stream from a road in what had seemed, nine months earlier, like the sleepy edge of the country, they could hear John and Jane Does calling out over the crackling of burning wood. "Idle No More!" they shouted, "Idle No More! We aren't going anywhere. This is our land and our water. We are calling on you to honor our treaties. This is Idle No More."

Four days later, SWN Resources Canada announced it had completed its seismic testing work. "*We would like to thank all New Brunswickers for their continued support,*" read the media statement.

In Elsipogtog, disbelief gave way to tentative celebrations. No one there knows if or when the company will be back to drill. So they remain vigilant, regrouping for the next battle.

Names of those involved in the protest have been omitted for fear they'll be targeted by law enforcement or corporate interests associated with shale gas development in New Brunswick.





STATE

FINANCE

POLICE

DEFENCE

ENERGY

ENERGY

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AL
TV

THEATRE AND THE ART OF TRANSGRESSION: UNLEARNING THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

TAMARA LYNNE

Tamara Lynne is the founder and Creative Director of Living Stages Theatre, in Portland, OR. She has been performing since the street theatre of her youth in small-town Oregon and is passionate about theatre as a process of transformation and empowerment. In 2004 she worked and trained with the theatre brigades of the MST, Brazil's Landless Movement.

In mid-December 2012, I stood on the outskirts of the Mango Garden Arena, a large circle of packed dirt just outside the communal home of Jana Sanskriti, India's foremost Theatre of the Oppressed organization. It was evening in West Bengal, and our first performance during *Muktadhara*, an international festival of theatre artists and activists, hosted by the esteemed Jana Sanskriti, who were celebrating twenty-seven years of theatre and community organizing in rural villages across Northern India. Jana Sanskriti is the largest Theatre of the Oppressed organization in the world, recognized for the aesthetic power of their work and their long-term commitment to community empowerment and action. They celebrated by bringing us—members of the international community—to the party.

Theatre of the Oppressed, or TO, is a hybrid form of theatre activism that emerged in Brazil in late 1960's and is now practiced around the world. The practice uses theatre as a catalyst to spark collective reflection and action about social issues, and to further the intellectual and political development of entire communities. The objective, according to TO founder August Boal, is to "turn non-actors into actors, in the theatre and in society."

I'd met the founders of Jana Sanskriti, Sanjoy and Sima Ganguly,

the previous year when they visited the US for the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed conference in Chicago. After leaving the Indian Community Party in the 1980's, Sanjoy had started the small village core team that what would become Jana Sanskriti. This was a time when many party members were critical of its elitist and undemocratic practices. As Sanjoy explained, it appeared to them that the main criteria for leadership in the party was an education in England and a degree from Oxford University, a situation that reinforced a system of class privilege and colonialism. Sanjoy, as well as a number of other leftists, headed for the rural villages and began a journey of art and politics with villagers, a long process he outlines in his book *Jana Sanskriti: Forum Theatre and Democracy in India*. During his years living in villages, he discovered how skilled many villagers were at debating politics through the folk art that they created, and this opened the door for Sanjoy to develop his own path into the world of political theatre.

Talking with Sanjoy during the Jana Sanskriti post-conference workshop in Chicago, I was struck by an approach to TO and a language around it that contrasted starkly with many of the prominent voices speaking within the US community of practitioners. In a US environment that stressed rules, structures, political correctness of language, and immediate outcomes, Sanjoy spoke of the importance of building relationships and working with a community to develop intellectual capacity over time. In an academically dominated environment that focused on the individual as the center of action, Sanjoy spoke of the importance of helping an audience make the shift from the

interest of the individual to the interest of the collective.

In my time with Jana Sanskriti, I began to see evidence of my own need to break rules I'd learned through my previous activism and TO work, to transgress lines I'd previously considered limitations, and to unlearn rules of engagement I'd been offered in a US-based learning environment. Participating in this international festival moved me, from adherence to the politics of identity that had dominated much of the discourse about privilege and oppression in the US, towards a concept of liberation that holds more potential for expansive dialogue, deeper understanding of solidarity, and greater possibilities for action.

Lessons from Jana Sanskriti's long history of theatre activism are relevant not only for activists working in the realm of theatre, but for all who are seeking to organize communities to confront, dismantle, or transform oppressive systems in the name of building a liberatory society.

HISTORY: BIRTH OF THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

Forty-odd years ago during a theatre performance in rural Brazil, a peasant woman stormed the stage and began beating up one of the actors. The scene was about infidelity; her husband had taken a lover in the city and asked his wife, who could not read, to hold onto the love letters saying they were business receipts. Upon discovering the truth, the woman was left with a dilemma: what does she *do*?

As director Augusto Boal urged the audience members—all rural landless workers—to speak their ideas out loud, the woman spectator became

more and more agitated, furious with the actors' misinterpretations of her words, until finally she accepted Boal's invitation to *show* rather than tell the audience what *exactly* she meant. When she stormed the stage, her message was unmistakable.

The moment the woman crossed the threshold from the audience onto the stage, she became not just a passive spectator of the theatre but a 'spect-actor'—one who is capable of both observing and taking action. Through this simple act of transgression, an entirely new form of theatre was created, a form that expanded and spiraled outwards into a full-blown global movement that has had the effect of influencing the landscape of both theatre and activism.

Over the next four decades, Boal wrote a series of books, beginning with the formative *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which outline the aesthetics and political ideology that serve as the foundation of this work, and offer practical applications to be used by artists and activists across the world. Influenced by the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, who broke down the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student to create teacher-students and student-teachers, Boal used the same theory to recreate and redefine the relationship of actor and audience, as well as to reconnect the politics of theatre to real life systems and social structures. Central to *Theatre of the Oppressed* is the assertion that no theatre is apolitical; theatre artists and audiences must inevitably take sides, and they must be on the side of the people, the oppressed of society, and then support action to transform it.

Boal had been imprisoned and tortured in Brazil during the

dictatorship for his involvement in the Workers' Party and his theatre activism. Exiled to Argentina, he faced an even more politically repressive climate, and this is where he developed a form of theatre known as Invisible Theatre, a form that allowed actors to create plays in public spaces and spur political dialogue without identifying themselves as theatre artists. Later, Boal self-exiled to Europe, where he initially believed that due to the lack of military presence on the street, oppression did not exist. Only after working with people did he theorize that the struggles people named as isolation, depression, addiction, and suicide were actually aspects of systemic oppression that had been internalized and lodged in the psyche of the population. If the "cops" were already inside the heads of the individuals and impacting their actions, then a military presence was unnecessary; the population has already accepted the oppressive system and will continue to reinforce oppression against itself. Boal adapted the theatre accordingly, developing a theatrical process to identify and isolate the internal "cops" and allow participants to theatrically strategize to deactivate or neutralize their impact. Some critics see this as a movement away from the Marxist politics of class struggle that are Boal's roots and rather a bourgeois impulse to appeal to the more privileged classes of Europe. Others argue that this is a necessary and logical expansion of his political work, and essential to combat the tendency for movements to self-destruct and sabotage liberatory potential.

Throughout his journey crossing borders, Boal adapted his methods to the specific social and political conditions he met, creating new branches of

TO connected by the idea that theatre must always be in service to the oppressed, and must engage the oppressed in reflecting and taking action to confront the oppression.

In all of these settings, one method called Forum Theatre has been a keystone of Boal's work, and it is in the practice of this form that we encounter the most lively and passionate political debate regarding this practice.

FORUM THEATRE: TYPICAL RULES

In Forum Theatre, actors present a play demonstrating a real life scene of oppression, and members of the audience are invited onto the stage to take the place of one of the characters and try to break the oppression to change the outcome of the play. The idea is that the specific moment of oppression, experienced by members of a community, serves as a *microcosm*, a symbolic way of exploring, understanding, and confronting the same system of oppression in the larger society, considered the *macrocosm*. For instance, when a young girl steps onto the stage to protest in a scene of domestic violence or abuse, this not only allows her an opportunity to challenge an oppression she faces in real life in order to develop new tactics, but it also offers a chance for the audience to gain deeper understanding of the ways patriarchy manifests itself. As the action continues on stage, the audience learns not only what *is* and what *is not* effective, but also the tricky and ever-adapting way that this particular oppression lodges itself in the ideologies, attitudes, and institutions of their community and poses a complicated system to overcome. Boal describes the event as less like traditional theatre and more like a football match. The

forum is facilitated by an individual who plays a role called the *joker*, who aids the process by enforcing the rules of forum while encouraging the community to engage directly in the debate by stepping onto the stage to propose solutions. Unlike a referee in a football match, the joker does not determine a winner, but rather refers questions back to the audience for increased engagement and debate. The joker will look for points of consensus as well as points of dispute, drawing attention to these in order to inspire more creative and sophisticated actions to confront the oppression. The role of joker is an essential aspect of forum theatre.

In traditional forum, there are a number of rules to make sure it works as theatre and, ideally, as politics. One standard rule is that members of the audience can step into only the role of the character who directly experiences the oppression, the person considered to be the protagonist. Difficulties arise when audience members want to replace the role of the oppressor character, and the result is often dismissed as *magic*. In real life, we can't usually replace our oppressors but must still struggle to overcome the oppression. On a practical note, this also causes the scene to resolve easily, and the theatre is over too quickly.

It is not merely for reasons of aesthetics and practical considerations that this rule is considered key. According to Boal and his mentor figure Paulo Freire, it is the oppressed who must liberate themselves and who are in the strongest position to have the experience and vision to transform society. Any actions of the part of the oppressor class to behave in a more humane manner, or to relinquish their own power, ultimately result in a situation

that does not make the oppressed better able to fight the oppression. This action would be better described as charity, not liberation. Liberation is not a gift that can be bestowed by a benevolent master, but must emerge from the struggle of the oppressed against the oppressor. When the oppressed as a class gather internal and external resources, begin to strategize collectively, and take action to confront, dismantle, or transform systems of oppression— this is where we find real potential for societal transformation.

Forum Theatre was originally performed within a community that faced the same oppression, initially the landless workers in rural Brazil. TO is theatre *of* the oppressed, not theatre *for* or *about* the oppressed. When performing for or with a community that includes both oppressed and oppressor, it is far too easy for a member of a privileged class to step onto the stage and attempt to show the oppressed what they should do. The result of this can easily shift into a blame-the-victim sport, with a 6-foot tall college-educated white male stepping into the role of a 4-foot tall woman from a rural village in a scene about a domestic dispute. While the tall man might overcome the oppression with ease through his gender privilege and the intimidation of sheer size— the same strategy would not necessarily be effective for a village woman in the exact same situation. Without reflection on this reality collectively, the result might lead an audience to dismiss the struggle as much easier to win than it actually is.

One example of this complicated dynamic was generated by a comment made by Boal himself, in reflecting on a proposed forum theatre scene about

the rape of a woman in a subway station in the early hours of morning in Rio. In arguing the point that forum is most effective when it shows the scenes *before* the moment of violence occurs rather than portraying the moment of violence on the stage, Boal suggested then that the scene might be rewound to begin before the woman even left for the subway. He added that the audience might intervene to prevent the woman from being alone in the subway station at midnight.

The implication that the woman who was raped should not have been alone in the subway station encountered a firestorm from feminists around the world, and raised important debate about the danger of what can happen when you invite an audience to solve an oppression they do not directly face. From a feminist context, the risk is victim blaming.

When I had a chance to ask Boal about this comment in 2003, it had already been written about, critiqued, and digested in publications around the world. He offered a typical open handed shrug, saying something to the effect of— he does not have solutions for the oppressions women face— that I must ask women if I want to know what to do. I was disappointed with his unwillingness to debate the question of feminism and the potential role of TO to reinforce oppression. However, in retrospect, I see that his answer was a logical extension of the philosophy of his work. Why would I be looking to Boal to find answers to the oppression women face? The tools offered are his answer: ask the community that faces the issue what is to be done.

While there is general agreement that forum theatre is best used within

a homogenous community that faces the same oppression, this itself raises complicated questions of who exactly makes up this ideal community. Prior to my own travels in Brazil, I'd been told that the reason forum worked so well in Brazil was that Brazilian landless workers (peasants) were a homogenous community. In my direct experience with the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) in Brazil's Central West, I learned that while the community faces a shared oppression—that of access to land—it is anything but homogenous. Government land policies in Brazil have kept the poor classes moving from place to place, and the Central West particularly was an area that included diverse populations from the indigenous communities along the border of Uruguay, Afro-Brazilian communities who had travelled from the North, German communities from the South, as well as

people of various genders, sexual orientations, and class backgrounds. From this experience, I began to question the existence of the homogenous community as something perhaps mythological, or something that existed in the past but no longer.

In an increasingly globalized community, where we have complex theories explaining intersections of oppressions that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, it is necessary to ask—does there *ever* exist a homogenous community? This is not a new question. Even during Boal's lifetime he faced criticism for using "Cop-in-the-Head" techniques he developed in Europe with rural workers in Brazil, when purists and Marxists suggested he should be focusing instead on the struggle for land. His response? "Yes, they are landless workers in need of land, but they are also husbands and wives, they have



gender issues and have asked me to help with the problems they face—do you want me to say to them ‘no, I will work with you, but only on issues of land struggle?’”

The tension between strict adherence to the rules of the form from an analytical standpoint, and the impulse to adapt the work to the real life needs of a particular community in a particular time is a tension inherent in this work, as in all political organizing. It is a tension Boal understood. In the last workshop I took with Boal before his death, I recall him turning and saying with a chuckle, “Don’t tell anyone this. But really—in TO you can break all the rules. But if you tell people this secret, there will be no more TO.”

Boal saw the complexity and contradiction of what he had created. What does it mean that a form of theatre born out of a moment of transgression, the breaking of a rule, has now developed its own set of rules, rigidly followed by its practitioners?

Connecting to the US-based TO community, I was struck by the focus on structures and methods, a dogmatic tendency towards highly detailed debate about the ‘rules’ of TO and the drawing of sharp lines between what it *is* and what it is *not*. The debate about the rules and politics of TO was lively during Boal’s lifetime, and this debate only intensified in the years following 2009, after his death created a vacuum of leadership in the TO world. After this moment, there was now no one to bestow legitimacy to this or that innovative technique or change in methodology.

Now TO is practiced not only in the fields, but in the universities of North American and European

countries. The practice of TO, created by accident in a moment of transgression upon the stage and developed as an empirical method for creating theory and action, has now become codified, documented, theorized, and debated in political and academic circles. Meanwhile, the practice continues to evolve based on the needs of the diverse communities around the globe struggling in different social and political circumstances, against a range of oppressions.

CULTURE OF ACADEMIC DEBATE

In the US, the network of TO practitioners has found the university to be the primary location for its training and development. This is a logical location for it, considering that in the US, much activism has emerged from the universities and educational institutions.

One result of this university-based focus on TO is the recentring of TO practice within a framework of traditionally academic approaches to this work. Theories are developed by students and professors using TO within an academic institution and often removed from many communities who do not have access to this space. This has influenced the language and framework of the debate surrounding the global practice of TO.

One tendency of this university-driven method of training is the insistence on relying on experts as a way of ensuring the quality, legitimacy or purity of the tradition. During the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed conference in 2008, a panel of so-defined experts presented their views on changes in TO practice and argued positions of legitimacy. The primary demographic represented on the panel was

white men, raising questions about the implications of a model of legitimacy that is based on the 'expert.' In response to this question not being effectively addressed during the panel, a number of us organized a make-shift session to ask questions about the ideas of expert, training, codification, and what this means for TO as a body of work, and the international TO community as a whole. Among the questions I asked: "How do we train people in this work? How do we train new jokers? How does one become an expert?"

One immediate response was an argument for more graduate school programs that focus on TO training, as if this were the obvious and only answer. Looking beyond the university system to develop skilled jokers and expand the pool of people who might be considered 'experts' was treated like looking to the moon for a new source of oxygen.

It was at this conference that I met Sanjoy. During his post-conference workshop, I asked him the same question. His answer could not have been more different. When speaking of training new jokers, he said, "They must understand the importance of the collective...When they go to the people, they learn. When they practice, they learn... A good joker thinks, 'there are a lot of wise people sitting in front of us... If you feel the sense of collective, you are a good joker—you don't have to dance too much!'"

Sanjoy, in his work with Jana Sanskriti, has had the experience of twenty-seven years creating theatre in the villages, developing forty teams across India, and training hundreds of new jokers through a process of practice, feedback, reflection and dialogue. Leaders and members of the central

core team range in class and educational background, and the learning is learning *with* and *from* the community with whom you work.

LESSONS FROM MUKTADHARA 2012

Traveling to create theatre with Jana Sanskriti in West Bengal, coming from a place dominated by critique and university-driven debate about rules and legitimacy of TO, my participation in Muktheadhara demonstrated that there were concepts I needed to challenge, attitudes to question in order for me to participate in this work in a meaningful and effective way. My own history of anti-oppression training had taught me to be painfully aware of my privileges in regards to race, class (on a relative global level), educational background, and nationality as a US citizen, and not to transgress certain boundaries. While offering lots of examples of what *not* to do, these trainings did not teach me how to effectively engage across these lines. The lessons I'd learned had unintentionally reinforced a practice of non-engagement, an obstacle that I discovered impeded my ability to form relationships necessary for real solidarity and collective action.

STEPPING ONTO THE STAGE WITH TRAFFICKED WOMEN . . .

When I arrived at the workshop in Kolkata, I was surprised to find we would be spect-actors of a forum performance presented by a group of young girls. I had learned from Sanjoy during the 2-hour drive to Kolkata that the girls performing were survivors of human trafficking; many had been brought to Kolkata from Bangladesh under horrendous conditions and forced to prostitute themselves. Now

the young women were being held by the state in a home that was, in effect, little more than a prison. They were not allowed to leave and were waiting inevitable deportation.

It was an unusual project to take on, Sanjoy explained. Jana Sanskriti won't be doing a project like this again because in the process they discovered that there is no possibility of an ongoing connection to the young women involved; security is highly enforced. "All we could do was to give them the names of our contacts in Bangladesh," Sanjoy said. "They will have a very difficult time when they get back, and I hope that they will be able to find some of our friends and allies."

This performance itself was a bit of a compromise. While Jana Sanskriti did not normally accept work with the state, they had agreed to this project because of a personal connection with an advocate of the program. Now, at the international festival, the funders and officials were showing up. Many of us from the international community bristled at the situation. We would be watching the painful story of a girl who, after the death of her parents, is kidnapped and forced to sell her body on the streets of Kolkata. Most of the girls were in their early to mid-teens. From a US-based TO perspective, this is a serious ethical and political dilemma. For those of us from the US and Europe, who have never experienced trafficking or the brutality of this world—what does it mean for us to step onto the stage and suggest a course of action? And what does it mean to take part in this political circus for the funders of the project?

To step onto the stage and suggest a course of action would appear

ridiculous, arrogant, inappropriate, disrespectful and victim-blaming, to say the least. What could we—especially those of us from more privileged places of the US and Europe—possibly say or do that would teach these girls anything? The unquiet and discomfort settled around us as we watched the gut wrenching play. When asked for audience interventions, there was a stifling silence. Most of us looked down or away. I counted the seconds, hoping that someone, *anyone*, would be willing to break the rules and step into the scene. Finally, one of the international participants from France, a tall blond man, stepped forward and took the role of the protagonist. I felt a collective sigh of relief, mixed with confusion as many of us were grappling with the contradictions of this unexpected and highly inappropriate scenario.

On one hand, it would have been inappropriate for any of us to step into the role of a 14-year-old-girl who had been trafficked from Bangladesh to Kolkata. Her experience was one I could not even imagine, and this may be why I was unable to step in. Looking back, however, I wonder if my reluctance—which at the time I blamed on political reasons—was in fact more of an emotional reluctance to really engage emotionally and in an empathetic way with the horrifying experience of this woman. I had learned well the position of correctness and safety that nonengagement offers.

Only later in the day did I understand that these young women had created and performed the play because they actually wanted answers, they wanted our engagement with the oppression that was so real to them. Refusal to play the game on political

grounds was equivalent to refusing to dialogue, refusing to involve ourselves with their reality, and ultimately the refusal to believe that true dialogue and solidarity is possible—a position that keeps European and North American white people ‘safe’ from having to deal, on a practical or an emotional level—with the struggles of people of color from the global South.

My own adherence to the correctness of my position of noninvolvement was a way to keep a safe emotional distance from those who directly face such oppression, those who are looking outwards for connection and solidarity. As they packed the young women back into buses to return to their prison home to prepare for deportation, I realized we were the only human beings they had seen in weeks or months, and that this was perhaps the only chance they would have to bring their stories to the international community for dialogue. My desire to stick to the strict rules of TO had meant a missed opportunity for me to engage in their struggle on a human level.

PATRIARCHY IS PATRIARCHY— IN THE CITIES AND IN THE VILLAGES

As the workshop continued in Kolkata, we created a series of plays to present at the festivals in the villages. We were a group of artists and activists from nineteen countries, speaking ten different languages. While the numbers included participants from India and West Bengal specifically, many of us were from cities in the US and Europe, wealthier and more urban places. We feared our struggles would not resonate. We feared that we were breaking a rule of Theatre of the Oppressed, coming to a village with

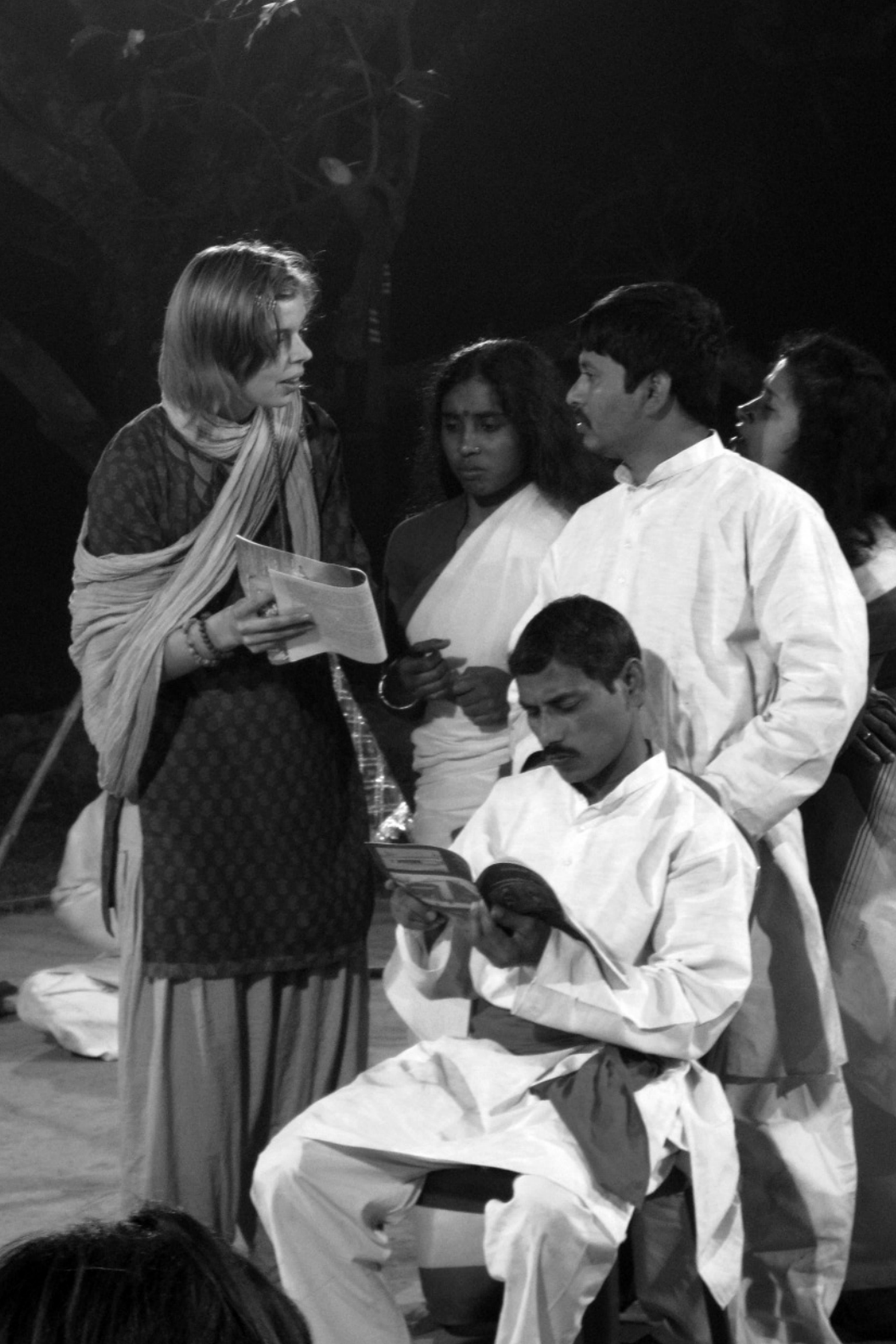
our own problems and imposing these on a community from the outside. We feared that we would let Jana Sanskriti down by performing bad plays that were unable to engage the villagers.

The topics of our plays included a broad range of social issues that ranged from the harassment of Muslim students to the oppression of an immigrant cafe worker. They included scenes of a mother who paid for her son to attend college but would not support her daughter, a grandmother taken away from her home to be placed in assisted living, and the oppression of a worker in a theatre who is scapegoated by his boss and fired.

Our group of actors was anything but homogenous, and so we were, once again, breaking this foremost rule of Forum Theatre. How would the villagers respond to these problems? Would they laugh us off the stage? Would they sit in silence? Would they be offended that we were there, presenting to them? We argued amongst ourselves to determine the impossible task of presenting our issues in a way that would work for any and all audiences. We argued about whether we should even present the plays at all.

After much debate during our play creation process, we mentioned to Sanjoy our concerns. What if the villagers don’t understand our plays, don’t relate to our problems? Or, what if we change the plays to relate better, only to discover that *we* can no longer relate to the problems?

Sanjoy listened patiently, but was not concerned. Shrugging, he said, “Patriarchy is patriarchy—in the villages and in the cities. It may look different in the villages than in New York or Paris, but what makes you think the villagers won’t understand that?”



Earlier, Sanjoy had spoken to us about what is necessary to make a good *joker*, the person who is responsible for facilitating the performance and engaging the audience in intervening in the play. First and foremost, sense of the collective is essential. Without that, nothing else is possible. With a clear sense of the collective, everything is possible.

“The inexperienced joker is very nervous, quite anxious before the play. They think ‘what if no one intervenes? What if nothing happens? What if there is no learning?’ The experienced joker is relaxed because they know that really forum theatre is not about finding a specific answer, but it is about building relationship.”

We stepped onto the stage into the bright lights in front of the several thousand Bengali villages. Not only would the villagers not understand our language (which was roughly translated by Sanjoy) but they might not actually hear us at all, due to a glitch with the power supply fueling the microphones, hanging in long cords in front of our faces. The complete lack of sound did not seem like an obstacle to the audience—as men, women, and children huddled in shawls on burlap sacks, rapt with attention.

It turned out, whether or not our words were heard, it didn't really matter. At Sanjoy's invitation, a young girl stepped onto the stage. She took the place of one of our actors. We had no idea what she was saying. There was momentous applause. A minute later, a grandmother, looking like she was in her seventies, stepped up. Again, we understood nothing. Third, a man in his 30's took the place of the woman, gesturing wildly as he spoke. Three

generations, each one stepping up to say something, to *try* something, to offer up ideas for the community to see, hear, reflect upon.

Building relationship, as Jana Sanskriti does it, happens over a long, long, period of time. It doesn't occur in one magical forum performance where the audience breaks the oppression and life changes forever. It doesn't happen in one festival even. It happens over years, decades. In the case of Jana Sanskriti, these relationships have been built over 27 years. This is how, in Jana Sanskriti forums, one can see three generations step onto the stage to intervene in the same play: a father, a grandmother, and a grandchild.

GOLDEN GIRL

Over and over again during the Kolkata festival, participants were asked to break what we had come to believe was the first and foremost rule of TO: that solutions always come from working within a homogenous community who have *experienced* the oppression, that you *only* step into roles that are familiar to you, part of your experience, your culture, your own oppression.

In the forum in Jana Sanskriti's home neighborhood, Girish Bavan, the play “Golden Girl” was performed in the Mango Garden arena to an audience that included neighborhood children, local families, and our odd assortment of international travelers.

The play had been created through a long process that Sanjoy describes. “Twenty-five women from one of the villages constructed two hundred images of family. There were many similarities, and some very subtle differences. This process is very long, but it is important...”

Using the images created by the women and *dynamizing* them into scenes, dialogue, and action, the play “Golden Girl” was created, and it told the story of village women before marriage, during marriage and after marriage. The play was structured by the director, but the actors—the women themselves—scripted it; they created the words and dialogue based on their experiences.

In the play, a young woman sitting by the fire has her book torn away from her hands by her father, and she is yelled at to get back to the kitchen and cook, as her brother sits across from her reading and studying for exams.

Sanjoy joked the play, and asked who in the audience will take the place? A young blond woman from the Czech Republic stepped onto the stage, took the place of the daughter and stood up to the father character, explaining to him why it was so important that she be educated.

As I watched the young woman step onto the stage, breaking what I had previously believed to be the foremost rule of forum theatre, I saw that her intervention engaged the actors and the audience in a new way, and that something new was beginning to form in the moment.

I began to question my own assumptions. Did I really believe that patriarchy in the villages was so very different than patriarchy in the cities of Europe? Do I really think that these two groups have no capacity to understand each other? Is it possible that a young woman from Europe has something to contribute to the ongoing dialogue that is not reinforcing her own privilege at the expense of Indian women?

I had missed something important in my initial assessment about forum

rules and the action of stepping into someone else’s shoes: we had been *invited*. The stage had been created by the community there with the purpose of generating new possibilities, and we had been given the honor of being invited to step onto this stage, this powerful aesthetic space, this activated location to enter the dialogue.

Reluctance of our international group to engage and accept this invitation on political grounds perhaps exposes residual paternalistic attitudes towards the West Bengal villagers, the assumption that there is no capacity for dialogue between us. This idea limits the potential for genuine relationship and solidarity and global movement building. The fear of breaking the ‘rule’ in this case suggests an underlying fear of an insurmountable power imbalance, and that by somehow approaching this with the wrong sentiment, we will destroy or devastate these fragile people. Furthermore, the idea that refusing this invitation is somehow in the best interest of *the people there* reflects attitudes that reinforces our non-involvement, distance, objectivity, and, in a sense, our *power* in being removed and not emotionally implicated in these struggles.

CROSSING BORDERS, TRANSGRESSING LINES

Even within a local context within the US, there are rules and boundaries of identity that we do not typically transgress. This was particularly clear to me during my work last year with the Eastside Forum project, a project which focuses on communities along 82nd Avenue in Portland, Oregon, a stretch of road that serves as an economic boundary and is also home to a number of racially and culturally

diverse communities. With community members that included both homeless and housed, the play “Lunch” was based on real life experiences of cast members and showed a day in the life of a woman who was homeless. Our audience also included people who’d experienced homelessness, as well as those who had not. During one performance, ten audience members stepped onto the stage to try something to break the oppression. This particular audience was predominantly people of color, and reflected a number of different racial and cultural backgrounds. After the play, I heard one audience member approach another. An African American man in his 50’s caught up with student from India who was in his 20’s. “I saw what you did on the stage just now,” he said. “There was something in your action I had never thought about before. You taught me another way to be.”

Sometimes learning happens across entrenched lines of culture and identity. While TO is always on the side of the oppressed, committed to the idea that it is the oppressed who must liberate themselves, there are also powerful lessons in strategy that can happen when groups of very different cultural, geographic, and economic conditions choose to engage in dialogue about larger systems of oppression.

BREAKING THE RULES IS ESSENTIAL; POWER LIES IN THE MOMENT OF TRANSGRESSION

Through one particular transgression 40 years ago, when a peasant woman entered the stage, an entirely new form of theatre was created, blooming and spiraling outwards into a full blown global movement. This space of radical possibility only exists in the

moment it is a transgression, in the perceptible intake of air that happens when someone crosses a preconceived limitation or boundary and takes a position never taken before. It is the moment that everyone watches and the feeling of transgression and radical possibility is palpable, tense with fear and excitement—and new possibility.

Rules are created to respond to a particular need or problem at a particular moment in time. Some of the rules of engagement I’d internalized in my own political work were ones that had emerged from important historical lessons: the failures of early waves of feminism, the lessons passed on by the Black Power Movement, the words of women of color carving out their own spaces to find identity and safety. In all of these, the message was clear: respect the boundaries of an oppressed community. That meant not crossing certain lines. Once I began to generalize this lesson to apply to all communities facing oppressions that are different than my own, that’s when the rules themselves begin to block capacity for real relationships of solidarity and collective action.

What would happen if as a movement we could simultaneously accept a particular group’s right to self-determination and at the same time openly stretch across these entrenched lines of identity in order to build and strengthen relationships, deepen understanding of systems of oppression that we jointly face, and share strategies for confronting them? What if there was a concept of safety that has room for groups that are identity-based, but that ultimately strives towards reaching out and beyond boundaries of identity to better define and confront the larger systems of oppression that impact all of us? What if

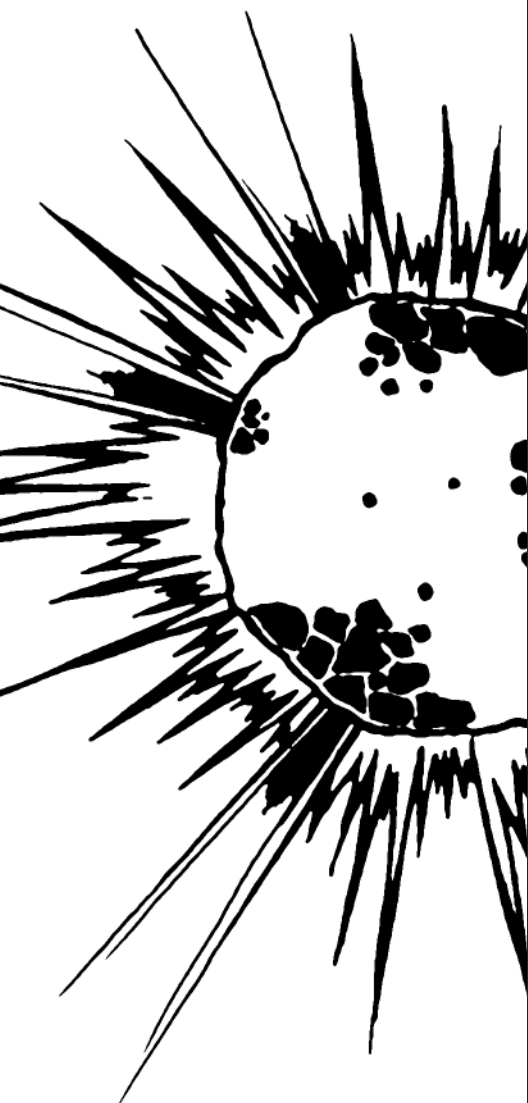
we encouraged each other to take these risks, make these transgressions, with the understanding that oppression is increasingly global and multi-faceted, and that we cannot confront it effectively alone? I wonder what new radical possibilities might open up.

The macrocosms of capitalism and patriarchy cannot be escaped. If a forum play is true, if it is real and authentic, it will by necessity reflect the systems existing in the outer society—with all the existing contradictions, limitations, oppressions *as well as* the latent and unexplored possibilities. Each moment of lived oppression, each scene in a story can serve as a microcosm, and each holds some grain of insight that offers a fuller understanding of the macrocosm, the larger system that none of us can see completely. In an increasingly global economy, where systems of oppression cross borders, community lines, identities, artists and activists must also cross borders to forge relationships and to look internationally for more complex understanding of the problems we face.

In TO and in political organizing, we must continue to make rules, theories, practices, and we must unapologetically break them as new rules are needed, as communities shift and change. The breaking of these pre-established rules, and the transgression of a pre-established boundary is what create the radical space of possibility, new opportunities and new structures for political engagement. We must hold onto this idea of transgression as we open up space for new and unexplored possibilities for action.

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OCTAVIA'S BROOD: SCIENCE FICTION STORIES FROM SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS— AN INTERVIEW WITH WALIDAH IMARISHA

LARA
MESSERSMITH-GLAVIN

Walidah Imarisha is a writer, organizer, educator, performance poet and one half of the poetic duo Good Sista/Bad Sista. Her work has appeared in dozens of publications, including the hip hop anthology Total Chaos. She directed and co-produced the Hurricane Katrina documentary Finding Common Ground in New Orleans. She has taught in the Portland State University's Black Studies Department, Oregon State University's Women's Studies Department and Southern New Hampshire University's English Department.

How do you see literature (and in particular, science fiction or “visionary” fiction) as a strategic intervention in popular consciousness and revolutionary movement-building?



Co-editors adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha are compiling an anthology of science and speculative fiction, fantasy, horror, and magical realist short fiction, all written by activists working for social change. Under the umbrella of what they call “visionary fiction,” the editors seek to draw from the imaginative and creative potential that exists in the realm of literature to inspire and guide the strategies and dreams of the radical movement.

“Whenever we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in an exercise of speculative fiction. Organizers and activists struggle tirelessly to create and envision another world, or many other worlds, just as science fiction does... so what better venue for organizers to explore their work than through writing original science fiction stories?” —www.octaviabrood.com

The collection is named for Octavia Butler, Hugo and Nebula Award-winning author, and first science fiction writer to be awarded the MacArthur Foundation “Genius” grant, whose work explored, among many other things, the intersections of race, class, gender, resistance, and imagination.

Adrienne and I founded *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements* on the premise that all organizing is science fiction. What does a world without prisons look like? Without poverty? Without hunger? We don’t know—it’s as foreign to us as the Klingon homeworld. But being able to dream these worlds, to manifest them in our imaginations, especially when we do this collectively, gives us all a concrete vision to begin to move towards and build.

Our radical movements have many strengths. One of them is analysis—we are very good at critiquing and analyzing the machinations of the current political structure. Which is vitally important. But as important is the ability to envision something else to replace it. This is actually what motivates people to become part of radical change—the ability to see that something better is possible for ourselves, our families, our communities, our world (and in this case, our galaxy). We believe that science fiction is the genre that can help us do that.

However, we want to be clear that we don’t think it’s inherent in science fiction to be revolutionary or visionary. This is clear from all of the mainstream sci fi films that have come out—the blockbuster where the lone white man saves the whole world from flood, aliens, asteroids, etc. This is why we came up with the term “visionary fiction,” as a way to describe that sci fi which is aware of identity, of power

inequalities. That sci fi which believes change happens from the bottom up, that it is transformational and complete, that it is collective.

We also did it so we didn't argue with the hard core nerds (who are my people, I love them so!) about the differences between sci fi, fantasy, speculative fiction, horror, magic realism, alternate timelines, and on and on.

Can you talk a little about the importance of thought experiments and prefigurative dreaming in the development of political praxis? What are some examples of this?

My co-editor adrienne has said that sci fi is the perfect "exploring ground," that it gives organizers the opportunity to play with different outcomes and strategies before we have to deal with the real world costs. Based on that, adrienne has been doing Octavia Butler Emergent Strategy Sessions across the country, coming out of a Transformative Justice (TJ) space at the Allied Media Conference a few years ago. In the Transformative Justice Science Fiction Reader a collective of folks put out, they wrote, "We are four power geeks who come to the allied media conference every year, and we have been developing a space for conversation around science fiction as a tool for our organizing and futurizing... Over the past few years we found each other out, as people thinking about TJ, and as sci fi geeks seeing interesting examples of potential futures rooted in TJ approaches in our isolated reading experiences."

Emergent strategy focuses on the idea of strategizes that arise organically. You collectively have a shared vision and values, but rather than having a

five year strategic plan, you recognize that in a constantly changing landscape, your strategies must be fluid and flexible, must react to the surroundings. It also allows you to use the resources around you, to find value in things that previously you may have dismissed as trash. This idea is really encapsulated in Butler's book *Parable of the Sower*, which follows the main character Olamina, who is a young Black woman who lives in a slightly more dystopic future in a gated community. She begins studying skills needed to survive outside of the walls, packs a survival kit bag, and begins envisioning other ways the world could be. When the community is attacked and the walls fall, she finds herself on the outside with her bag, her knowledge and her dreams. She finds people along the way who collectively dream with her to imagine what a new community can look like.

I wrote an article "Science Fiction and Prison Abolition: Lessons To Build Our Futures" for an upcoming issue of *The Abolitionist*, because I feel that sci fi is actually an ideal place to explore something like prison abolition. Many folks are completely unfamiliar with the idea of community accountability processes that do not depend on the criminal justice system and the prison industrial complex. So this is a great opportunity to have that exploring ground adrienne talked about, to say, without confining us to reality at first, what else is there?

One of our stories in *Octavia's Brood* does just that—Kalamu ya Salaam's story "Manhunter" (an excerpt from a larger piece) focuses on a community of women warriors and leaders who are attempting to keep the human race alive. One of the warriors kills

another, and they have a gathering to decide what is to be done with her. It is a powerful scene that shows the complexities of community accountability, and offers solutions rooted in healing rather than retribution.

My partner David Walker, whose story “The Token Superhero” also appears in *Octavia’s Brood*, wrote, “Life would be easier if people understood that you can be a hero without having a villain.”

Our ability to tell stories shapes how we view our reality around us. If we only hear stories that neatly package good and evil with no understanding of the complexities of situations, how can we begin to see the world through lenses that take into account complexity?

As Black feminist thinker and poet Alexis Pauline Gumbs (also an *Octavia’s Brood* contributor) said when asked how abolition and science fiction connected to her, “For me prison abolition is a speculative future. It imagines a species with a set of fully developed powers that are right now only fledgling. We are that species.”

Your collection owes a great deal of its framework to the thought and writing of Octavia Butler. Ursula LeGuin is often cited as a sci fi writer who explores issues of gender (Left Hand of Darkness) and anarchist social organization (The Dispossessed); Kim Stanley Robinson’s “Mars” trilogy grappled with revolution and coalition-building on a planetary scale; Marge Piercy contrasted utopian and dystopian possible futures (Woman on the Edge of Time). Who are some of the writers that have moved you the most, politically speaking, and what kinds of issues or insights did they address most successfully? Which issues remain untouched?

Yes, we definitely owe much to Octavia Butler. We call ourselves her brood (a nod to her collection of books *Lilith’s Brood*)—her children; we do not claim to be Octavia or to do what she would, but we believe we are carrying on that work in countless multitudes of ways, just as she carried on the work handed down to her.

One of our contributors Alexis Pauline Gumbs quotes from an interview Octavia Butler did in the 1980s, where she was asked how it felt to be THE Black female sci fi writer. And she said she never wanted that title. She wanted to be one of many Black female sci fi writers. She wanted to be one of thousands of folks writing themselves into their present and into the future. We believe that is the right that Octavia claimed for each of us—the right to dream as ourselves, individually and collectively. But we also think it is a responsibility she handed down—are we brave enough to imagine beyond the boundaries of “the real,” and then do the hard work of sculpting reality from our dreams?

And we also want to honor many other writers, especially those living at the intersections of multiple identities and oppressions, who have dreamed new worlds and then set about the hard work of making them reality. We know W.E.B. DuBois wrote visionary fiction in 1920, using it as another avenue for discussing the racial landscape of this country, and we want to honor that this lineage of work is long. It is actually ancient. Specifically for adrienne and myself as two Black women, we know that our enslaved ancestors were visionary fiction creators; while in chains, they dreamed of us, their children’s children,

free, which was complete science fiction at that time. And then they bent reality to create us. It's vital for those of us from communities with historic and collective oppression to remember each of us is science fiction. And as such, this is part of that responsibility Octavia laid down for us—we have a responsibility to those who came before, and to those who come after.

What was the genesis of the “Octavia’s Brood” project? What are your hopes for its role in the movement and beyond?

Adrienne and I were both working on visionary fiction in different ways, and had heard about each other’s work. We decided to join forces to work on *Octavia’s Brood*, and because as we said all organizing is sci fi, we wanted organizers and movement builders to be able to claim that space, to be the ones writing those visionary stories. Using their every day realities and experiences changing the world to form the foundation for the fantastic, and hopefully build a future where the fantastic becomes the mundane.

We also very much wanted to balance insightful visioning with quality writing. This entire process has been incredibly collaborative. Many of our contributors had never written fiction before, let alone science fiction. When we approached folks, the majority were hesitant to commit, feeling like they weren’t qualified. But overwhelmingly, they all came back a few weeks later enthusiastically with incredible ideas and some with dozens of pages already written. The editing phase has been much longer on this process than any other I’ve been part of, because we have gone back and forth with the writers

numerous rounds, to help them clarify their vision and craft. We are nearing the final round, and with the support of our incredible adviser Sheree Renee Thomas, who edited the groundbreaking anthology *Dark Matter: 100 Years of Speculative Fiction From the African Diaspora*, we know *Octavia’s Brood* will not only have vibrant ideas, but captivating writing as well.

For the future, my dream (which I am working to make a reality!) is to have sci fi and visioning incorporated deeply and completely into our radical movements. This can happen in more ways than can be named. One of our contributors, Morrigan Phillips, has developed an incredibly engaging direct action workshop where you use fantasy lands to test direct action strategies. I’ve trained it twice, and it is by far the most engaged and fun time folks have ever had in a strategy session. That’s just one of the multitude of ways we can bridge the gap between the world of the real and the world of the imagination.

All of your contributors are actively involved in movement work. How does their fiction differ from visionary sci fi written by people outside the movement? Who are the audiences?

Undocumented artist and organizer Julio Salgado wrote, “We can’t just share the good stories. We need to confess the problematic aspects of our beings if we want to leave behind three dimensional stories of ourselves.” This is at the core of the visionary fiction stories created by folks within the movement. They understand the hard realities, and do not offer any easy solutions. We do not write utopias, because utopias have no usefulness in building new worlds.

I think there is also a level of creativity and ingenuity reflected in these stories that comes from being an organizer, that comes from being told there are only two options, pick the lesser of two evils, and saying, “No, I don’t accept that. We will make other options.” One of the stories in *Octavia’s Brood*, “Homing Instinct” by Dani McClain, does just that. In the story, because of ecological disaster the government has issued severe restrictions on travel that basically mean people will no longer be able to move freely around the country or world; they must pick one location to call home. The main character is trying to decide between two locations, and feeling trapped. Ultimately, not to spoil it, she decides to make herself a third option.

The thing about the third option is, it’s uncharted territory—there is often very little guidance and we are making it up as we go along. Which is why it takes bravery to envision it, and then follow it. And why we need that emergent strategy, so we can take advantage of the opportunities that present, while still holding true to our vision and values.

What are the limitations on the radical potential of visionary fiction?

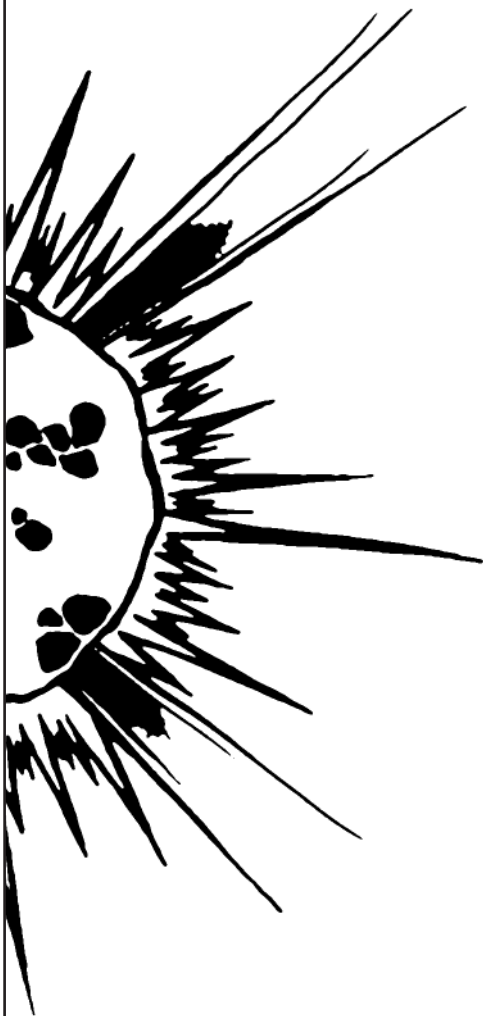
The limits are only those of our imagination, and our bravery to allow ourselves to dream beyond the constraints of this world.

What is your recommended reading list of visionary fiction for folks in the movement?

Any list I would give would be woefully incomplete. I’m hopeful folks

will not only search out visionary fiction pieces already written, but also create their own and add to this collective dreaming and building.

Interviewer’s note—“*Octavia’s Brood*” is set to be released in summer 2014. For more information or to support the project, please visit: www.facebook.com/octaviasbrood or www.octaviasbrood.com.



LIBERATING LINGUISTICS

ALEXANDER REID
ROSS

Alexander Reid Ross is a cofounding moderator of the Earth First! Journal Newswire, and a canvasser with Bark, living in Portland, Oregon. His articles have appeared in Science and Society, CounterPunch, The Ecologist, Green Social Thought, Climate & Capitalism, The Singapore Review of Books, continent., and Life During Wartime (AK Press 2013). He is also the editor of the forthcoming anthology Grabbing Back: Essays Against the Global Land Grab (AK Press 2014).

SYNTAX OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

What is the appropriate level of organization to perform certain tasks or articulate certain positions, and how does linguistics empower us to function as a society towards such collective ends? We have to approach this question on both large and small scales using the tools granted to us by linguistics, such as syntax (the study of grammatical structure), semantics (the study of meaning), semantics (the study of signs), and phonetics (the study of voiced sounds). The good news is that these tools are not limited to the abstract. As the case studies discussed in this essay intend to show, they can be applied to the everyday articulations of our movement (eg, media, social network posts, communiqués, and even artistic performances) to hone our communications and express ourselves more radically. This essay attempts an exploration of the linguistic function as it pertains to the logical structure of social movements, as well as the writings, speeches, and memes that can emerge.

One particular development of anarchist theory is a syntax of popular struggle: We the people demand X.¹ Subject moves into action. X is an objective that the subject is determined to achieve. In such a way, the objective

can be analyzed from the perspective of a subject as a predicate that determines the subject as much as the subject determines the object. This may seem incomprehensible in our atomized society, which favors the narrative of “the Great Man,” but the logical structure of the movement is really a constant interplay between what we already understand and what we are becoming in the practice of mobilizing together. It is the basic phenomenon of meaning, being, and becoming that we seek to define or determine, and which in turn determines us.

Considering demands-based organizing, we might think, for instance, of the *piqueteros* of Argentina, who throng to the streets for specific reasons and demands, and whose constant activity moves the mark of political reform further with every quantitative struggle. Other examples of demand-based organizing include the anti-austerity movement and the anti-fracking movement. Very rarely do movements arise that are too complex to be thought of as “demand-based” at all.

Occupy Wall Street mobilizations defied the grammar of social theory, but it did so more brazenly, by uniting in the refusal to make demands. The very phrasing of Occupy challenged the logic of engagement, and consequently the most deep seeded notions of the past three decades—namely, one of the most strongly held populist theories that the *demand* is the “datum”² of social protests, mobilizations, and even larger movements.³

Did Occupy become a different form mobilization (or series of mobilizations), due to the fact that it refused to formulate demands? When I talked to theorist of populism, Ernesto Laclau, as

the Occupy movement spread throughout the US, he noted the proliferation of global protests resulting from the fact that “democratic demands coalesce around a more global type of popular interpolation.”⁴ The lack of particular demands in OWS reflected a universally shared dispensation (which Laclau identifies as Populism), directed towards popular inclusion in politics. At that stage of global mobilization, demonstrators around the world were “expressing a rejection of the system in its totality, [including] the tradition of social movements without the more radical form of social protest.”

Was the absence of demands similar to what Maia Ramnath calls “a universal urge”? In *Decolonizing Anarchism*, Ramnath’s terrific journey through the Indian independence movement, anarchism is posited as a function of solidarity and mutual aid, rather than their necessary cause. Through this perspective, we can see how non-European systems of political resistance grow organically alongside the mostly-European phenomenon of anarchism. Organic and liberating, decentralized movements share one thing in common with anarchism, Ramnath posits: a universal urge towards liberation.⁵ The presence of such a universal urge would explain why OWS followed Arab Spring, carrying with it a certain anarchic milieu dating far back into history. Rather than, “We demand X,” perhaps Occupy’s phrasing was closer to “We *will* X.” In this case, X clearly meant “to Occupy.” Thus, the phrasing of Occupy became its own demand, immured to a tactic, but leaving open the question of strategy—how can we imagine new, alternative ways of being together?

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY LINGUISTS

Mainstream media could not understand this qualitative leap from formal demand-structure to social liberation, because it refused to step out of its totalitarian methods, which dictate the conventional forms of engagement. As Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, "What makes a subject difficult to understand—if it is significant, important—is not that some special instruction about abstruse things is necessary to understand it. Rather it is the contrast between the understanding of the subject and what most people want to see. Because of this the very things that are most obvious can become the most difficult to understand. What has to be overcome is not difficulty of the intellect but of the will."⁶ What is crucial in Wittgenstein's thought is that the syntax and semantics of media statements, press releases, or articles do not have to be particularly complex—in fact they shouldn't be. The very importance of media, for Wittgenstein, rests on using language as a tool to bring people a message that already feels familiar. In this way, people are more receptive, and perhaps even able to contemplate ways of being together that they already understand. Hence, the ability to relate in common can empower and liberate.

The deepest challenge is mediating the social interaction between the "inside" of the protest movement and the "outside." The question we might venture to ask here is, "How can we communicate the ideas and relationships of our movement in a language that makes sense?" This question touches on the surface of the sensory terms on which our ideas exist. To go deeper into a possible answer, we might

be able to see linguistic models as setting the stage, drawing people into the ideas and perspectives of a social model—be it an encampment, a mobilization, or a movement. I propose that we return to the field of "sense data," which Bertrand Russell deploys to refer to "all that we directly and primitively know of the external world" before we have the chance to draw perceptions into larger conclusions.⁷

A sense datum is any particular object that comes alive to our senses even before we can necessarily perceive its function as playing a role in the formulation of ideas. Here, the realm of physics crosses into that of cognition, as the physical sense datum becomes the locus point of perceptual shifts of meaning, new territorializations of thought and community, and finally, new subjectivities (eg, "the People" or "the 99%"). Linguistics is not only a way of expressing the sense datum in its rawest form, but to express the object as it appears to us, what role it plays in our lives, and how we feel about it. The level of linguistics is one that communicates such relationships and connections, and in doing so, brings further relationships about.

Just as Bertrand Russell places sense data in the realm of epistemology, or the logic of knowledge, we might suggest that there was a "border epistemology" (to utilize Walter Mignolo's term⁸) between reality and phenomenon that Occupy negotiated. Here, the conventional dualities between the nation and the alienated, the capitalist system and the "outside," the environment and unlivable spaces, are not simply surmounted or transcended, but straddled, occupied, inhabited, while being challenged and inevitably incorporated.¹⁰

This mediation of borders between the idea and its truth value fits in the context of decolonization struggles that form an important contextual background, and must also be considered as a formative principle of liberation. Border epistemology is thus an important effort to move from subject to predicate—from the position of being together (civil disobedience, occupation, black bloc) to a strategic objective that agrees with the subject (securing space, sustaining infrastructure, creating a social model based on general assemblies). Thus, the border epistemology implied here was not summed up by a statement like, “We are the 99% and we demand something,” but by the brilliant, rolling chant, “We are the 99%, and so are you” in which the “we” and the “you” merge into one another.

The relationship between subject and predicate here is part of a larger problem of the Other, whom Occupy identified as the 1%. There was no reason to make demands of this class. Much better to use the terrain of Occupy as a sight for community-based skills sharing and directly democratic social networking to “grow the movement.” The level of success Occupy attained in these goals is to an extent measurable by the many decentralized groups that have grown out of the Occupy mold. Each turn in the movement becomes a passage, perhaps, of subject to predicate, a fulfillment not of a demand addressed to the 1%, but of a need for the development of a more radical and autonomous social sphere. As a friend of mine once said, drawing from bell hooks, “Occupy, like love, is best understood as a verb.” That is the challenge of liberating linguistics—to articulate forms of being together using

the tools of nonviolent communication, openness, and mutual aid while recognizing that we are building a new world together.

We might even suggest that the regeneration of the spirit of Occupy through the opening up of new groups is a process whereby the syntax of social movements (subject/predicate) moves in closer relation to truth value, if we take truth value to mean a non-representable, existential relation between the subject and the outside world. As linguist Gottlob Frege writes, “Subject and predicate (understood in the logical sense) are indeed elements of thought; they stand on the same level for knowledge. By combining subject and predicate, one reaches only a thought, never passes from sense to reference, never from a thought to its truth value. One moves at the same level but never advances from one level to the next. A truth value cannot be a part of a thought, any more than, say, the Sun can, for it is not a sense but an object.”¹¹ In the context of movement communications, we are not only bringing truth forward through language, but, perhaps, exploring operations that will develop that truth towards a further aim. By permeating society through more decentralized and flexible groups, such as Strike Debt as well as increased involvement with groups for Climate Justice, Housing Justice, and decolonization, developments beyond Occupy logical structure of community empowerment affirmed direct democratic processes. The word Occupy, for example, carries militaristic connotations, which concerned critics of US imperialism; “Decolonize Occupy” and “Decolonize Wall Street” originated as effective memes, which

pointed out the settler attitude of many within Occupy by pointing to the problematic connotations of the word "Occupy," thus hinting at an ingrained colonial mentality that most people had not even contemplated. The simple changing of one word led to a heated debate over whether the meaning of Occupation was being "Occupied," or whether the term had to be scuttled as a first step in a more aggressive approach to the movement.

It is worthwhile to note that the practice of direct democracy has been compromised in the extreme by the consistently provocative nature of systemic white, male privilege in society, and the intention of an empirical approach to linguistics in social theory must be the opening of a space of consensus and liberation using language to liberate the imagination through communication and contemplation of shared experiences. So how can linguistics liberate in this way, both to create the social conditions of communications that engage people and help create a space where "the People" can achieve liberation?

THE NEW

This project, I have to confess, is obviously not a new one. It is worthwhile to go back to Roman Jakobson's crucial work at the Moscow and Prague Linguistic Circles as well as the early Russian Avant Garde, which emerged out of the confluence of Mystical Anarchism and a popular uprising against aristocratic forms of cultural representation (such as Naturalism).

Still a student during the tumultuous revolutionary era that extended to 1918, Jakobson joined the total revolt of artists and wordsmiths against

the status quo. Part of the movement proposed the transrational as the potential of the word as such, the sound as such to convey meaning by themselves, outside of or beyond given referents.¹² As though one could always be inventing in a kind of renaissance of liberation where everything bursts forth with the new, the young poets and avant garde artists of the revolution synthesized science, technology, and modernism with a particular primitivist verve that called forward an awakening of everyday sensations to a revolutionary perception of sense data.¹³ This movement opened the possibility that sounds could express more than words, the latter becoming sensual ideophones, or phonetic units that express ideas through phonetic enunciation. For instance, a line in Mayakovsky's 1917 poem *Человек (Man)* reads: «Кто целовал меня—/скажет,/есть ли / слаще слюны моей сока.» («*Kto tsilavál m'injá—/skazít,/jes't' li/ sláŋf:i sl'únú majéj sókə*», "Whoever has kissed me will be able to tell you, if there's any juice that's sweeter than my saliva.") If you read the Russian phonetically, it really feels like saliva is building in your mouth.

The phonetic performance actually draws from a more important, contingent, almost electrical, surge than their function as simple points of reference. The anarchist painter, Kasimir Malevich (famous for his painting, "The Black Square," among others), praised Jakobson's transrationality, noting the similarities between the painter's own reckoning with nonrepresentational thematics of surface, color, and space and Jakobson's insights into language, poetry, and poetic language. The poet Velmir Khlebnikov called

for “experiments in colored speech,” continuing the expressive zeitgeist.

Of course radical linguistics in its entirety cannot be “rewilded” with new codes, poetic interventions, or what Noam Chomsky calls “word salad.” The potentials of sense conveyed through radical media and outreach, however, remain critical to examine. The global movement of revolt against the status quo flows over boundaries, across cultures, overwhelming pervasive cultural signs with subversive meanings.

Are we looking to language strictly as a form of representation, or can we think the potentials of linguistics as flowing far beyond those boundaries? The direction of non-representation was initially a radical, if not totally anarchist, thematic, calling for the demise of anything that would allege some form of popular representation as opposed to autonomy and self-determination. It is our challenge, with modern linguistics pointing us towards a cognitive plasticity that scientists had not thought possible fifty years ago, to strive for a linguistic model that recognizes communication beyond representation.

Let us consider, for example, two images with text related to the Occupy movement’s beginnings in order to find similar liberating strains in the world today. But to do so, we will have to stretch our linguistic imaginations, as the avant garde has done, to incorporate notions of images, color, and sound into our analysis. This is no easy task, as it requires us to bridge gaps between syntax, semantics, and phonology, along with notions of reference, sense, and representation. In this struggle to bring liberation and linguistics together, I suggest that we incorporate aesthetics as well, since we are over the cusp of media

breakthroughs such as Twitter, YouTube, and the blogosphere that have moved farther into the minimization of text and incorporation of the “multimedia experience” that includes image, video, and music. The struggle of linguistics in the milieu of communications often referred to as “memes” becomes an engagement in semiotics by conceiving of ways in which language works through and with symbols and signs.

CASE STUDY #1: “BRING TENT”

The first image is one we all know well—the ballerina posing on top of the Wall Street Bull—it is black and white, there is some smoke in the background, and a rowdy line of people are emerging through the smoke, presumably to fight for the working classes. Below it, the text states very succinctly the time, place of the event, and makes a plain statement: “Bring tent.” This iconic image is nothing, I suggest, without the text—understanding their relationship is paramount to realizing the full potential of aesthetics and linguistics in outreach today.

Although too much can be said about the ballerina—the significance of her pose (mimesis), the unusual figure of a ballerina in a popular culture dominated by sports and fashion, the ideas of power/resistance that ballet is really built around—we should focus on one particular situation for the purpose of this article: the notion of the performance. The ballerina performs atop the bull, and in so doing, perhaps alters the symbolic presence of the bull—the performance alters the perception that is achieved through the sense data at hand. The logical syntactic structure of “Bring tent,” underscores the kind of understated import of what is at hand.

This is a radical event, precisely because it is not overinflated, it does not make concessions or contradict itself. In phonetic order, “Bring tent,” two syllables, with two morphemes beginning and ending with consonant sounds (bring and tent), pushing forth a kind of added ideophonic certainty and conclusiveness to the sentence. The double “t”s of “tent” helps build the sentence to what Jacobson calls a phonetic “arc.”¹⁴

Is there anything particularly liberating about this syntax? Well, imagine the text read, “We suggest you bring a tent,” or “It would be smart to bring a tent, because we are planning on camping overnight.” There is, of course, nothing wrong or intrinsically oppressive about these sentence structures. However, their logical structure does not provide as much space for the imagination. Keeping the sentence utterly succinct will present tantalizing questions that can only be answered by your presence at the action; it also avoids potential confusion, obfuscation, or subjective inflation. It will also accentuate the sense of the text, itself, by distinguishing it from other motifs of design, such as placement, font, and complimentary images. In its certainty, the statement will carry the assurance that there will be an action (and, of course, that it will involve tents).

The grammatical form of “Bring tent” is worth indulging for its marked shortness. The sentence is marked insofar as it diverges from grammatical rules. It is strange, because we as readers do not often see two-word, two-syllable sentences. But it is strange in its compact, powerful form. There is no subject, except the implied “You,” the viewer, the People. However, the sentence also reads almost as a quick

annotation, like something one would jot down as a reminder on a “to-do list.” The subject in this sentence, then, is hidden from sight (perhaps someone on the front line emerging from the veil of smoke behind the bull). Here, we might argue that we have a sentence that is both marked and peripheral in the sense that it is a fragment. By being liberated from the core construction of language, it opens space for the imagination even as (or, indeed, before) semantics “enters the picture,” so to say.¹⁵

In semantic form, we have at least a suggestion or reminder, if not a challenge, instruction, or commandment (“Bring tent”) that is marked within activist circles as something quite extraordinary. It is, above all else, perhaps, a *demand*. Contemporary communication almost always requires the qualification of instructions with a kind of nonassertive request—ie, “would you mind bringing a tent?” or “if you would bring a tent, that’d be great.” The marked semantic deviation from the norm helps generate a kind of “semantic invariance” that transforms the implied instructive attitude into a more playful, emancipatory relationship. The attitude of “Bring tent (implied: because I tell you so)” is replaced with “Bring tent (implied: let’s get excited).” Thus, the words draw a border between recreation and work, revolution and status quo, that is crisscrossed as well through the image. The sentence makes a demand of the absent subject, calling for a subject to come into being by embracing not only the singular demand (of bringing a tent), but the demand, as such—the playful notion that one should not be too afraid of demanding something of one another, let alone of making a demand in general.

The terseness of the text, and its almost confrontational sense, plays down its real significance, in light of the stark image. The shifting of symbols, the transformation of the bull into a force of revolution, the mimetic figure of the ballerina, the strength of the text, all indicate a certain revelation amidst the austere black-and-white. There is a mythopoetic feeling in the whole of the piece when considered from these perspectives. The mixture of realism and fantasy, between the ballerina and the bull, cannot be called “non-representational” or even “transrational” in the strictest sense, but the queerness of the concept of the ballerina and their public performance on the Wall Street Bull may open up space for transrational phenomenon to take place there—at the spot of the action—not here, where we are imagining what could happen as we look at the picture. Thus, the black and white is a kind of a map through which the reader will bring to life the performance of the impossible, while remaining prefigurative, potential, playing largely in the realms of symbolism and imagination.

CASE STUDY #2: RIOTER AGAINST YELLOW BACKGROUND

We have all probably seen the photograph from the Greek riots of 2008 catching a tight shot of a single rioter, clad in black clothing with a balaklava and ski goggles, in mid stride against a curtain of tear gas smoke. It remains arguably the most iconic photograph of the 21st century, encapsulating the anxieties and tensions of the unknown social actor—the revolution-ary subject. Who is behind the mask? Who is the person emerging from the tear gas? In a way, we already have, as

discussed in the prior case study, a piece of nonrepresentation. The subject who cannot be represented, who defies their own representation, makes no demand, but acts in a system of counterpower against statist forces. In the formative days of Occupy, a poster came out of this precise character set not amidst a scene of smoke, but a warm, solid yellow background. The only text adorns the top of the image, and simply reads #occupywallstreet.

The first thing that should be noted is that this piece of media is a reproduction of an iPod ad. The reduction of the background to a yellow square is immediately recognizable as a kind of Minimalist intervention of art, not unlike the De Stijl ideas that popularized Apple’s aesthetic brand with the plain, white MacBook. The comparison, or indeed expropriation, of the artistic form coopted by Apple, repositions the avant garde minimalism in social production. The crucial thing here is that the art is mimetic—it presents a thematic abstraction in the background, but in the font, the definition of the performance is highly realistic. The relationship to the iPod commercials is functional, in that it takes the articulation of the act of listening to individual music in public (exclusive and alienated) and transforms it into the act of rioting (social, expressive). The action (rioting) is distinguished from the milieu in which the action takes place (background color), making it an “anywhere, wherever” potentiality. With this spatial relativity, an image from the Greek riots can become an avatar for Occupy Wall Street, or any other such event. In this sense, the realism complements the nonobjective by making it actionable, allowing minimalism to

become disruptive, which obviously has important connotations regarding speed and tone, but less obvious connotations regarding Khlebnikov's ideas on "colored speech" addressed above.

Notice that text as sense is sparing in the extreme in these pictures, which brings power to the image and additional clarity to the text in its capacity as sense. But what we are talking about here is more than the text within the picture, itself, but the grammar of representation, or, rather, the language of social movements in and of themselves. With the minimalist structure—discrete text with either abstract or photographic figure against an obscured background—the outreach material is able to deploy plasticity to its fullest advantage. This has profound significance concerning the generation of global movements together, corresponding to the words of Catherine Malabou: "The human is plastic. That means it gives itself its own form, that it is able to transform itself, to invent and produce itself, and that it is nothing but this very process of self-formation."¹⁶ While the image under inspection tells a story—a rioter on the run, the symbolic conquest of Wall Street, etc.—the viewer is able to enjoy the potential of negative space as designed via minimalism. Here, the openness of the image brings an imaginative value that has a palpable quality. The colors are used like sounds, tonal and clear, reflecting a palpable feeling of action and emersion in a growing and vital movement. The viewer of the material finds it actionable, as though already participants.

Beyond the simple presentation of the act—rioter against yellow background—there is nothing to say;

hence, the twitter hash tag justified left in yellow against a black banner across the top of the image really says it all. Again, the title, *Occupy Wall Street* features the word "Occupy" as both subject and object; the image of the rioter *is* an image of *Occupy Wall Street* (the revolutionary subject) as much as "Occupy Wall Street" is an *action* being demanded. So we have in nonrepresentational art as political media a call to action, not towards mere protesting in resistance, but towards dual power and what Andrej Grubačić calls "state breaking" by forming an "exilic space" of new social phenomenon.¹⁷

Jakobson describes this kind of nonrepresentational turn in both linguistics and aesthetics as "[t]he tendency to make the sign independent of the object," which "is the guiding principle of the whole of modern art." In the case study mentioned above, there is a liberating movement between the text and the picture that enables the sign of *Occupy Wall Street* to float above an objective meaning and achieve its content "on the ground" by its performance, which is proposed in the sense of vibrancy and ecstatic nonrepresentation. Jakobson continues, "The attempts made by certain observers to link this specifically artistic phenomenon with a limited social sector and ideology corresponding to it are typically mechanistic aberrations: if we infer from the non-objective character of an art that the artists' conception of the world is non-realistic, we artificially obliterate an important antinomy."¹⁸ Nonrepresentation escapes politicization, and opens the poetic possibility of life in the fullest sense of the word *poesis*, creation, recreation, combination. Linguistics must share common values

with art in this way if revolutionary materials are to be produced.

CASE STUDY #3: "DIREN GEZI PARKI"

For the next case study, we might turn our focus to a more recent, but connected manifestation of the "universal urge"—Occupy Gezi Park (*Diren Gezi Parkı*). The Occupy Gezi movement brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets from across Turkey. What started as a protest against the clearing of one of the smallest parks in Istanbul, turned into the broadest protest movement that the country had seen in a very long time—and it is still smoldering.

One of the crucial aspects of Occupy Gezi was the symbolic value. Gezi Park, though small, remains one of the last standing green spaces in the city. The government was not simply planning on clearing the park; it intended to rebuild an Ottoman-era military barracks there, converted into a high-class shopping mall. So when people rose up against the clearing of Gezi Park, they manifested a rebellion against unpopular city planning, urbanization as the depletion of green spaces, and the accumulation of capital. Beyond that, the protests against the park's destruction did not garner many protestors to begin with, but after the state's intervention with pepper spray, gas, and general brutality, the protests spread like wildfire throughout Istanbul, and then into other cities of Turkey until it was a widespread popular uprising.

The notion of Occupy Gezi, in its full linguistic content, achieved a kind of maximal potential during this uprising. According to a Turkish friend of mine who was very active throughout the hottest months of protests, "*diren*

literally is a command, or an imperative to resist. *Direnmek* is to resist. Without the *mek* at the end it becomes a command, a wish, an order from one to another. So *Diren Gezi Parkı* is both a command and a solidarity in order for Gezi to hold on, to keep on resisting as much as it can." The idea that a demand, *diren*, can be a kind of distillation from the infinitive of resistance ("to resist") (*direnmek*) already registers the kind of overtones in line with the syntactic "deep structure" that this article has attempted to point towards. The difference between linguistic surface forms of English and Turkish grammar are interesting in themselves: in English, the notion of to demand and to resist are quite separate; in Turkish, they are practically one step removed, as the demand stems immediately from resistance. The Latin word resistance is a modified form of *sistere* or to dwell or stand; the prefix, re-, makes the word "against," to resistance means to dwell or stand against. The act of resistance, then, manifests an objection, but not a demand or subject forming position. While the surface forms of English and Turkish differ significantly, there is a deep, structural similarity—the notion of *Occupy* and *Diren* will refer ultimately to the same position, albeit with different contingencies of place and time.

However, consider again how my Turkish friend spoke of *Diren Gezi Parkı*, focusing on the exact words, "*Diren Gezi Parkı* is both a command and a solidarity in order for Gezi to hold on, to keep on resisting as much as it can." Notice how the place of resistance also becomes the resisting site—it is not necessarily "the People," but the park itself that is resisting "as

much as it can.” This subject formation is completely distinct from Occupy Wall Street for the simple reason that Gezi already represented an important place to the population with specific significances of green space and popular gathering point, while Wall Street is clearly an antipopular place. The notion then that Occupy Wall Street bears a transformative demand (occupy in order to transform) rather than a defensive demand (occupy in order to resist in a specific place for a particular reason) are reflected by both the semantic and syntactic differences between slogans. This is of course not to say that Occupy Wall Street would have been *more* popular if it had chosen a different site or a different rationale, but to bring out some important issues that show how different linguistic patterns and decisions can help reproduce different kinds of movements in different ways.

CASE STUDY #4: THE WAR

The connection between certain words and historical lineages is valuable for activists to consider—particularly when considering its performance. Each of the case studies that I have discussed develop the dynamic between performance and language, but no group has pushed the relationship between the word and the deed further than the Russian anarchist art group, Voina.

Voina is the Russian word for War, and draws meaning from numerous contexts. Tolstoy’s *Voina i Mir* (*War and Peace*) provides one important line of connotation, because within its pages, Tolstoy explores the meaning not only of war but of its antonym, peace. *Mir* does not only mean peace, it also means the world (the other Russian word for world, *svete*, is interesting, because it has

a double meaning as well—the world, but also light). So with Tolstoy, the idea of war is fashioned in contradistinction to peace, as well as the world. Tolstoy’s text promotes the idea of war and peace as relative, but not totally oppositional. One might be compelled to draw a formulation from Tolstoy’s story that those who seek the world will find war, but those who know peace will find the world—the best warriors are the honorable, gracious, and caring. It is with an extra twist that the art group Voina presents itself as a passionate rupture in the violence underlying the “peaceful” order of everyday life to reveal the war against the planet and all of humanity. Here, I am tempted to quote from the poet Khlebnikov mentioned above: “Wind is song / Of whom and of what? / Of the sword’s longing / To be the word.” It is Voina’s intention to allow the truth value of actions to “speak for itself” while allowing words to act alongside the actions as a tacit force in themselves. The epistemological border between deed and word is constantly being tested through Voina’s linguistic innovations.

I conducted an interview with linguist and chief propagandist of Voina, Alexei Plucer-Sarno in Russian during October 2013, and have translated his comments about applying linguistics in action here to forward this discussion.¹⁹ “Voina uses innovative language, whose main objective is to destroy the old mythological beliefs about the world. For the purpose of destruction and annihilation, to deconstruct these myths we use delusion and sarcasm,” Plucer explains, using a play on the Russian word for sarcasm (*sarkazm*), by dropping the *m* and transforming it into the word for former French President, Sarkozy

(*Sarkaz*). Plucer continues, “Such ideologies as fascism, Nazism, totalitarianism, authoritarianism are all based on the delusional mythologies that have not changed since the days of ancient Rome. These delusional myths include such opposition as a State/Homeland, Politics/People, Center/Periphery, good/evil, victory/defeat, Holiness/sinfulness, top/bottom, and so on. We openly mock such myths, trying to show our viewers that all these concepts are nothing but unhidden delusion. And under the name of homeland, Holiness, the People, and the Power, the most terrifying monsters are hiding, like the mafia thugs in power. Our actions are not simply ambiguous—they are crazy, delirious, absurd, and fitful. And that’s exactly why they deconstruct all this insane and crazy Russian reality around us.” Innovative language, in the case of Voina, is often used in relation to the actions themselves—how they are described, and how their performance and articulation works within the underlying logic of social consciousness.

In order to dismantle the preconceived notions of political powers and ideologies, Voina presents public performances as works of art, and Plucer is always there to articulate the actions to the press. One example of the play on words that Voina puts into practice is the work called “Dick Captured by the FSB,” in which a giant, 180-foot-long phallus (which the group called *Giant Galactic Space Penis*) was painted on the Liteyny drawbridge that leads to the Federal Security Services (FSB) headquarters in St. Petersburg. The action was rehearsed for two weeks ahead of time, until the group could complete the act in 30 seconds. hilariously, the action featured an implicit play on

words that only young Russians could understand, as the Russian slang for “cool” or “rad” is “kruta” which literally means “a sharp peak or cliff,” such as a raised drawbridge. In the end, the act won a national art award. The painting on the bridge pointed out not only the phallic symbolic representations of everyday life in architecture, but also the phallogocentric aspects of Russian language—in particular, the verisimilitude between “kruta” and a 180-foot-long erect penis. Writing for *France24*, Plucer declared, “Above all, the huge dick is a caricature of the corrupt totem of power that governs Russia.”

The totem is an important figure for Voina, as it indicates a hierarchy of values that Voina seeks to deconstruct by using taboos in ways that the audience will understand, enjoy, and even celebrate. As a linguist, Plucer has written an extensive dictionary of Russian swear words, or *mat*. Since these words are forbidden, and yet everyone uses them, the failure to investigate their import linguistically suggests a broader problem between what is accepted and what is forbidden. As members of Voina noted, even the police laughed and took photographs of the *Giant Galactic Space Penis*, that is before they came to their senses and beat up the artists.

Even the lines between word and deed, the symbolic and the direct, are crossed over in Plucer’s mind. “A linguistic work is done to a greater extent in the logico rational plane, where there is little space free association and unbridled imagination. My linguistic work influences me only in that I have written linguistics books, and in action my art comes from my mind. On an unconscious level, it is at all related to the same symbolic orders. . . . In the

back of my mind on a symbolic level, there is neither art nor science. There are only my fantasies.”

Returning to Wittgenstein, Voina performs the vulgar in the public realm of thought, word, and deed, in order to expose “the contrast between the understanding of the subject and what most people want to see;” however in this sense, Voina is pointing out how what is normally felt as a liberating experience (funny, exciting, interesting) is condemned in the public eye, due largely to the conservative influence of the government and the mafia. By opening a space for liberation that is morally forbidden, Voina seeks what filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky sought: “to leave man defenseless against good.” Plucer insists, “All our actions are not only peaceful, but they are against violence, against any infringement of the rights of minorities and the general rightlessness of the people.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although the case studies in question draw on minimalism to illustrate the relationships between text, image, and action, there are many posters, flyers, and even actions that will point to the similar openings for creativity and thought. The purpose of this essay has been merely to encourage new thoughts and insights for whomever seeks to study the syntax of cross movement communication and consider linguistics when building movements through media and communications.

Where we might view “the political as a constitutively open field of indetermination, antagonism and contingency,” we might also consider a non-representational space of “universal urge,” that moves between word

and deed.²⁰ This place of whimsy and liberation transcends traditional subject/predicate phraseology and mobilize, a productive social sphere that presents a “something else” wherein “a new world is possible.” By valuing the different morphologies of movements around the world, and by assessing the contrasting hegemonies that are implicit within and between those movements, we can learn more about the way movements communicate with one another through media and actions.

As I have tried to propose in this essay, the end process of articulating such a possible liberating linguistics would be, in the words of Mukerji, “to create a sense of freedom in people’s souls.”²¹

ENDNOTES

- 1 Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding* (New York: Verso, 2010).
- 2 In this context, we take “datum” to mean a fundamental premise, or a fixed starting point—a given.
- 3 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (NYC: Verso, 2008).
- 4 Ernesto Laclau, interview with the author, January 11, 2012.
- 5 Maia Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2010).
- 6 Ludwig Wittgenstein (James Carl Klagge and Alfred Nordmann, eds.), *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951* (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1993).
- 7 Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1951).
- 8 Walter Mignolo, “Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De) Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience,” European Institute for

Progressive Cultural Politics (2010), retrieved from eipcp.net.

9 This is similar to what Kristin Ross (no relation) describes in her book on Rimbaud and the Paris Commune (Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (NYC: Verso, 2008).

10 Gottlob Frege (Peter Geach and Max Black, eds), *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege* (this piece translated by Max Black) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 56-78. Found online here: <http://philو.ruc.edu.cn/logic/reading/On%20sense%20and%20reference.pdf>.

11 Roman Jakobson, *My Futurist Years* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1997), 17.

12 Victoria Richter, *Literary Primitivism: It's Function in the Early Works of Vladimir Mayakovsky and Other Russian Cubo-Futurists* (University of Toronto, 1998).

13 So we find that the criticism that abstraction is somehow bourgeois is historically misinformed (although the CIA did indeed back abstract expressionism in the US in order to coopt and neutralize the revolutionary propositions that it posed in the first place).

14 Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *The Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1956).

15 For more on core construction and government binding, see Robert Barksey, *The Chomsky Effect: A Radical Works Beyond the Ivory Tower*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), and Noam Chomsky, *Lectures on Government and Binding* (Dordrecht, Holland: Foris Publications, 1981).

16 Catherine Malabou, "The future of Humanities," 2010, Trans-Europeenness.eu.

17 Andrej Grubačić, "Exit and Territory: A World-Systems Analysis of Non-State Spaces," in *Grabbing Back: Essays Against the Global Land Grab*, ed: Alexander Reid Ross, (Oakland: AK Press, 2014).

18 Roman Jakobson, "The Contours

of The Safe Conduct," "Kontury Glejtu," in *Postscript to Glejt*, the Czsč translation of Boris Pasternak's *Oxranaja Gramota* (Prague, 1935). Veltrus, in *Semiotics of Art* (Cambridge and London, 1976), 195, quoted in Joachim Pissarro, "Mondrian's Antinomies," *Apollo Magazine* (1995).

19 All quotations are from my interview with Alexei Plucer-Sarno, October 6, 2013.

20 Saul Newman, "The Politics of Post Anarchism," 2010, retrieved from theanarchistlibrary.org.

21 Ramnath.

**ARMED WITH THE
KNOWLEDGE OF
OUR PAST, WE CAN
CHARTER A COURSE
FOR OUR FUTURE.
MALCOLM X**

DO-IT-YOURSELF STRATEGIES FOR REVOLUTIONARY STUDY GROUPS¹

MAMOS ROTNELLI

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Before a new revolutionary strategy becomes a lived reality, it begins as an idea. Of course, ideas are not the driving force of history—human beings struggling for liberation make history through concrete, sensuous activity. Our creativity, life, labor, and struggle shape our social relationships and are shaped by them. But there are moments in history when we know we need to act and we are not yet able to, because we have not yet found comrades who want to act together. At these moments, the actions we imagine are held in reservoirs of thought sustained by a constellation of collectives, blogs, zines, hip hop cyphers, and stand-up comedy acts. Fresh revolutionary strategies percolate as “culture” and “theory,” pushing their way up through the crust of capitalist hegemony like a ballooning volcano, until the point where they can finally erupt into lived experience, where they can be tested in practice, evaluated, and refined.

How do we nurture this process, so that it can happen as fast as possible, and so that as many people as possible can participate in it? That is the question this piece attempts to answer. In order to develop revolutionary strategies, we need to reflect on our practice. But it also helps to reflect on the practice of other revolutionaries throughout history, and that requires

study. This article shares some concrete strategies for how we can study effectively, accessibly, and inclusively.

If revolutionary strategic thought becomes the exclusive domain of academics, or of a predominantly white male college-educated Left intelligentsia, then the process is already hijacked and co-opted. I wrote “Between the Leninists and the Clowns” and “Reading for Revolution Parts 1 and 2,” making a case for dedicated and sustained revolutionary study groups outside of academia, part of living struggles of working class and oppressed people.² I argued that these study groups can build collective capacity so that oppressed people can take up more space in strategic debates; so that people without degrees and formal education will have the confidence necessary to go head-to-head with the professors, politicians, nonprofit and union bureaucrats who try to hold back our communities’ struggles. I see this as far more fruitful than trying to guilt trip the current college-educated Left intelligentsia to give this space and knowledge to those who can make the best use of it. This piece builds on these previous essays.

But the question remains: how do we do this in practice? How do we study in ways that break from academic culture and invigorate fresh, non-dogmatic strategizing? What do we do when people in our collectives or affinity groups have a wide range of literacy skills and (mis)education? When some of us have had bad experiences with reading and writing based on alienated education in our high schools or colleges? What do we do when some of us have been to graduate school and some of us have not graduated from high school? When some of us have

been trained to write books and others have never gotten meaningful, accurate feedback to improve our writing?

These are questions that groups of revolutionaries across the country are wrestling with. Some of you might even be wrestling with them as you read the other strategic texts in this journal together.

Black Orchid Collective (BOC) has been attempting to answer some of these questions in practice, through the study groups we’ve conducted. We’ve integrated literacy skills with reading and strategizing, to try to level the playing field as much as possible within our collective, creating space where members can learn reading strategies that working class urban public schools in Seattle failed to teach.

We are certainly not the only ones trying to do this, and we don’t have all of the answers, but I’d like to offer some of the insights we’ve developed in this process, in the hope that it will prompt a wider process of collectives sharing our study strategies with each other. Out of this process, I hope we can develop a set of “best practices”—not a standardized curriculum, but a set of study strategies that prove themselves effective, that can be adapted and changed to fit the different circumstances we find ourselves in.

MELTING DOWN THE MASTER’S TOOLS AND FORGING OUR OWN

Before I share these strategies, I should disclose that I’m a public school teacher and that some of these strategies are ones that I’ve learned from experimenting in the classroom, and from formal study in a Masters in Teaching program. Classroom education is designed to produce a new generation of workers to be exploited; it is not

designed to support people developing our capacities to make a revolution. As a teacher, I try to subvert that as much as possible, but I can't do it alone.

I'm aware that many of the reading strategies we learn to use in the classroom are not adaptable to contexts of revolutionary study. I took some of these strategies and introduced them to our collective, BOC, and we altered them to fit our needs, rejecting aspects we saw as oppressive, and adding our own. If, for some reason, we have not gone far enough in this process, I welcome critical feedback from readers in how we can continue it.

Secondly, I am wary of people who carry themselves as "revolutionary teachers" since this preserves an alienated professional role that needs to be overcome in the revolution. I am not trying to encourage that by writing this piece. On the contrary, I want to encourage a process through which everyone can become teachers AND learners, and hence the specialized role of "teacher" can eventually be abolished. I'm trying to share teachers' secrets so that we don't monopolize this knowledge.

Audrey Lorde said "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house," and she's right.³ But when it comes to education today, the master's house contains some back rooms in which there are piles of tools that are rusting. The master doesn't know how to use them and hasn't tried to because he's afraid we'll all use them to tear down his house. In other words, students, parents, teachers and educational researchers have discovered a range of learning strategies that we simply cannot implement in capitalist classrooms, where high stakes standardized testing and coercive,

top-down, white-dominated curriculum is the norm.

For example, we all know that effective learning requires cooperative inquiry, not competition; there are journal articles, books, and conversations full of engaging ways to facilitate this so that students can empower themselves through learning together, without relying on the teacher as the sole dispenser of knowledge.

When it comes to education, it's the best of times and the worst of times. It will take a revolution to create the social context where we can consistently implement and improve some of the more liberating learning methods that we are discovering and creating. The contradiction between what is possible and what is required for the test inspires a subterranean, emerging rebellious consciousness among many teachers and students. This consciousness is constantly swallowed up by all the boredom, drama, and cynicism of classroom life.

One of the best places where we can develop these new learning methods is in the social freedom struggle itself—in the communities, networks, and organizations we are building as we transform ourselves in struggle. This might overlap with formal classrooms at moments when students and teachers struggle together, but it will not be contained there, and teachers should have no monopoly over the process—anyone can use these methods to learn together and to teach each other.

METACOGNITION: MINDFUL CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

One of those potentially subversive tools that classroom teachers are trained to use is metacognition, which I would describe as a cross between

what Buddhists call “mindfulness” and Marxists call “consciousness.” With a little adjustment, metacognitive reading strategies can be applied in revolutionary study groups. My comrade Jeremy is a teacher and a veteran anarchist in the Northwest, and he wrote an excellent description of what this could look like, which is worth quoting at length:

A big thing in teaching these days is this idea of metacognition, or thinking about thinking. The idea is that helping students to explicitly think about and articulate how they think will help them think better. For example, it's not enough to know the answer to a math problem, it's potentially more important to be able to describe how one found the answer, and why the method worked. Teachers are also encouraged to identify the tricks that skilled readers/writers/quantitative thinkers use and to explicitly teach those to students as learning strategies. Students learn how to infer meaning in texts, make predictions in stories, visualize numbers in a wide variety of ways, or break unknown words into their component parts.

We need this in a big way in revolutionary work. Everything is so mystified and loaded with jargon, that especially new organizers feel like they have to read dozens of books before they can hold their own with veterans. This is a mistake. There are very real tricks to thinking systematically and strategically about political realities, and those tricks can be taught. Similarly, manipulative and abusive politics are rife in our movements because people are using techniques and tactics that most of us aren't metacognitively aware of. We need more awareness of when we are creating straw positions, when we are

using anecdotal evidence, when we are creating false dichotomies, imagining zero-sum situations, etc.⁴

The best teachers encourage students to think out loud, in small groups, or with partners, about their reading, providing sentence starters or other tools to prompt students to engage in metacognition about their own reading process. The purpose of this is to teach students how to pose their own questions about the text. In most revolutionary study groups, however, this kind of explicit metacognitive processing is often lacking. Either the facilitators sum up the text and ask what people think about their analyses, or they bring pre-created study questions that people answer, or there is no structure and everyone just talks about whatever they want. In each of these scenarios, the danger is that the study group can end up mystifying the process by which texts are analyzed and revolutionary strategies are created. Those who know how to do these things end up doing them frequently, but they don't explain how, so it ends up being attributed to their individual intelligence, experience, etc. Those who don't know how to do them are either ignored or they are put on the spot and embarrassed or overwhelmed if they don't speak up as much. The processes that revolutionaries use to read to strategize should not be taken for granted; they should be named publicly, specified, shared, analyzed, assessed, and critiqued/ improved if necessary.

Metacognition can also be used to bridge the gap between daily life and the text, between street smarts and book smarts, and between the spoken and the written word. This

can avoid creating the false assumption that strategic knowledge is found only in books. It can also challenge the assumption that many oppressed people end up internalizing from years of alienating education: the idea that their own way of speaking and thinking is somehow inadequate because it is not formal or “standard.” For example, Carol Lee documents how teachers working with Black youth in Chicago began by doing exercises in which the students recognized the highly literary and intellectual character of their own day-to-day language. Everyday, informal games like “the dozens” or what my students call “baggin’ on each other” use all sorts of figurative language, sarcasm, double meanings, personification, etc. Sometimes this is formalized into rap battles or cyphers. Students begin by identifying these as intellectual assets their communities already bring to the table. Then, they identify similar moves that are made by authors of classic works of written literature.⁵

We adapted this approach in Black Orchid Collective when we began our study group with the exercise outlined in part two of Appendix A (Intro to Metacognitive Reading Strategies). We began by analyzing our own consciousness in various situations from daily life and from organizing scenarios (e.g. what to do when we’re singled out by a cop, or what to do when someone starts making vague passive aggressive accusations in a meeting). We talked about how we read these situations. We then compared and contrasted this to our consciousness when we read political texts.

This was a lot of fun; like stand up comedians, we were finally saying out loud what everyone had been

thinking but never had a chance to say. We also realized we all had a lot of unspoken knowledge based on practice, which we hadn’t gotten a chance to share with each other. This kind of thinking often doesn’t come up naturally in meetings, hang outs, or study groups; it requires some kind of intentional prompting to bring forward. It requires intentionally recognizing that our own minds are teachers, and that we can learn from them.

The appendices and the rest of this article outline how a similar metacognitive process can be applied to reading texts in revolutionary study groups. The bookmark in Appendix B is something we have on hand whenever we’re reading or discussing a text. It includes sentence starters that prompt us to reflect on our own thought processes as we read, e.g. “I predict that...” or “I think that _____ voices are being left out because _____.” We find that when we intentionally meditate on our own reading processes like this, everyone is more prepared to start discussions and to analyze the text. The conversation becomes more complex, more engaging, and more connected to our own lives and to struggles today.

Practicing writing down our thoughts about the text before discussing them is also a form of writing practice. It breaks out of the schoolish idea of writing for a teacher or a grade, and encourages us to write in order to clarify our own thoughts. This is a crucial step in becoming comfortable writing for a public audience. Some revolutionaries might take this for granted, but not everyone has had such positive experiences or encouragement with finding their own voice as writers.

SCAFFOLDING: WHEN YOU STEP UP, WE WON'T JUST STEP BACK, WE'LL GET YOUR BACK

We've all had the experience of sitting in a study group where some people dominate the conversation, speaking so much that others don't have a chance to participate. This is a problem because it denies everyone else the chance to learn by thinking out loud and engaging in dialogue/debate. It also deprives the whole collective of the ability to draw from the knowledge and perspectives that everyone in the room could contribute. The most common response to this problem is for the facilitator to encourage those who have "stepped up" to speak to now "step back" to make room for others.

This works better when you have a situation where everyone is prepared to say something and most people simply can't get in a word because a few people are talking too much. But it doesn't work as well when the difference between who is talking and who isn't is primarily based on an imbalance in access to information, knowledge, skills, etc. In these kinds of situations, the facilitator might put people who haven't spoken on the spot, and might end up embarrassing or alienating them.

In these kinds of situations, I think it makes sense to encourage the most skilled participants to help support those who have not yet developed the skills they carry. Instead of asking them to step up and step back, the facilitator should prompt them to step up in ways that specifically help their comrades step up. This is called "scaffolding." It is based on the idea of the "zone of proximal development," developed by a communist educational theorist named Vygotsky in the 1920s. This zone is the

moment where real learning happens: it is the space between what each of us is able to do on our own and what we are able to do together. The theory is that people learn when we try something that is new and challenging for us, collaborating with others for whom it is not as new and challenging.⁶

In this sense, learning/teaching is social because it is not monopolized by the teacher; everyone in the study group or classroom teaches each other. This works best in groups of people with a range of abilities, where people can complement each others' strengths: I might be strong in making predictions and you might need help with that, and I can help you; in return you might be strong in analyzing character traits, and you can help me.

We used scaffolding in the Black Orchid Collective reading workshop (Appendix 1). We started out practicing metacognitive reading strategies together, with a "scaffold," or structured support to make sure we teach each other how to do it. Then, gradually, the scaffold was removed, and the workshop moved toward the point where we could each practice metacognition on our own. Of course, the goal is for us each to then be prepared to teach someone else how to do this by doing it with them and providing scaffolding to make this possible.

Some teachers have criticized the idea of "scaffolding" as authoritarian, asking the question "who is building whose house?"⁷ This is a good question. Scaffolding might not be the best metaphor since it implies something rigid, rather than fluid, and fluidity is exactly what we need in revolutionary study groups. To ensure this, the skills involved in setting up the scaffolding in

the first place also need to be shared so that the same people aren't monopolizing the power inherently involved in that task. That's one of the reasons why I'm writing this piece—to share my own knowledge of how to do this so that others can critique and improve on it.

(ANTI-)DISCIPLINARY LITERACY

You may have notice that this approach echoes how learning happens outside of formalized modern classroom settings. For centuries, people in communities have learned from each other by doing things together; those who have experience and skill in particular activity might take on a mentor role, and folks with less experience might become apprentices. In authoritarian societies, these roles become rigid and oppressive, and the mentor exercises coercion over the apprentice. But in more horizontal or egalitarian societies, these roles can be fluid, changing, and non-coercive.

A lot of cutting edge educational theory attempts to bring this kind of dynamic into the classroom by treating the teacher more as a practitioner of a certain skill (like reading, writing, or science), and less as a distributor of pre-prepared standardized knowledge.

The label educational theorists use for this is Disciplinary Literacy. In this case they don't mean "discipline" like the exercise of coercive authority over someone in order to "discipline them." Instead, they mean "discipline" as a set of activities that require skill and experience to accomplish. Disciplinary literacy theorists argue that there is not just one, universal "literacy;" in fact, there are specific discourses—or ways of reading, writing, and speaking—that exist in various communities.

Teachers use reading apprenticeship lessons to provide students access to these discourses so they can participate in these communities fully as equals. For example, students might practice reading like a poet; when they read, they might identify how the author uses imagery, metaphors, similes, or rhyme. The goal is to be able to discuss this with other poets, and to learn to write like that. The end goal is not a test; it is a poetry performance or scrapbook shared with an authentic audience. Alternatively, students might read like a historian; when they read, they might identify the source of the text, and interpret this source in its historic context. They might ask whether the source has a perspective, a bias, or an ideology that causes it to elevate certain voices and leave out others.⁸

The main critique of disciplinary literacy is that it tends to celebrate the discourses and disciplines of academia. It trains students to think in terms of existing scholarly "communities" that are professionalized and largely middle class. In response, scholars like Heller have argued "In defense of amateurism."⁹

But what if we think of disciplinary communities in ways that go beyond academia? What if we challenge the ways in which academia tries to discipline our thinking by enclosing and dividing it into middle class dominated "fields of study." What if we recognize that there are a variety of intellectual communities with their own discourses that exist outside of academia? For example, many aspiring hip hop artists already have "disciplinary literacy" when it comes to hip hop—they listen to artists they like, they read their lyrics, and they watch their videos in the hope of learning the craft from them, so that they can develop themselves as artists.

Similarly, revolutionaries have our own communities with our own discourses, and when we're at our best, these are not the same as academic communities and discourses. The way we read history is different from how academic historians read history. We write for broad and multi-faceted working class communities, not for narrow academic journals; that affects our choices in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and cultural reference points.

Nevertheless, revolutionary politics does bring with it a set of practices of reading, writing, and speaking that have been honed throughout centuries of struggle, often called "anarchism," "communism," "feminism," "ecology," "decolonization," etc. Our goal should be to make these discourses more accessible to emerging revolutionaries, and to provide apprenticeship experiences where folks who are new to revolutionary politics can learn everything they need to participate equally in revolutionary struggle and community. We can start with metacognition—becoming aware of how we already read, discuss, and write as revolutionaries. By stating this explicitly, we can then share it with new folks, and provide contexts in which they can practice and develop these capacities.

However, an important caveat is in order here: our communities, and their discourses, are under construction. The learning process should not be one where new folks are indoctrinated to write, speak, and read exactly like members of existing radical circles. Many of the ways that US revolutionaries currently write, speak, and read, are horribly inadequate. Sometimes they are sectarian, elitist, or outright oppressive. This is a product of the

isolated, fractured, and underdeveloped nature of most revolutionary activity in the US. So really, what we should be thinking about is what we all will need to do in order to read, write, and think over time as we grow together as revolutionaries. In other words, the current revolutionaries are not permanent teachers who take new revolutionaries under our wings as students. Instead, we are students ourselves who are sharing what we have already learned so that we can learn together with new comrades. New folks might bring to the table the experiences, questions, and insights we all need to move forward and grow out of the problems we are currently facing.

Next I'll give an example of what "reading like a revolutionary" might look like when it comes to historical texts.

HISTORICAL TEXTS ARE DYNAMITE, NOT DUST

The Afro-Caribbean and American Marxist C.L.R. James once said that people retreat into classic texts to avoid the problems of the world today; what they don't understand is that those texts are now classic precisely because they were dynamite in their own times, people wrote them to blow apart the old ways of thinking to make room for something revolutionary.

Radicals today would benefit from heeding his warning. The goal of reading historical texts by past revolutionaries is not to recycle old slogans, principles, ideas, abstractions, etc., and then apply them today in a dogmatic way that makes no sense to people who are actually alive. It is also not so much about abstractly "comparing and contrasting" past revolutionary situations to today. That is a good preliminary step

that helps us understand both the past and the present, but it doesn't go far enough.

Instead, we can read past revolutionary texts to see how oppressed peoples created ruptures from the status quo of their times. This helps us to understand how change happens. If we understand what goes into that, what it feels like, what pressures and contradictions and decisions you face when it's happening, then we can make changes in the present without getting swept away by the pressures of unknown situations.

In other words, reading these past texts is not about finding some theoretical magic wand that allows us to predict the future, or some strategy that can be dredged up like a buried treasure and applied to the present. That kind of thinking is what Marx criticized as "idealism."

Instead, reading about the past allows us to understand what revolution was like. And that's a precious experience, since most of us haven't gone through a revolution, and no matter how important our immediate experiences are, none of us have much sense at all of what it feels like to be that free. At best, we can extrapolate from high points of struggle in our own time, those fleeting moments when we can glimpse the future, such as the Occupy camps, port shutdowns, and militant anti-police brutality actions. But reading about the experiences of people who created high points of freedom in the past can help us extrapolate and strategize about how to take it further the next time our own struggles reach these high water marks.

So we can approach these texts asking questions like "what did the

people who made that revolution feel? What did they think? What did they do? How did they create together? How did they make choices when they were confronted with completely unknown situations?" This gives us a chance to prepare for those kinds of situations.

It's also worthwhile to think about what we need to know in order to exercise our imagination like that. Usually, we need at least some understanding of the historical context in which the text was written. We can't detect what was truly new if we don't understand what came right before it. For this reason, it's good to have someone in our study groups prepare a short presentation giving the context before we read. Texts that are well written should provide this in the intro or early chapters, and this is definitely something to prioritize reading slowly and taking notes on. Once we know the general state of the situation, it is easier to detect moments when events broke from that state, creating ruptures and openings into unknown forms of freedom.

READING, STRATEGIZING AND OVERCOMING DOGMATISM

Each time we see that happening, it's probably a good idea to stop and imagine what we would be feeling/ thinking/ doing if we were in that situation. Using a lot of sensory imagery is a good idea here too, because it makes it more enjoyable and less boring. You could make a kind of "choose your own adventure" movie in your head, thinking about what the people would have looked like, sounded like, etc., and thinking about what you would have been thinking, feeling, and doing if you were there. I know this sounds cheesy or childish, but that's because capitalism

drills into our head a divide between thought and emotion. Kids don't have as much of that yet, which is why sometimes they are more creative than adults. We need to overcome the stereotype of reading being something that is abstract, intellectual, divorced from our souls—which is exactly how it is often taught in schools, especially as we get older. It doesn't have to be that way.

When we ask ourselves “what would we have done,” it's also a good idea to think “what would happen next if we did that?” That way, we can practice strategizing in unknown situations.

A comrade pointed out that I tend to think on my feet a lot in meetings and in crowd situations. She said I'm able to change my strategy very rapidly based on new information, without getting stuck in dogmatic ways of thinking. Personally, I was surprised to hear this since I think this is actually something I need to work on. But she asked how I do that, and asked if I could share it with her so she could do it more herself. I started trying to figure out where I had learned how to do this. I realized that there is really no substitute here for simply being in struggle with lots of people in uncontrolled, unscripted situations (like unpermitted marches). But reading about these kinds of situations can also be good, as long as you don't read looking for some pre-determined answer, and as long as you don't read in a study group that treats the text like a manual for constructing revolution.

For example, if people in the text make the decision to go out and engage in a riot that was breaking out, you might want to pause and ask, “okay, what could that lead to? What might happen next? If that happens, what would I do?” Since real life is

not mechanical or linear, it's always good to think about three or four or more possible outcomes. This really prepares you to strategize in fluid, non-dogmatic ways during real life situations. Eventually this kind of thinking becomes second nature and you just start running through a bunch of possible outcomes of situations you're in, and evaluating them. The only caution I'd add here is not to get cocky—even if you evaluate four or five situations, the real life outcome might still be a surprise.

SETTING GOALS

Some texts are so full of details that they can be overwhelming. So before you read, it's a good idea to write down one to three concrete goals that you want to accomplish by reading the texts. It's helpful to make these goals realistic and achievable.

If you are reading together as a collective, the goal might be to tackle issues that are coming up in your organizing, or to better understand a struggle emerging somewhere in the world, learning what we can from it to apply in our own situation. The goal might be to produce a text together on the topic at hand three months later. You might start by collectively brainstorming the questions you need to answer in order to write the text, and then develop a course of study together that will help you to explore these questions. You could then read the texts together, or individuals in the collective could each take a text, read it, and form a presentation on it to share with the group.

As Marx said, “Philosophers have only interpreted the world, but the goal is to change it.”¹⁰ It's always good to try

to link your goals back to something relevant to the actual struggle. This link is not always immediate. Sometimes we tend to get buried in the immediate tasks involved in local activism, and this can make it hard to see the big picture or prepare for unexpected future upsurges. So when we read to understand the struggle, it's often more about developing the kinds of capacities, habits, and ways of thinking necessary to be flexible in real time, and to make decisions under pressure.

So for example, if you're reading the autobiography of Assata Shakur from the Black Panthers, you might develop goals like:

1. To understand what characteristics someone needs to be a revolutionary by looking at Assata's behavior as an example and role model or as a cautionary tale/example of what NOT to do, depending on your perspective.
2. To understand how to build a revolutionary organization where Black women can thrive as leaders by looking at what the Panthers did to support Assata's development, and what they did to prevent her development (for example, did she face sexism in the organization? If so, how did she and others respond to that? Compare and contrast her experiences in the Panthers with Huey Newton's, for example).
3. To answer the question: how does someone become a revolutionary; by looking at Assata's childhood and adolescence and thinking about what influenced her to make the decisions she made.

In contrast, these kinds of goals are probably not as useful, and are either boring, harmful, or both:

1. To learn historical trivia about the Black Power movement so that you can impress other people with your knowledge.
2. To find ammunition to back up your organization, clique, scene, or tendency's "party line" on revolutionary organization and gender; to make other people look bad.
3. To read something by a Black woman just so that you can't be accused of reading too many books by white men.

READING COMPREHENSION

Some basic goals need to be tackled first before we can move onto more complex ones. Teachers sometimes call this "Bloom's taxonomy." Bloom was a psychologist and educational theorist. He argued that you need to know the facts about something before you can understand it, you need to understand it before you apply it to a different situation, you need to be able to apply it before you analyze it, and you need to analyze it before you create something of your own based on it.¹¹

For anti-authoritarians who emphasize critical thinking and autonomy, we are all in a hurry to get to the point where we can create our own knowledge, strategies, texts, and ideas. And this is good. But to get there together, we need to make sure that everyone has access to the basic information, understanding, application, and analysis first, or else we'll be replicating inequalities in terms of who has the power to exercise this autonomy and who does not. When it comes to study groups, this means we need to start with reading comprehension first before we start analyzing the text or crafting our own strategies. Here are some suggestions for how to do that:

—At the bottom of each right hand page, you could pause and ask yourself “what did I just read?” Then try to summarize the key points in your head, verbally, or on a piece of paper. If you find you can’t do this, you might want to go back and read it over again. This prevents going into “auto-pilot mode” and just reading on and on without getting much out of it.

—Building off this, you might want to keep a notebook as you read. See Appendix A for suggestions on how to do this. In BOC, we specifically taught each other how to do this and practiced it together. The method we used involved tracking our questions, predictions, and connections, not simply summarizing or listing information. This is not something we should assume people have learned how to do in school or on their own; unfortunately, school teaches many of us to focus on trivial details in preparation for tests; it does not train us to engage with the text at this level of depth.

—One of the things that drags a lot of readers down is lack of access to vocabulary. The best way to overcome this is through reading itself, but it can be a chicken or egg issue because reading becomes easier and more enjoyable the more vocabulary you know. In this sort of situation, it’s helpful if comrades in a study group collectively generate a list of key vocabulary words related to the topic before reading the book. Or, if someone has already read the book, they can write out the crucial vocab words first, then everyone can have this at hand while they read. It’s also often possible to figure out the vocabulary words based on context—how is the word being used? What comes right before and right after it? Finally, dictionary.com

makes looking up words a lot faster, so if possible, it may be helpful to meet in a place with internet access.

A lot of revolutionary history and contemporary discussions among revolutionaries involve specialized jargon like “proletariat,” “hegemony,” “primitive accumulation,” “patriarchy,” “the gender binary,” and so on. This can be difficult for folks who don’t yet have access to all of these words. It’s important for study groups to define these terms early on, and not just throw them around. New participants should not be mocked or “called out” if they don’t understand the meanings of these terms. Asking “what does heteronormativity mean” is different from claiming it doesn’t exist or that we shouldn’t fight it! I know this might sound obvious, but I’ve seen radicals respond this way multiple times, and it really shuts down discussion.

Revolutionaries often use common words in distinct ways. For example, the word “liberal” commonly means something like “tolerant, accepting, or willing to use a large amount of something.” For folks coming from some countries, liberal might mean free-market oriented (what the US left calls “neoliberal”). Ironically, in a US context, that’s closer to the word “conservative.” But US revolutionaries often use the word liberal to refer to specific political tendencies that tend to advocate reform instead of revolution, that tend to emphasize the need to reach out to middle class white people and to avoid alienating them, people who think that change comes gradually and incrementally, people who work for the Democratic Party, union leaders, and nonprofits. It’s important to specify what we mean by terms like this.

It is also important to give someone the benefit of the doubt when you first meet them. Someone might call themselves a “liberal” by which they mean to say “I’m a tolerant person” or “my conservative family calls me a liberal.” A dogmatic person might dismiss them right then, but if you ask them some questions and listen you might find out that they actually think we don’t need bosses, or they might think the US military has no business being in other countries.

The same thing goes for new authors we pick up. We risk missing out if we reject them just because they use a few words that we find oppressive or flawed. Before rejecting these books, we should ask what the authors mean when they use these terms. It’s helpful, again, to think about what the authors’ cultural and historical contexts were, and what political tendencies they might be coming from, because all of this influences how they might be using deceptively common words in specialized ways, or specialized words in ways that are different from how we use them.

READING AS A SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Sometimes we may find ourselves reading in order to “translate” out of date ideas into a contemporary context, or specialized ideas into a more accessible, general context. We might be drawing from one specific “discursive community,” trying to bring knowledge from that community into a different community. In fact, this kind of translation work is exactly what academia often fails at, and some revolutionaries are uniquely situated to do this well because of their combinations of broad working class life experience and

specialized theoretical knowledge. Here are some suggestions for how to do this:

At the bottom of each right hand page, or at natural stopping points, you could pause and ask yourself “how would I explain this to my friend, comrade, coworker, or neighbor?” If you’re reading collectively, you might organize this explicitly as a role playing exercise.

This is especially helpful when you’re trying to figure out what’s at stake in debates between different tendencies. It can be abstract and confusing to think, “how would a Christian respond to these debates about gender” or, “how would a Black Nationalist respond to this point about the League of Revolutionary Black Workers’ interventions in Detroit automobile plants? In contrast, how would an anarchist respond?”

Instead of trying to do that, I’d suggest thinking about actual people you know who are Christians or Black nationalists or anarchists, and imagine having a conversation with them in your head about the book. What would they say? How would you respond? Then, later on, when you want to actually have that conversation with the person you’ll be more prepared, and you’ll also remember better what you wanted to raise with them. To avoid dogmatism, it’s important to reflect on this after the conversation. Were your first hypotheses about how they were going to respond correct? Or did they prove you wrong? If so, does that change your interpretation of the text?

This makes reading less of an isolated, individualized, elitist practice—it reminds us that knowledge is social, and meant to be shared. In fact, it goes deeper than that—knowledge is really something we produce together—we

are revolutionaries, so we don't believe in "intellectual property rights." Almost all of the good ideas I've ever had have come from conversations with people in person, or from sitting at home reading and writing thinking about how I can better communicate with other people. Keeping this social process in mind also keeps up our motivation to read, by reminding us why we are reading in the first place.

CONCLUSION

These are just a few suggestions for how we aim to read as revolutionaries. A lot more could be said. To continue the discussion, I'd love hear other folks' experiences with reading, and suggestions for how to read in revolutionary ways. Please feel free to adapt and print the study materials from the appendices, to use in your collective and individual study; if you do, please let us know how it goes so we can improve on these materials in our own study groups.

APPENDIX A: BLACK ORCHID STUDY GROUP CURRICULUM SAMPLE

Note: this is based on the text Night Vision by Butch Lee and Red Rover, which we were studying at the time. It could easily be adapted to other texts.

Goal: To use metacognition and reading strategies to read like a revolutionary

Metacognition: Thinking about your own thinking

Reading Strategies: Thought processes we use to make meaning out of a text. (For example, asking myself "what is the main point of this paragraph" or saying to myself "I predict that...")

1. OPEN ENDED WRITING RESPONSE/ DRAWING FROM PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

15 to 30 minutes (write then share) Free write/ warm up. Write for 15-25 minutes, don't worry about proper grammar, spelling, etc. This is more about practicing using writing to think and to communicate ideas. After we are done we'll share what we wrote. Feel free to draw from what we studied last week in Ch. 1 of *Night Vision*, from your own life experience, and from previous readings, discussions, forums, and debates.

If you get stuck, feel free to choose one or more of these questions as a prompt:

What is race?

What is gender?

What is class?

What is a nation?

How are all of these categories changing today?

2. INTRO TO METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES

We use strategies all the time for interpreting verbal language. This is half of what is often called “street smarts” and it is also half of what we do as revolutionaries. We’ll start by practicing that, and becoming aware of what strategies we’re using everyday. Then we’ll apply the same process to interpreting written language through reading.

Choose a scenario from the list below, and think about how you would “read” the situation. Write down what thoughts would go through your mind. What questions would you ask yourself about the situation? What questions would you ask the other person verbally? How would you assess the different information you receive in order to develop an accurate interpretation of the situation? How accurate would your interpretation need to be before you can make a decision?

Scenarios:

—You’re facilitating a public forum and someone gets up during the question and answer session and starts to rant angrily and loudly.

—It’s the beginning of a demonstration and a cop comes up to you and singles you out in the crowd and says “We want to make sure everyone is safe today, so you could please tell me the march route so that we can protect you while you’re marching?”

—You are in a large meeting and someone starts making passive aggressive criticisms that may be directed against someone else in the room but you’re not sure.

Here are a few more general ones that I use with my students:

—Someone is clowning on you.

You need to figure out if it’s hostile or playful/friendly, and you need to figure out how to respond.

—You are talking to someone you are attracted to and you’re trying to figure out if they’re flirting with you or not, and how you want to respond.

Please write out your thought processes using the following as a guide:

—What the other person says or does:

—What I think about when I see/hear that:

—What I say/ do in response:

—How they respond to me:

—What I think about when I see them respond:

We will share these together and will discuss what thought processes we used to read and interpret the situation.

Reading scaffold 1:

I will read aloud a section from Ch. 2 of *Night Vision*. As I read, I will say out loud what I am thinking, to model for you some of the reading strategies I use as a reader and as a revolutionary. For example, I will ask myself questions about the text and will then try to answer them, and I will make predictions and inferences.

After I read, I’m going to ask you to tell me what strategies I used and we will make a list together.

Reading scaffold 2:

I will read aloud another section from *Night Vision*. This time as I ask questions, we will answer them together.

Reading scaffold 3:

In pairs, please read a 3rd section from the text. As you read, please think

aloud and come up with your own questions and responses. You can start your sentences with “I wonder” or “I noticed that ” or “this reminds me of” or “I think he might mean.”

Reading scaffold 4:

Read a 4th section on your own. Write down what strategies you used (e.g. what questions you asked yourself, what predictions you made).

3. READING WORKSHOP PART 2: READING LOG

Goals:

- to use metacognition reading strategies to help make sense of texts.
- to practice developing our own interpretations of the texts we read together.

Keep a reading log in response to the texts we are studying during this decolonization workshop the next few months, beginning with *Night Vision*. To keep your log, divide each page with a vertical line down the center.

On the left side of each page, record significant passages from the literature you read.

On the right side, across from each passage, write down a question you had about the passage, or a statement/ thought you had about it. You can use the metacognitive bookmark (Appendix B) as a guide.

If you are reading a photocopy or a book you can mark up, draw a star next to each passage in the book that you have recorded in your journal, or highlight the passage in your book so that you can find it easily. It is not necessary to copy the entire passage into your notebook, sometimes you

can just copy the beginning few lines, then the page number so you can find your highlighted passage easily when we discuss the text in the workshop or the meeting.

Remember, your response log doesn't need to be textbook English. The purpose of this exercise is more to think about reading and writing without worrying about the form your thoughts take. This is preparation for eventually writing public responses to the texts we are reading. At that point, we will think more specifically about how to present our ideas publicly. But right now we are writing mostly to develop our own ideas, together.

Reading log scaffold 1:

Read another section of *Night Vision* out loud together. Then we pause and each of us will re-read and add an entry to our own log based on what we each find significant about the text. Then we will read our entries to each other and give each other feedback.

Feedback should focus not only on the content of the text but also the process. Are each of us using metacognition / reading strategies? Are each of us approaching the text with a sense of inquiry, focused on creating our own interpretations of the text? This feedback can be awkward but it is key to un-learning bad habits we learned in school, like simply sounding out the words, focusing on irrelevant details to prepare for tests, or reading on “auto pilot,” just skimming through even when we don't understand the meaning of the text.

Reading log scaffold 2:

Do the same process for another passage, this time reading on your own

and writing an entry in your own log. When everyone is done reading that passage and writing about it, we will share and give feedback.

Reading log scaffold 3:

Please read the rest of the chapter on your own, and fill out your reading log as you read. Everyone should bring their logs to the BOC meeting. In the meeting, we will discuss the passages each of us found relevant, and the questions we posed about the text in our logs.

APPENDIX B: METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES BOOKMARK

Setting goals

The main question I want to answer today is. . .

I'm reading this in order to. . .

Predicting

In the next part I think. . .

My prediction was correct/incorrect because. . .

Visualizing

I picture in my mind. . .

I can organize the information by. . .

If I were in their shoes, I would. . .

If I were to do that, I think the outcome might be. . .

Questioning

A question I have is. . .

I wonder about. . .

Is that really what they mean. . .

Making Connections and Inferring

This reminds me of. . .

Even though it's not explicit, I think the text is saying. . .

I think what connects these ideas is. . .

I didn't expect _____ because the text. . .

I can / can't relate to this because. . .

I think if _____ read this, they would say. . .

In the historical context, this would have meant. . .

This was a breakthrough / rupture/ turning point because. . .

This shapes the world today because. . .

Recognizing a problem

I got confused when. . .

I'm not sure of. . .

Fixing the problem

I'll reread this part. . .

I'll keep reading and check back on this. . .

This reading strategy isn't working so instead I'll try. . .

Summarizing

Up to this point, I think the big idea is. . .

So what this passage is saying is. . .

Arguing with the ideas

I agree/ disagree with this part of the text because. . .

I think these ideas support the interests/power of. . .

I think that _____ voices are being left out because. . .

Evaluating the writing itself

I think this is good/bad writing because. . .

The writer does _____; I'd like to try that in my own writing by. . .

If I were to rewrite this passage, I'd write it this way:

Vocabulary

The word _____ means _____.

I would use this word when I'm trying to _____.

ENDNOTES

1 This article is the third part of a series on revolutionary literacy called Reading for Revolution. Parts 1 and 2 can be found here: <http://blackorchid-collective.wordpress.com/2013/05/27/reading-for-revolution-parts-1-and-2/>.

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3 Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 110-114.

4 Jeremy, "My Year in Teaching School and My Politics," 2eyesopen, August 22, 2012, available at <http://2eyesopen.com/2012/08/22/thinking-about-my-teaching-school-year-and-politics/> (accessed Dec 8, 2013).

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6 L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

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Heinemann, 2007).

8 Elizabeth Birr Moje, "Disciplinary Literacy: Why It Matters and What We Should Do About It" (presentation at the National Reading Initiative Conference, New Orleans, 2010), available at <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/3121> (accessed Dec 8, 2013).

9 Rafael Heller, "In Praise of Amateurism: A Friendly Critique of Moje's 'Call for Change' in Secondary Literacy," *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 54, no. 4 (2010): 267-273.

10 Karl Marx, "Theses On Feuerbach", Marx/Engels Internet Archive, 1845, available at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm> (accessed Dec 8, 2013).

11 "Bloom's Taxonomy Action Verbs," Clemson Reference Materials, available at <http://www.clemson.edu/assessment/assessmentpractices/referencematerials/documents/Blooms%20Taxonomy%20Action%20Verbs.pdf> (accessed Dec 8, 2013).

"STRICT DISCIPLINE COMBINED WITH SOCIAL EQUALITY": ORWELL ON LEADERSHIP IN THE SPANISH MILITIAS¹

KRISTIAN WILLIAMS

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In his essay, "Looking Back on the Spanish War," George Orwell relates a brief but illuminating anecdote about life in a revolutionary army: "I was a 'cabo', or corporal, in command of twelve men," he begins.

One day a man suddenly refused to go to a certain post, which he said quite truly was exposed to enemy fire. . . . I seized hold of him and began to drag him towards his post. . . . Instantly I was surrounded by a ring of shouting men: 'Fascist! Fascist! Let that man go! This isn't a bourgeois army. Fascist!' etc etc.²

Elsewhere he concludes the story:

After this, for some weeks or months. . . this kind of argument recurred over and over again, i.e. indiscipline, arguments as to what was justifiable and what was 'revolutionary,' but in general a consensus of opinion that one must have strict discipline combined with social equality.³

WAR AND REVOLUTION

The situation was typical of the militia system in Spain, at least from what Orwell saw of it, and it was a peculiarity of the type of war in which he was fighting.

Spain elected a left-wing Popular Front government in 1936, and within a few months the army launched a coup

led by Generalissimo Francisco Franco. It fell to the left-wing political parties and labor unions to organize militias and resist the fascist offensive. At the same time, with the elected government largely absent, workers took control of industry, peasants collectivized the land, and in some places money itself was abolished. Orwell later recalled:

[T]here was occurring a revolution of ideas that was perhaps more important than the short-lived economic changes. For several months large blocks of people believed that all men are equal and were able to act on their belief. The result was a feeling of liberation and hope that is difficult to conceive in our money-tainted atmosphere. . . . [It] shows you what human beings are like when they are trying to behave as human beings and not as cogs in the capitalist machine.⁴

Orwell traveled to Spain as a journalist, but “joined the militia almost immediately, because at that time and in that atmosphere it seemed the only conceivable thing to do.” He confessed, “There was much” about the revolution “that I did not understand” and “in some ways I did not even like it”; nevertheless “I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for.”⁵

Owing to his association with the Independent Labour Party, he ended up joining the militia of a Trotskyist organization, the Party for Marxist Unification, or POUM.⁶ With them he spent some months on the Aragon front until he was wounded by sniper fire. Ultimately, as the Communist Party gained control in the Republican territory, other factions—including the POUM—were suppressed, and Orwell

had to flee. Then, in 1939, the Republic fell and Franco declared victory. Spain remained a dictatorship for more than three decades.

“AN UNTRAINED MOB”

Both the revolutionary aims of the war and the haste with which the Loyalist forces assembled themselves were evident in the militia system. At the beginning, the militias were made up entirely of volunteers, with little knowledge of firearms and no experience in combat. The division to which Orwell was assigned, for example, he described as “an untrained mob composed mostly of boys in their teens.”⁷ And their commanders were hardly more seasoned: “Men, who in private life were factory workmen, or lawyers, or orange growers, found themselves within a few weeks officers, commanding large bodies of men.” Nearly everyone on the Republican side was forced “to learn the art of war virtually by practice.”⁸

“How on earth could the war be won by an army of this type?” he wondered.⁹

The very organization of the militia seemed to encourage insubordination: “There were officers and N.C.O.s, but there was no military rank in the ordinary sense; no titles, no badges, no heel-clicking and saluting.”¹⁰ And in general “a man could choose which section he should belong to . . . [,] could also change to another bandera if he wanted to[.]”¹¹ and could discharge himself from the armed forces at any time when he was due leave.¹²

But, “considering the circumstances,” Orwell admits, “they were better troops than one had any right to expect.” Furthermore:

it is a tribute to the strength of 'revolutionary' discipline that the militias stayed in the field at all. To until about June 1937 there was nothing to keep them there, except class loyalty. . . . A conscript army in the same circumstances—with its battle-police removed—would have melted away.¹³

Whatever their shortcomings, this rabble—with their ill-fitting uniforms, ancient rifles, and their refusal to salute—held the line against the fascist advance while a regular army assembled and trained at the rear. Were it not for the militia volunteers, Franco would have marched across Spain practically unopposed, and the Republic would have fallen almost without a fight.¹⁴

A POPULAR ARMY, OR THE PEOPLE ARMED?

After about a year, the volunteer militias were either suppressed or else absorbed into the Communist controlled Popular Army, "modeled as far as possible on an ordinary bourgeois army, with a privileged officer-caste, immense differences of pay, etc etc." This consolidation was explained at the time as a matter of military necessity, but it ultimately proved to be a kind of counter-revolution. As Orwell saw it,

the undoubted purpose of the change was to strike a blow at equalitarianism. In every department the same policy has been followed, with the result that only a year after the outbreak of war and revolution you get what is in effect an ordinary bourgeois State, with, in addition, a reign of terror to preserve the *status quo*.¹⁵

Whether the process of Army building is inherently

counter-revolutionary, I am not sure, but there is a good case to be made. At the very least, it seems to be the logical consequence of putting the priority on the military aspects of the conflict rather than on the political dimension. The theory was that the war had to be won before the revolution could proceed, but in the event, militarization only insured that the revolution was over before the war was. Where untrained and ill-equipped workers had fought the fascists to a stalemate while simultaneously reorganizing society, the new Army, with its formal discipline and Soviet guns, abandoned the revolution and decisively lost the war.

Orwell was later convinced that the only way to win would have been to let the revolution proceed.¹⁶ He saw that the workers had fought, often against great odds, because they had seen the gains they had made and felt instinctively that they were worth defending.¹⁷ "For the Spanish militias, while they lasted, were a sort of microcosm of a classless society."¹⁸ As he explained in *Homage to Catalonia*: "The essential point of the [militia] system was social equality between officers and men. Everyone from general to private drew the same pay, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, and mingled on terms of complete equality."¹⁹

By embodying the ideas of the revolution, making its aims something more than trite slogans or distant goals, the militia system put the whole relationship of rank, and the process of discipline, on an entirely new basis:

In a workers' army discipline is theoretically voluntary. It is based on class-loyalty, whereas the discipline of a bourgeois conscript army is based

ultimately on fear. . . . When a man refused to obey an order you did not immediately get him punished; you first appealed to him in the name of comradeship.²⁰

This arrangement may sound idealistic, but Orwell argued, "In practice the democratic 'revolutionary' type of discipline is more reliable than might be expected." And moreover, "The discipline of even the worst drafts of militia visibly improved as time went on." His own experience in command gave him the opportunity to witness this change:

In January the job of keeping a dozen raw recruits up to the mark almost turned my hair grey. In May for a short while I was acting-lieutenant in command of about thirty men, English and Spanish. We had all been under fire for months, and I never had the slightest difficulty in getting an order obeyed or in getting men to volunteer for a dangerous job.²¹

This "gradual improvement in discipline," he thought, "was brought about almost entirely by 'diffusion of revolutionary consciousness'." But this consciousness was not a matter of learning to think in Marxist slogans, or unquestioning adherence to the prevailing dogma.²² Instead it was developed through "endless arguments and explanations as to *why* such and such a thing was necessary."²³ Revolutionary discipline, in other words, was founded on principles exactly opposite those of normal military discipline.

Because the fighters understood what was at stake, and because they could see the ideals they fought for being realized, both in the larger society

and in the militia itself, they were willing to accept discipline and follow orders. They would endure hardship and expose themselves to danger in part because the goal was a worthy one, but as importantly, because they could see that the risks and the sacrifices were shared, if not precisely equally, then at least among equals. Orwell would later reflect:

Almost certainly the main reason why the Spanish Republic could keep up the fight for two and a half years against impossible odds was that there were no gross contrasts of wealth. The people suffered horribly, but they all suffered alike. When the private soldier had not a cigarette, the general had not one either.²⁴

THREE LESSONS

One should always be careful when drawing lessons from extraordinary circumstances. And it is important that we not romanticize the facts of revolutionary warfare:

The essential horror of army life . . . is barely affected by the nature of the war you happen to be fighting in. . . . Bullets hurt, corpses stink, men under fire are often so frightened that they wet their trousers. . . . A louse is a louse and a bomb is a bomb, even though the cause you are fighting for happens to be just.²⁵

However, Orwell's view of the Spanish militias seems to present several considerations that will be important to any organization trying to achieve both internal democracy and revolutionary discipline.

First, it is striking that what initially may appear to be the

organizational weaknesses of the militia system—the challenging of authority, the refusal of automatic obedience, “the fact that you often had to argue for five minutes before you could get an order obeyed”²⁶—turned out, in fact, to be its real virtues. For these were deep expressions of the values for which the soldiers were fighting. They were the features that distinguished their army from the enemy’s. And so they were precisely the means by which loyalty was cemented and discipline ensured.²⁷

Second, the move toward military discipline and centralized authority was *not* a temporary expedient necessitated by the war. It signaled, instead, the political defeat of the revolution and may have accelerated the military defeat as well. By separating the aims of the war from the goals of the revolution, the Communist government greatly damaged public morale, undercut the basis for international working class solidarity, divided the left wing forces against one another, and eliminated any possibility of a revolt occurring behind Franco’s lines.²⁸ “They made a militarised conscript army possible, but they also made it necessary.”²⁹ This fact suggests, at the least, that we should be wary of sacrificing the democratic aspects of our organizations in the name of security, or to achieve some immediate tactical gain. Military victory cannot be bought at the expense of political defeat.

And finally, there is the insight that “orders had to be obeyed, but . . . when you gave an order you gave it as comrade to comrade and not as superior to inferior.”³⁰ There is a quality to the relationship between comrades, as opposed to that between superior and subordinate, that changes what it

means to issue, or receive, instructions. In such circumstances it matters very much whether we act from a sense of trust or out of fear; whether the order can be challenged and rationally defended; whether the context is one of mutual respect and shared sacrifice, or contrariwise, whether we treat each other as instruments rather than as individuals.

A great deal depends on knowing the difference between a comrade and an apparatchik. The militia system managed to combine a respect for authority with a resistance to authoritarianism. The militia (as Orwell quickly learned) did not tolerate the bullying of troops by their commanders. It attached neither material incentives nor social privileges to promotion through the ranks. Though it depended on a combination of personal loyalty and political commitment to ensure discipline, it did nothing to discourage questioning orders or voicing dissenting opinions. In all these respects, the militia differed from a regular army—whether that army was controlled by fascists, Communists, or simply a bourgeois officer class—and further, the militia system worked as well as it did precisely because of those differences.

TWO CASES FROM MY EXPERIENCE

In my own political work, which has been chiefly anarchist—or, at least, anarchistic—more is accomplished through persuasion than ever attempted by command. Yet I have also, at times, been in the position of issuing instructions, or receiving them.

For example, as a member of Rose City Copwatch, I was occasionally chosen by my peers to lead a copwatch team, a job that largely consisted of

making tactical decisions about where to position our observers, how to coordinate our movements, and the like. Performing that role at an anti-police demonstration—one of a series characterized by escalating clashes between cops and anarchists—I once sent people I love rushing toward the spot where riot police were moving in against the black bloc. Violence seemed inevitable, and I sent my team straight into the fray.

On the other hand, in a different context, I once received a cryptic phone call summoning me to a meeting. Not knowing with whom I was meeting or why—only that the call came from a trusted source and he said it was urgent—I cancelled my plans and headed across town. When I arrived I was given a quick synopsis of the situation and asked to serve as a sentry. I spent that night, alert but bored, watching over the home of a man who had been threatened by a gang of white supremacists—likely the same group who had recently shot and crippled a local anti-racist skinhead.

Such instances are not typical of my experience, but it was precisely the day-to-day familiarity—the discussion, the cooperation, the concern, even the arguments—that made it possible to act under those heightened circumstances. No one could have *made* me lose a night's sleep to protect an aging peacenik, and no one had to. And I was aware, even as I gave my instructions to the copwatch team, that there was nothing I could do to force them to obey. Had they refused, I could only give up my position.

As it happened, they did not refuse; they did not even hesitate. They hurried, instead, toward the conflict,

toward the danger. And while I am sure that my judgment was sound—that any other copwatcher, in fact, would have made the same decision, and that I would have followed just as readily—had any of my team been hurt, I know I would have been responsible, and I would have blamed myself deeply. I knew it even as I gave the instructions. That responsibility was, in a sense, implied by the very act.

My authority depended entirely on their trust in me. And that trust—not only in my intent, but in my tactical sense and my judgment—was precisely the reason they selected me for the job. Their trust in *me* was largely forged in the process of working together, of planning and debating, and navigating disagreements. More importantly, though, their trust in *the position* depended on the organization's egalitarian, democratic culture. The "Decision Maker on Patrol" (DMOP) was elected at the beginning of the shift specifically to make tactical decisions according to our training, established guidelines, and copwatching policy. It was expected that, time permitting, after every police encounter the entire group would debrief, discussing how we did and how we could perform better. Questions or concerns about the DMOP's decisions would be raised then and, if the group wished, the position could be rotated at that point as well.

More broadly, though, authority could be delegated this way for particular types of tasks precisely because in the normal course of events everyone's voice counted, everyone had a say. We could entrust a single person to make tactical decisions *because* we were used to making decisions together. Our decision making process, to which we

were obsessively devoted, emphasized deliberation and encouraged patient discussion. As our facilitation guidelines outlined:

In general, debate should be treated as a valued part of the decision-making process, not as an obstacle or a distraction between the proposal and the vote. Thinking and discussing together allows us to improve our understanding, correct for individual biases, and refine our ideas. Disagreements will inevitably occur, and should be seen as a valuable aspect of the democratic process. Our willingness to respectfully consider diverse opinions, to both offer and accept criticism, will be a mark of our commitment to democracy.

Not only had the political and strategic decisions been made collectively and in advance, but the organization's democratic structure—and as important, its democratic culture—worked to ensure that the authority bestowed in one area not expand or become generalized.

Of course, not everything is guard duty or copwatching, and we can find less dramatic examples of the type of leadership I'm discussing in the regular events of our daily lives. Usually they go unremarked on, or even unnoticed. I'm talking about things as simple as deferring to the expertise, experience, or technical proficiency of our colleagues. Or sometimes, authority is just a matter of appointing someone to coordinate some area of activity, and then letting them coordinate it. In that sense, it can be a trivial accompaniment to any division of labor—delegating routine executive or administrative decisions to the people doing the work. That limited

notion of authority is not at odds with autonomy; it can actually be an expression of collective self-management.

LEADERSHIP AS PRIVILEGE

One problem that persists, even within radically democratic organizations, is the tendency to select leaders from among those groups already privileged in the larger society.³¹ The method of selection is almost a matter of indifference if, in the event, the *same people* tend to gain power.³² Orwell observed:

In the POUM militia there was a slight but perceptible tendency for people of bourgeois origins to be chosen as officers. Given the existing class-structure of society I regard this as inevitable. Middle-class and upper-class people have usually more self-confidence in unfamiliar circumstances, and in countries where conscription is not in force they usually have more military tradition than the working class.³³

Leadership, of course, comes in many varieties and each type suggests something of the virtues required of those who exercise it. Characteristics laudable in a teacher, an advisor, or a facilitator will not always be the same as those required in an editor or a militia captain.³⁴ Those who would serve in a position of command need to have, not only a grasp of strategy and the ability to make themselves understood, but also a sort of personal bearing that communicates, silently and effectively, that their instructions are to be followed. This personal quality is sometimes understood as charisma, but that is not quite right: effective leaders may be personally disliked and yet retain

their sense of authority and respect.³⁵ What the position requires, as Orwell suggests, is a kind of confidence—a decisiveness, a willingness to commit and take responsibility, and perhaps above all, an assumption that what one says *matters* and the expectation that it will be taken seriously. In the society we live in—stratified by race, class, gender, nationality, and so on—some people are trained to give orders almost from birth, and others are drilled in taking them. The means of instilling these lessons can be as subtle as the rules of etiquette or as blunt as a policeman's club.

As Orwell observed, in his native England:

A person of bourgeois origin goes through life with some expectation of getting what he wants, within reasonable limits. Hence the fact that in times of stress 'educated' people tend to come to the front; they are no more gifted than the others and their 'education' is generally quite useless in itself, but they are accustomed to a certain amount of deference and consequently have the cheek necessary to a commander. That they *will* come to the front seems to be taken for granted, always and everywhere.³⁶

Now, these habits of entitlement and deference, ingrained as they are into each of us, do not just go away because we become ideologically committed to equality. And what is worse, the difference is not merely one of outlook or perception; it is likely also to correspond to real differences in experience, and in the particular social skills needed to make one's voice heard and to achieve compliance. These personal characteristics and interpersonal skills are even more important where coercive

measures are unavailable or impractical—in other words, in an egalitarian organization rather than a rigid hierarchy, in a revolutionary militia rather than a traditional army.³⁷

There is no perfect answer for this problem.³⁸ The ultimate solution naturally lies with changing society, so that inequalities based on race, gender, and so on disappear and cultural expectations about what leaders are *like* grow broader. In the short term, it may be that the best we can do will be to help encourage the qualities of leadership in *all* the members of our organizations, and take practical steps to help develop them. I believe that democratic practices, almost by definition, do much to help that process. But it is important that we all become more accustomed—simultaneously—to collective decision making, *and* to the exercise of responsible leadership when the duty falls to us, *and* to taking orders and following instructions as one aspect of our commitment to democracy. Strict discipline and social equality are not, in this sense, in opposition; the exercise of each relies on the other.

THE LIMITS OF LEADERSHIP

The important thing to note about such exercises in leadership is just how *limited* they are. Authority in these cases is contextual, it is contingent, and it is restricted to a fairly narrow sphere of competence. We must always be alert to keep it inside these bounds. We must guard against the danger of authority reaching beyond its justifications, or leadership ossifying into a permanent hierarchy. Of course structural checks, such as rotating roles and making leaders subject to immediate recall, go some distance to preserving the democratic

character of the relationship. But the *culture* of our organizations is at least as important. Those who are in positions of responsibility, and those they direct, should always keep in mind exactly *why* they are in that position, what its purpose is and what its limits are.

Leaders cannot be allowed to insulate themselves from criticism, or to suppress disagreements; their position must always depend on the approval of their comrades, especially those they lead. They must not be above debate; instead, their position ought to *invite* debate. Likewise, no one should be allowed to use his position to accrue personal privileges or advance a private agenda. In a healthily functioning group, the surest way to lose leadership would be to abuse it.

It may be helpful in closing to recall Bakunin's remark:

Hostile as I am to the authoritarian conception of discipline, I nevertheless recognize that a certain kind of discipline, not authoritarian but voluntary and intelligently understood, is, and will ever be, necessary whenever a greater number of individuals undertake any kind of collective work or action. Under these circumstances, discipline is simply the voluntary and considered coordination of all individual efforts for a common purpose. At the moment of revolution, in the midst of the struggle, there is a natural division of functions according to the aptitude of each, assessed and judged by the collective whole: Some direct and others carry out orders. But no function remains fixed and it will not remain permanently and irrevocably attached to any one person. Hierarchical order and promotion do not exist, so that the executive of

yesterday can become the subordinate of tomorrow. No one rises above the others, and if he does rise, it is only to fall back again a moment later, like the waves of the sea forever returning to the salutary level of equality.³⁹

There are times in all of our lives, even as we fight for our freedom, when we have to do things that we would rather not do, when we must act with imperfect information and even against our own inclinations, when we must serve as one part of a larger unit, and do so reliably if only because others rely on us. There are times when we must give things up, even things that are very dear, and we may not always know whether what we gain has been worth the price. And sometimes, what may be harder still, we may have to ask similar sacrifices of others.

ENDNOTES

1 Several people offered comments on earlier versions of this essay. Thanks are owed to Amelia Caite, Emily-Jane Dawson, Chris Knudtsen, Eleanor Jones, Peter Little, Geoff McNamara, Paul Messersmith-Glavin, Josef Schneider, M. Treloar, Kevin Van Meter, and Emily Winokur.

2 George Orwell, "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 2: My Country Right or Left, 1940-1943*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 255-6.

3 George Orwell, "Notes on the Spanish Militias," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 319.

4 George Orwell, "Review: *Red Spanish Notebook* by Mary Low and Juan Brea, *Heroes of the Alcazar* by T. Timmermans," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 287.

5 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1980), 4-5.

6 He later reflected, "Had I gone to Spain with no political affiliation at all I should probably have joined the International Column and should no doubt by this time have had a bullet in the back for being 'politically unreliable', or at least have been in jail. If I had understood the situation a bit better I should probably have joined the Anarchists." George Orwell, "Letter to Jack Common [October? 1937]", in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 289.

7 George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 26.

8 George Orwell, [Broadcast of 16 May 1932,] Orwell: *The War Commentaries*, ed. W.J. West (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) 94-5. Interestingly, this passage was blocked from broadcast by the official censors.

9 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 27.

10 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 27.

11 Orwell, "Notes on the Spanish Militias," 318.

12 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 196.

13 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 29.

It is an important point, because "Later it became the fashion to pretend that the faults which were due to lack of training and weapons were the result of the equalitarian system. Actually, a newly raised

draft of militia was an undisciplined mob not because the officers called the privates 'Comrade' but because raw troops are *always* an undisciplined mob." Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 27-28, emphasis in original.

14 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 28.

15 George Orwell, "Spilling the Spanish Beans," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 272.

16 "After what I have seen in Spain I have come to the conclusion that it is futile to be 'anti-Fascist' while attempting to preserve capitalism." George Orwell, "Letter to Geoffrey Gorer [15 September 1937]," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 1: An Age Like This, 1920-1940*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 284.

17 Following similar reasoning, he later argued that the only way for Britain to prevail in World War II was to implement revolutionary economic measures: "We cannot win the war without introducing Socialism, nor establish Socialism without winning the war." George Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell, Volume 2: My Country Right or Left, 1940-1943*, eds. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 94.

18 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 104-5.

19 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 27.

20 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 28.

21 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 27-28.

22 Orwell states that POUM militia-men were never pressured to join the Party. (Orwell, "Notes on the Spanish Militias," 325.) Additionally, "there was very little heresy-hunting in the P.O.U.M. . . . short of being a pro-Fascist no one was penalized

for holding the wrong political opinions.”

In fact, Orwell himself “spent much of my time in the militia bitterly criticizing the P.O.U.M. ‘line,’ but I never got into trouble for it.” Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 71.

23 Orwell, “Notes on the Spanish Militias,” 319, emphasis in original.

24 Orwell, “The Lion and the Unicorn,” 86-7.

25 Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 250.

26 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 29.

27 Orwell described “those enormous arguments” as the “means [by] which discipline is gradually hammered out in revolutionary armies.” Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 256.

28 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 67-70.

29 Orwell, “Spilling the Spanish Beans,” 275.

30 Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 27.

31 See, for example: Emily, “Gender/Leadership,” *Red Skies at Night*, issue 1 (2013).

32 “Theoretically, promotion was done by election, but actually the officers and NCOs were appointed from above. . . [but] this does not in practice make much difference.” Orwell, “Notes on the Spanish Militias,” 318.

33 Orwell, “Notes on Spanish Militias,” 326.

34 I have focused in this essay on military-type activity precisely because it represents a hard case, where the stakes are highest, the need for discipline is clearest, and authoritarianism is most likely to creep in.

35 Orwell recalls that as a corporal “I made myself thoroughly unpopular” (Orwell, “Notes on the Spanish Militias,” 319); yet when his authority was challenged a young recruit whom he had personally offended “sprang into the ring and began passionately defending me. . . exclaiming,

‘He’s the best corporal we’ve got!’” Orwell, “Looking Back on the Spanish War,” 255.

36 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1958), 49.

37 “At the beginning one had to get orders obeyed (a) by appealing to party loyalty and (b) by force of personality. . . .

It is extremely difficult to punish men who are already in the front line, because short of killing them it is hard to make them more uncomfortable than they are already.

The usual punishment was double hours of sentry-go—very unsatisfactory because everyone is already short of sleep.” Orwell, “Notes on the Spanish Militias,” 319-20.

38 In 1984, Winston Smith observes, “If there is hope. . . it lies with the proles. . .

[However,] Until they become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.” George Orwell, *1984: A Novel* (New York: New American Library, 1984), 60-1.

39 *Bakunin on Anarchism*, trans. and ed. Sam Dolgoff (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2002), 414-5.

BUILDING A REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM

COLIN O'MALLEY

Colin O'Malley is an anarchist and organizer living in Rochester, NY. In 2007, he spent the year in Buenos Aires, Argentina where he became convinced of the necessity of specific anarchist organizations. On returning to the US, he helped found Buffalo Class Action and Rochester Red & Black. Through these organizations he has participated in the series of Class Struggle Anarchist Conferences that led to the 2013 founding of the nationwide Black Rose Anarchist Federation.

Two recent events have thrown critical challenges at the anarchist movement in the United States: the financial crisis that began in 2008 and the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement that sprung from that crisis in 2011. If the current political and economic outlook in this country is any indication, we should expect more frequent moments like these to arise. "Movement Moments" such as these are critical opportunities for revolutionaries of any variety, left or right. Acceptance of the status quo seems impossible.

OWS, in particular, presented an incredible opportunity for anarchism. It was largely propelled by anarchists, in many places sustained by anarchists, and certainly got many people talking about anarchism. In Mark Bray's recent work *Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street*, he looks at the influence of anarchism among organizers in OWS and found:

The interviews showed that 39% of OWS organizers self-identified as anarchists. . . . I noticed that 30% of organizers who did not self-identify as anarchists (34% of all organizers didn't identify with any overarching label) listed anarchism as an influential element in their overall thought.

These Movement Moments don't present themselves every day. It is essential for us to critically examine what our movement has gained, what it has lost, and what it needs to be stronger the next time that a Movement Moment happens. So, given the early influence of anarchism to OWS organizers, what was gained? In some places it seems that anti-foreclosure direct action groups have grown, in others the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) has seen growth in membership, and in general there is certainly a feeling that anarchist ideas are increasingly a part of the dialogue in many social justice movements. None are explicitly anarchist gains, though. While the direct action anti-foreclosure movement and the IWW obviously have some internal anarchist influence, neither is expressly anarchist and both often actively avoid a strong connection to anarchists.

Bray concludes that Occupy Wall Street was a missed opportunity by anarchists:

When I step back to evaluate the tangible political outcome for the anarchist movement after months spent before a world spotlight with thousands of eager new people beating the doors down to get involved, I get the sinking feeling that to some extent we too "glided through these events like ectoplasm through a mist." We didn't even have any competing leftist formations. The field of political influence was left open to us and we didn't get as much out of it as we should have.

Bray credits a lack of organization as a key piece of this missed opportunity:

A lot of new organizers were inspired by the anarchist ethos and it would have been useful for anarchist organizers to be able to say, "Oh, you're interested in anarchism? Come to our discussion Thursday evening about 'anarchist perspectives on organizing';" or "Maybe you'd be interested in joining our anarchist organization/collective."

Of course, the simple conclusion that anarchists should build, or even have, organization isn't a new or comprehensive idea. But, looking to anarchists in South America, we see more clearly the concept of organizing as anarchists and the role of an explicitly anarchist organization. Given the success that anarchists have had in South America, it's certainly worth considering their methods and applying those that make sense in our context.

BUILDING A REVOLUTIONARY ANARCHISM SPEAKING TOUR

I chose to coordinate the Building a Revolutionary Anarchism Speaking Tour to help us take full advantage of these Movement Moments to build the popularity and influence of anarchism in the US. Originally expected to be only three or four stops, the final tour included seventeen stops throughout the entire US over most of the summer of 2013. I found that many others share a frustration with the lack of progress made by organized anarchism during these Movement Moments, and that many others are hunting for new ideas about effectively organizing while also maintaining their ideals as anarchists. The timing was perfect. I found people all over the country that had initially been very excited by Occupy Wall

Street, but had since found themselves struggling to envision unified next steps.

In my short time as a committed organizer for transformational and revolutionary change in the United States, I've seen multiple "Movement Moments" come and go. In each case, it seems we failed to grow *our* movement and learn the lessons necessary to prepare for the next moment. Along with a growing number of individuals and organizations in the country, it became clear to me that the lack of an explicitly anarchist organization is one of our major weaknesses.

It was 2007 when I became convinced of the real value of creating explicitly ideological anarchist organizations. While in Argentina, I became acquainted with some members of the Red Libertaria of Buenos Aires, a formal anarchist communist organization engaged in a wide variety of educational and organizational activities. Almost immediately, I was struck by the thoughtfulness, intelligence, sincerity, and effectiveness of the anarchist movement there. It's an inspiration that I've focused on sharing since my return to the United States.

The Building a Revolutionary Anarchism Speaking Tour helped me not only to share that inspiration, but to dive into some of the detailed differences in organizing method that I saw in Argentina. But it wasn't simply minor organizational tweaks that I felt I needed to share. Anarchists in South America had developed a theory of the role of the revolutionary anarchist organization, *especificismo*. It was this understanding of ourselves and our role in movement building that I felt a powerful urgency to share. And in June 2013, as the scheduled tour dates

quickly jumped from five to seventeen, I knew that urgency to be a shared one.

DISCOMFORT WITH IDEOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION IN THE US

To explain my perspective on ideological organization prior to living in Argentina, I need to back up a bit. It's necessary to contrast my earlier experiences with those that I had in Argentina, to better express my current perspectives.

I would have described myself as an anarchist since sometime in the year 2000. I became aware of the ideas of anarchism through the anti-World Trade Organization demonstrations in Seattle. At that time, I felt revolution right around the corner. Seeing resistance popping up around the country was inspiring and seemed connected to other movements internationally. I participated in a couple of black blocs, and even one effort to form a local anarchist group in Buffalo, called BuffalA (get it?). But I always had some real discomfort with ideological groups.

Basically, BuffalA tried gathering together everyone in Buffalo that called themselves an anarchist. We never had any agreed-upon principles. We couldn't agree if we should organize a militant labor movement towards taking over industry, or burn down all the factories. Some argued we shouldn't even make formal decisions. Some argued we shouldn't even meet—despite being at a meeting. Obviously, it didn't take long for this effort to collapse.

Having come from an industrial rust belt city, having grown up on and off of welfare, and having my family routinely evicted from awful housing, I always felt that the anarchist movement wasn't really connected to the

people that needed to be at the front of it: those most impacted by capitalism, the state, patriarchy, and white supremacy.

Instead, we seemed to almost intentionally create an isolated subculture that was resistant to really engaging in the problems of the people around us. We talked about movements and general strikes and mass action, but we never seemed to want to genuinely engage with the people that we were talking about. This disconnectedness led to a strict purist mentality about what kind of groups were “anarchist enough” to work with. At the end of the day, it seemed clear to me that this kind of purity was actually just a way to rationalize our inactivity and isolation. Over time, we did have some good potlucks and punk shows, a Food Not Bombs, and an infoshop. But in the end, none of these projects really developed stronger organizers. None of them led to any sense that greater social change was on the way. None of them even led to a couple of new leaders from communities of color or the working class. This isn’t a very new problem in the US anarchist movement. In the 1930s, Lucy Parsons noted this:

Anarchism has not produced any organized ability in the present generation, only a few loose struggling groups scattered over this vast country, that come together in conferences occasionally, talk to each other, then go home. . . . Do you call this a movement? . . . I went to work for the International Labor Defense because I wanted to do a little something to help defend the victims of capitalism who got into trouble, and not always be talking, talking, talking.

In my experience, the same proved true. Eventually, the purity, isolation, and outright poor organizing skill seemed disingenuous. I began spending more time organizing with broader “social justice” and “worker rights” groups. While I often had pretty serious disagreements with the analysis of these groups, at least I saw some degree of real organizing happening, and I felt less isolated in my own community. So, by the time I went to Argentina, I would have called myself an anarchist, but I wouldn’t have argued for anarchist organizations.

ANARCHISM IN ARGENTINA

I didn’t go to Argentina to learn about anarchism or anarchist organization. I went to learn about the workers’ movements that had been taking over their workplaces. I was intrigued about what made their workers’ movements so much more militant than ours. The short answer I discovered is that they aren’t afraid of ideology. Anarchist, socialist, and communist ideas were far more openly discussed than in the United States. Each of these ideological groupings had multiple organizations, spaces, and publications, and all had members inside of major unions, community organizations, and student groups.

It didn’t take long for me to meet the Red Libertaria de Buenos Aires, a citywide organization of anarchist communists that described themselves as “especificistas”—a word I had never heard and wouldn’t really understand until months later. To a lesser extent, I also met members of the Federación Libertaria de Argentina.

Almost immediately, I saw real differences between the Red Libertaria

and my previous experiences. At the first Red Libertaria event that I attended, I met workers organizing in their workplaces, students organizing in their student unions, people living in the *villas miserias* (shantytowns) engaged in their community organizations. This depth of presence in oppressed communities was almost the exact opposite of the isolated subcultural groups I was accustomed to in the US. Even more important than the diversity in the room, the conversation within was notably stronger. Anarchism was spoken of as a road map for people actually engaged in day-to-day struggles. Immediately, I felt I should pay attention to how they were organizing.

While there are certainly anarchists in the US that organize in a manner similar to Argentina, these methods don't seem to be the standard here. For the most part, Argentine organizing was much different from what I had experienced in the US.

First, the Red Libertaria had developed clear points of unity. They were an expressly anarchist communist organization. They weren't building an organization of anyone that called themselves anarchists. Rather, they developed specific agreements as a pretext for joining. Often, this approach is treated as authoritarian in US anarchist circles. But having a clear set of unifying points made organizing around those points so much easier, even if it results in smaller founding groups.

Second, the Red Libertaria didn't use consensus. This was an absolute shock to me. It had been ingrained in me that consensus was the only acceptable form of decision making among anarchists. On a global basis, our attitudes in the US are a bit of

an anomaly. In most of the rest of the world, anarchists don't insist on consensus. As Andrew Cornell points out in *Oppose and Propose!: Lessons from Movement for a New Society*, Quakers brought consensus to US anarchism. A vital door to creating much larger organizations rather than small nonsustaining affinity groups, could be opened by allowing for simpler and quicker forms of decision making.

Third, the Red Libertaria had dues. Members paid dues to ensure a well funded organization and to guarantee that everyone was sharing in the costs equally. This is important for a couple of reasons. When an organization grows in membership, it also grows in resources that help to fund a space, publications, a media wing, events publicity, etc. Meanwhile membership shares equitably in the costs of the organization. It's been shown in many studies that poorer people will often give more out of their pockets than more well off members. However, a scaled dues system ensures that those with greater resources help to fund the organization to a greater degree.

Combined, these differences in organizing techniques paint a pretty obvious picture. Anarchists in Buenos Aires were building formal organization and weren't afraid to be straightforward about that. There wasn't a need to constantly bend to nearly hegemonic antiorganizational views. I argue that the anarchist movement in the US has nothing to lose from at least some of us doing the same. There are plenty of antiorganizational or informal organizational groupings. Let's stop assuming that there is something anti-anarchist about building intentional and formal organization. Simplistic and purist

internal policing shouldn't prevent us from experimenting with ways to build towards revolution.

ESPECIFISMO

While even a handful of small process differences increase the strength of South American anarchist organizations, the critical distinctions don't stop there. Our differences run much deeper than that. The Red Libertaria had a more comprehensive understanding of the role of an ideological anarchist organization—how it worked to build anarchist ideas and how it related to broader movements of working class people and communities. These ideas are called *especifismo* and have become an important part of the organized anarchist milieu in South America.

In the US, many of us were introduced to the notion of *especifismo* through the article, “*Especifismo: The Anarchist Praxis of Building Popular Movements and Revolutionary Organization in South America*” by Adam Weaver in the eleventh issue of *The Northeastern Anarchist*. While this article wasn't my introduction to *especifismo*, I've found it to be a useful summary of those ideas.

In his article, Weaver breaks down *especifismo* into three succinct points:

1. The need for a specifically anarchist organization built around a unity of ideas and praxis.
2. The use of the specifically anarchist organization to theorize and develop strategic political and organizing work.
3. Active involvement in and building of autonomous and popular social movements, which is described as the process of “social insertion.”

This basic breakdown provides a road map for the development of an anarchist organization that has an impact beyond itself.

THE SPECIFIC ANARCHIST ORGANIZATION

In the statement, “Our Conception of Anarchist Organization,” the *Federação Anarquista do Rio de Janeiro* (FARJ) say:

This model of organization maintains that the function of the specific anarchist organization is to bring together and coordinate the forces stemming from militant activities, building a tool for solid and consistent struggle, that seeks a finalist objective: social revolution and libertarian socialism. We believe that work without (or with little) organization, in which each one does what they want, poorly articulated or even isolated, is inefficient. The model of organization we advocate seeks to multiply the result and effectiveness of militant forces.

Simply put, it's through organization and collective action that our individual efforts find a more compelling result. And, it's through organization that we allow our efforts to sustain themselves beyond the activity and participation of solid individual militants and organizers. Organizations are capable of weathering through the more dormant moments between mass movements; something that is vital if we are to genuinely learn from the lessons of each movement in which we participate.

In Buffalo Class Action and in Rochester Red & Black, two local anarchist organizations inspired by

especifismo, my experience has been that an explicitly anarchist organization enables us to make the ideas of anarchism more appealing and relevant to the day-to-day struggles happening in our towns. In both cases, with little time, we found we were having an impact beyond ourselves as others heard our ideas and welcomed our intentional support for specific organizations and their fights. In the case of Rochester Red & Black, this influence seems to have gone beyond Rochester. Despite being a group of fewer than twenty, as I traveled the country speaking, I found quite a few people that were already familiar with Rochester Red & Black. This kind of impact couldn't have been accomplished to the same degree by any one individual in our organization.

DEVELOPING THEORY AND STRATEGY

In anarchist circles we seem to be in a never ending conversation about tactics and whether tactics are effective. In this case, we're missing the forest for the trees. One particular tactic isn't universally effective or ineffective; its efficacy is based on how it is incorporated into a broader strategy. In many anarchist circles, there is very little conversation about strategy beyond simple tactical preferences, and these tactical choices are often based on personal predisposition for a degree of superficial militancy rather than effective integration into a larger strategy.

In "Huerta Grande," the Federación Anarquista Uruguaya (FAU)—the initial developers of the theory of especificismo—share the importance and connection of theory to the development of strategic organizing.

Without a line for the theoretical work, an organization, no matter how big it is, will be bewildered by circumstances that it cannot condition nor comprehend. The political line presumes a program, which means goals to be achieved at each step. The program indicates which forces are favorable, which ones are the enemy and which ones are only temporary allies. But in order to know that we must know profoundly the reality of our country. Therefore to acquire that knowledge now is a task of the highest priority. And in order to know we need a theory.

Having a clear strategic program will simultaneously protect our organizations from manipulation by larger political forces and allow us to offer strategic direction to people in struggle for concrete gain. And if we can't offer a genuine path to building militant organizations that will eventually lead us into revolutionary conditions, how can we really call ourselves revolutionaries? Without a clear program developed by anarchists, we will find ourselves stuck working with reformist organizations while ignoring our own beliefs or being revolutionary in name only—speaking the most militantly, no matter how impractical our strategies really are.

Once we have such a theory and a program worked out, what to do with that program will be a new challenge entirely. Do we move to enact that program with just our own small group of committed, organized anarchists? The third point of Weaver's breakdown of especificismo helps to clarify the next step.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LEVELS OF ORGANIZING

In many ways, the notion of “social insertion”—as it’s called in South America—is the heart of *especifismo*. To thoroughly understand social insertion, we first need to understand the distinctions between social movements and political organizations. Basically, social insertion is how organizations and movements interact as well as the role of the revolutionary anarchist political organization within that relationship.

As I’ve said, the anarchist political organization is simply an organization of self-identified anarchists with an articulated unity of ideas and praxis that are working to develop a strategic program of revolution leading to anarchist social and economic structures. Of course, by its nature, this organization will be fairly small in comparison to the general population and will expect a high level of commitment from its membership.

The other essential counterparts in our revolutionary efforts are social movements and their organizations. In “Social Anarchism and Organization,” the FARJ explains the central role of social movements in anarchist revolutionary thought:

If the struggle of anarchism points towards the final objectives of social revolution and libertarian socialism, and if we understand the exploited classes to be the protagonists of the transformation towards these goals, there is no other way for anarchism but to seek a way to interact with these classes.

Social movement is the mass organization of exploited classes, including the unions of working people, the

tenants organization in apartment complexes, the student unions in schools, the popular assemblies of neighborhoods, and the self-organization of the unemployed. Social movements gain their strength from mass participation more than from ideological purity. In a workplace struggle, all workers should be involved, not just the anarchist ones. The union would marginalize itself to only serve those workers that identify as anarchists or require that a joining member be anarchist. To do so would weaken the union’s ability to fight the bosses and, ultimately, weaken the struggle against capitalism.

Simply put, an anarchist and anti-vanguardist perspective of revolution is that the social movements themselves are the revolutionary actors; their organizations will ultimately bring about a social revolution. The anarchist organization is not the vanguard leading the people to revolution. Rather, the anarchist organization offers genuine revolutionary direction to social movements and the exploited classes that make up those movements.

SOCIAL INSERTION AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

How do anarchists intend to engage with the broader classes that make up social movements? *Especifista* organizations argue that social insertion is the way that anarchists should engage with those broader classes. The importance of social insertion can’t be overstated. As the FARJ say, “Social work and insertion are the most important activities of the specific anarchist organization.”

Social insertion is about engaging in social movements and their organizations as genuine participants.

As participants in a revolutionary anarchist organization, we would then be participants and members of two or more organizations. Dual organizational orientation brings us into direct day-to-day contact with non-anarchists of the exploited classes, as they engage in organizing and struggle for their survival.

Within these organizations, revolutionary anarchists should openly advocate for our positions, even when in the minority, to clearly articulate the perspective that we offer. Our ideas of direct action, horizontal organizing, class struggle, and anti-capitalism should be openly discussed in the social movements as important strategic elements of gaining power for the social movement.

It is important to highlight that open advocacy does not mean that anarchists should attempt to capture leadership of these organizations or attempt to “ideologize” a social movement into an anarchist social movement. Instead, the purpose of open advocacy is to remind the broader social movements of the power that they hold and their ability to fundamentally restructure society.

Our revolutionary anarchist ideals will find traction in social movements through our influence as members of the social movement with a clear vision of a new world and with the organizing skill of long-term militants. This means that, as anarchists we will teach our ideas to our companions in struggle by “doing and showing” much more than by “talking and explaining.” Active engagement in building the social movement, doing the necessary day-to-day work to exemplify a strong grassroots social movement member,

and fighting on issues of survival for the exploited classes will grow our own influence.

Not only will engagement of this sort help the anarchist militants and organizers to grow their influence, but such direct activity is essential to informing their strategic and theoretical perspectives. A perspective divorced from the on-the-ground class struggle can’t possibly know the important local actors, the way they interact, and who to work with and how. Knowing these details will make us stronger organizers and better allies to those in our communities and social movements.

Actively breaking down the division between committed, organized anarchists and broader, but likely more reformist, social movements is particularly important in the United States. Since at least the 1950s leftist organizers have been actively, and sometimes brutally, separated from larger social movements. Over the decades, social movements have grown accustomed to having no revolutionary perspectives openly discussed and argued. At the same time, ideological groups have grown accustomed to having little or no influence in the arena of social movements. The result has been social movements afraid of asserting their own power and even more afraid of discussing “radical” ideas. On the other hand, ideological groups have developed a habit of creating perfect models of organizing that will never see the light of day and using them to denounce the social movements for failing in their mission. If we’re ever to see real change, the division between revolutionary anarchists and social movements must be broken down. Social movements need us, and we need them.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS NEED US

I find myself frequently speaking in anarchist circles. In these circles, I've noticed a strong understanding of all the ways in which social movements need anarchists and our perspectives. The anarchist critique on the strategies and tactics used by most movements are familiar. Unfortunately, these critiques are frequently used to denounce social movements and rationalize our lack of activity rather than to propose more meaningful ways in which to engage. However, revolutionaries engaged in social movements often agree with our perspectives and would also like to see them utilized.

One very obvious strategic perspective of anarchists that seems utterly lost on those in more reformist social movements is the trap that electoral and legislative campaigns really are. The anarchist perspective of direct action as the primary means to demand change is critical to redirecting energy in many social movements away from their failed reliance on electoral politics.

When unified and concerted activity by thousands of individuals is your primary source of power, as it generally is for social movements, hierarchical organization is a huge impediment to your own power. The notions of horizontal organization offered by anarchists allow for the individual rank-and-filer to have a genuine sense of ownership of their organizations and the decisions of those organizations, which in turn leads to more committed and concerted activity on the part of those members.

Many social movements exist specifically for empowering groups of people in exploited classes. In effect, this is participation in class struggle. Unfortunately, many such groups have

no intentional focus on class struggle. This confusion leads to serious strategic blunders in selecting allies, accepting funding, and granting influence. Without an understanding that the organization must build its own power to engage in class struggle more effectively, many organizations undermine themselves. They hand internal power over to those that would otherwise be class enemies, they accept funding with its many strings from those same enemies, and then wonder why they can't actually build power. In truth, they've been coopted as a symptom of their own deficient class consciousness.

In all of these situations, anarchism has a clear perspective to offer to social movements that would help them strengthen themselves. And if the anarchists involved were more interested in strengthening the social movement than they are in always being right, then they will know when and how to engage those internal debates.

WE NEED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

What many anarchist circles in the United States tend to forget is how important a real connection to broader social movements is for the anarchist tendency. Rooting the ideas of anarchism in the concrete day-to-day struggles of marginalized people gives anarchism a necessary grounding in reality.

In the immediate sense, there is a clear need for organizer training in the US anarchist movement. After decades of organizing largely in insular circles of other anarchists, we've lost many of the large-scale organizing and institution-creating skills that many of our predecessors possessed. The historic difficulties of keeping infoshops

and other anarchist spaces alive are an obvious result of these basic deficiencies. Given the recent excitement generated by the IWW, in the anarchist milieu one would expect greater growth in membership. The waxing and waning of local anarchist organizations is often less the result of some inherent problem with the notion of organization than it is the result of simply lacking basic organizational skill of local anarchists. Basic organization of meetings, maintenance of local publications, development of strong events and mobilizations, and building local institutions of our movements are all things that we could stand to learn from broader social movements.

Our collective weakness in organizing around peoples' everyday experiences and developing effective responses has led to another huge problem: a disconnect between anarchism and working-class communities and communities of color. These are precisely the communities where the self-emancipatory ideas of anarchism need to be rooted. And just as importantly, the daily experiences of these folks help to inform the strategies, tactics, and thinking of organizers. There is no way that the anarchist movement can claim to have any genuinely revolutionary potential without being rooted in those communities that most need revolution.

A deeply rooted connection to the realities of everyday people has a more profound impact than simply informing our organizing strategies and tactics; it also gives our ongoing theoretical development a similar connection to reality. Many modern theories emanating from the US anarchist milieu have very little meaningful connection to the realities

of marginalized people in our communities, and when we allow ourselves to remain only in these insular communities, we eventually have debates that are totally unintelligible to the people around us. If we intend to build mass movements, this disconnect and its widening nature should frighten us.

REVOLUTION, COUNTER-REVOLUTION, AND LESSONS LEARNED

The historical context of *especifismo* is important if we're to think about what it means for us today and the seriousness through which we should view these ideas. *Especifismo* came out of Uruguay after years of dictatorship. Despite having an incredibly powerful and influential anarchist movement in the early 1900s, Uruguay entered a dictatorial period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. During this period, some members of the FAU engaged in an intense process to learn what allowed them to lose their country to fascism and how to strengthen future anarchist efforts. *Especifismo* embodied the ideas that came from that process and which quickly found thoughtful adherents in many other South American countries that were similarly escaping dictatorship.

Similar conclusions were made by other anarchists after similar experiences. As the Spanish Revolution devolved into a prolonged civil war, with the fascists taking a more obvious advantage, the Friends of Durruti rose to defend the importance of a specifically anarchist revolution. In their statement, "Towards a Fresh Revolution," the Friends of Durruti extol the need to learn from the mistakes of the July revolution:

Revolutions cannot succeed if they have no guiding lights, no immediate objectives. This is what we find lacking in the July revolution. Although it had the strength, the CNT did not know how to mold and shape the activity that arose spontaneously in the street. The very leadership was startled by events which were, as far as they were concerned, totally unexpected. They had no idea which course of action to pursue. There was no theory. Year after year we had spent speculating around abstractions. What is to be done? The leaders were asking themselves then. And they allowed the revolution to be lost.

In Russia, anarchists were an essential part of the revolution. Anarchists there experienced one of the earliest betrayals as authoritarian communists destroyed the instruments of worker power that anarchists had helped to create and, ultimately, drove those anarchists out of the country. A few years later, based in France and looking back on the Russian Revolution, the group of Russian Anarchists called *Dielo Truda* spoke of their thoughts:

It was during the Russian Revolution of 1917 that the need for a general organization was felt most deeply and most urgently. It was during this revolution that the libertarian movement showed the greatest degree of sectionalism and confusion. The absence of a general organization led many active anarchist militants into the ranks of the Bolsheviks.

In the "Organizational Platform of the Libertarian Communists," *Dielo Truda* set out their ideas of the importance of an explicitly anarchist

organization built around a unity of theory and practice, as well as the role it would play and the methods it would utilize. "Anarchism is no beautiful fantasy, no abstract notion of philosophy, but a social movement of the working masses; for that reason alone it must gather its forces into one organization, constantly agitating, as demanded by the reality and strategy of the social class struggle."

Whether it was seeing the losses of an explicitly anarchist revolution in Spain or seeing their country devolve into fascism, the lessons of how an anarchist movement can have a greater impact on a larger scale are remarkably similar. If we hope to have any meaningful impact in the United States as the world goes through ongoing crises in global capitalism, we must consider these lessons seriously.

A QUESTION OF SCALE AND TIMING

We don't have time to learn these lessons in our own country. The political and economic reality of the world and the United States' role in the world is changing rapidly. The decline of the American standard of living, the approaching "minority majority," the weakening ability of the United States government to enforce its empire abroad, and impending ecological crises all make the status quo untenable for the elite as well as the exploited classes. Social upheaval will only increase in frequency. Spontaneous rebellion, whether militant or reformist, left or right, will happen.

Such uprisings and upheavals won't always go our way. They typically go the direction of those most capable of offering real or seemingly real answers to some or all people. Without a

well-organized anarchist movement capable of offering our ideals with the strategies and tactics to get us there, what makes us believe that any upheaval will move us towards true liberty, equality, and solidarity? I fear that if we don't actively work to further our influence and increase our skills in day-to-day political and economic organizing, the battle of ideas will be won by much worse people.

Could the approaching "minority majority" be used as a lightning rod for empowering racist and fascist tendencies amongst a scared white working class? The answer is yes, it already is. The membership of the Aryan Brotherhood is estimated as high as twenty thousand in and out of the prison system. The anti-immigrant sentiment of the Tea Party isn't hard to turn in a more explicitly fascist direction. What about the right wing "libertarians"? Is there any reason to believe that in a moment of social disruption that they wouldn't advocate for wholly private, for-profit policing to "secure order"?

These moments require us to do more than treat anarchism like an interesting book club. We need to engage in thoughtful, committed, and sincere organizing to prepare ourselves and our communities for the challenges that lie ahead. We need to develop an anarchism with deep roots in our struggling communities and work within those communities to develop a counter-hegemonic intellectual and organizing tradition. It is and always has been the only hope for achieving an anarchist future and is essential to defending against any drift towards fascism. It's apparent to me that *especifismo* offers vital lessons for us to learn exactly these things.

CLASS STRUGGLE ANARCHIST NETWORK AND BEYOND

While I write this, the local organization to which I belong, Rochester Red & Black, is engaged in a nationwide anarchist organization along with a number of other local and regional organizations in the United States. Many of these organizations are informed and inspired by the methods of organizing detailed by the *especifista* organizations in South America.

The development of this organization hasn't been easy. And I don't imagine that the ongoing organizing of the group will be easy either. It may last through to revolution, or it may fall apart. Either way, to go through the experiences and struggles with one another and develop such an organization is essential to building the anarchist movement in the US.

Personally, I have high hopes that such a formation will lead to an anarchist movement that continues to hold its revolutionary ideas while building real depth in our neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and families. Without a popular anarchism, we can't have a revolutionary anarchism.

THE HEIST OF EAST 13TH STREET: THEFT AND VALUE IN THE GENTRIFYING LANDSCAPE

JACKSON SMITH

Jackson Smith is a member of the collective that operates the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space (MoRUS), a storefront museum chronicling the Lower East Side in New York City's anti-gentrification struggle. The summer of 2013 he co-founded the MoRUS Film Fest. He is currently a graduate student in Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University.



On a sweltering final day of May, 2013 a handful of seasoned Lower East Side squatters gathered in C-Squat's storefront, otherwise known as the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space. Founded in part by a squatter, the museum is dedicated to the rich history of spatial reclamation efforts in the neighborhood. On this evening the squatters were brought together for an event titled "18 since 13," a commemoration of the eviction of 541 and 545 East 13th Street on May 30th, 1995. Radical priest Frank Morales spoke first. He read an impressionistic essay of his lingering hopes from that summer eighteen years ago, when squatters repeatedly battled to retake their buildings. Fly shared a slideshow of sensational news clippings and her sketches of demonstrations at the squats. Peter Spagnuolo read poetry and shared a slideshow, which included grainy photographs from the early 1980s depicting the rehabilitation of the 13th Street buildings. His presentation became an intimate conversation between himself, Frank, Fly, and several others in the room about the perils and adventures of rehabilitation work in these bombed out brick tenements. They swapped stories of diving into manholes to rig up illicit electricity and perching on wooden beams that were balanced precariously in multistory chasms. Peter gave a detailed

explanation of the construction and maintenance work at the 13th Street squats; such work included the installation of new floors and ceilings—helping to secure the longterm stability of the buildings—and tending to cracks in the supporting exterior walls. Some squats even required new roofs. These buildings were arguably saved by the efforts of squatters over the course of a decade and they are still standing today, though no longer as squats. The eviction of the squatters in 1995 and the theft of their buildings was a watershed moment in the consolidation of a gentrified landscape and paved the way for the Lower East Side Coalition of Housing Development to transform the buildings into nominally low income housing.

The squatters did more than maintain the physical shapes of the 13th Street buildings. While their efforts were certainly oriented around the preservation and improvement of their homes on the terrain of *use value*, their labor ultimately maintained and valorized the *exchange value* of the properties as well. Furthermore, the work that they undertook to save these buildings occurred in a rapidly gentrifying landscape, inflating the value maintained by the squatters and existing in the material shapes of their buildings.

By the early 1980s the city owned nearly 500 properties on the Lower East Side as a result of the social and economic disinvestment there during the 1960s and 1970s. The properties were seized through tax foreclosure, when the deteriorating conditions in the neighborhood and financial redlining convinced small scale landlords to abandon their properties *en masse*. These conditions provided the general impetus in the early 1980s for a new

round of real estate speculation that would later take shape as full fledged gentrification, as well as providing the material opportunity for the reclamation efforts of squatters. The conditions also ideally positioned the city to take a central role in redevelopment efforts. Against the backdrop of these political economic conditions, the story of the 13th Street squats demonstrates how city policy dictated the terms of the antigentrification struggle through what was effectively a divide-and-conquer strategy. Nominally antigentrification housing advocates partnered with the city to expropriate the exchange value produced through the work of squatters and expand the commodity circulation of buildings and land in the form of low income housing.

City policies in this respect operated in a twofold manner. First, subsidies¹ for low and moderate income redevelopment of city owned housing stock, combined with the selective allocation of this stock as a “scarce” resource managed by the city, exploited the emergent distinction between potential low income redevelopment partners and extra-market providers of low income housing, or squatters. The intensification of these divisions facilitated the expropriation of rehabilitated housing stock that had existed on the margins of market mechanisms. By artificially creating an atmosphere of pitched competition for usable housing space, city policies cast the squatters who inhabited much of this housing space as agents of gentrification and enlisted the moral support of community housing advocates in evicting them. Second, evicted buildings were transferred to low income housing organizations (such as mutual housing associations or public/

private development corporations) for redevelopment as low and moderate income housing. These forms of housing reintroduced relations of tenancy to the provision of low income housing and contained only limited restrictions to their eventual conversion to market rate rents and resale values. In this way, city policy utilized housing advocacy organizations as key redevelopment partners that both mitigated the effects of an antigentrification discourse and facilitated the consolidation of dominant property relations in the neighborhood. This trajectory is evident in the story of the 13th Street squats and offers valuable insight into contemporary antigentrification strategy, as well as efforts to address the contemporary foreclosure crisis through sweat equity squatting.

The deep division between squatters and other housing advocates in the late 1980s and early 1990s had its origins in the early 1980s. Under the leadership of Mayor Ed Koch, the city was searching for ways to rid itself of vacant housing stock. Meanwhile, community activists on the Lower East Side were beginning to organize against encroaching gentrification. These latter efforts were led by the Joint Planning Council (JPC), a loose coalition of housing advocacy organizations that was originally formed in the 1960s. In 1982 the JPC demonstrated the power it had built in the neighborhood through a parade to city hall that attracted around four thousand people. It was the visible manifestation of intensive efforts being undertaken by the JPC to put together an antigentrification development plan for the Lower East Side. This plan, announced in June of 1984, called for 1) all city owned property to be developed as low income housing; 2) the

establishment of a Special Community Preservation District; and 3) the creation of an enforcement apparatus to protect tenant rights and ensure low income redevelopment. The JPC brought the plan under consideration by Community Board 3, who eventually approved it and brought it to the city's attention. The plan was then ignored by the Koch administration for several years before a compromise was reached in 1987.²

During the same period the JPC led community efforts to defeat the Artist Home Ownership Program (AHOP), proposed by Mayor Koch as a way to dispose of some city owned housing stock in the neighborhood. This program called for sixteen abandoned tenements to be converted into artist housing through a public/private financing partnership.³ Developing housing exclusively for artists—albeit working and relatively low income artists—outraged housing activists in the neighborhood. In this manner, the program prefigured the city's divisive utilization of property allocation and development subsidies a decade later, when the city changed its focus from artists' housing to low and moderate income housing. Although the JPC's opposition to AHOP did not entail condemnation of its ulterior motives, such crude political maneuvering did not pass completely unnoticed by artists and activists. Artist and social critic Martha Rosler noted that the opposition to AHOP “ignored the political use of subsidies” and Jack Waters—a founding ABC No Rio artist—suggested that projects like AHOP “were veiled strategies that divided communities along racial, cultural and economic lines who should have otherwise been united

against oncoming gentrification.”⁴ However, AHOP was really little more than a veiled attempt to return city owned housing stock to commodity circulation—the plan allowed for market rate resale of the renovated apartments after just three years.⁵ Nonetheless, housing activists would have done well to connect the defeat of the ambitious AHOP program to the city’s later focus on low and moderate income housing to achieve the same ends.

The compromise brokered by Community Board 3 between the mayor’s office and the Lower East Side housing activists was made official in 1987 through the “Memorandum of Understanding.” In this memorandum—which was signed by the JPC—the city rejected the activists’ original demand that all city owned property be developed as low income housing. Instead, the plan called for market rate development of 50 percent of city owned property in the neighborhood. Subsidies generated from these profits would then fund the development of low and moderate income housing on the other 50 percent of city owned property. This compromise also, as sociologist William Sites has observed, transformed the JPC organizations from “protest and planning” groups to active redevelopment partners of the city—these housing advocates would be responsible for implementing the low income proviso of the compromise.⁶ While the transformation of housing advocacy organizations wrought by the crosssubsidy plan limited the scope of these antigentrification efforts, an alternative route toward the fulfillment of the plan’s low income requirements provoked a deeper contradiction in the struggle. The mutual

housing associations that evolved from the JPC were committed as much as possible to permanently preserving low income housing. The city, however, could receive low income “credit units . . . for *any* low- or moderate-income housing provided outside the mechanism of the mutual housing associations.”⁷ It is therefore unsurprising that the redevelopment efforts of the mutual housing associations were often overshadowed by public/private redevelopment schemes that offered tax credits and eventual resale rights to corporate funders of low and moderate income housing. These profitmaking schemes, moreover, appeared to be the city’s preferred method of nominally low income housing development on the Lower East Side. Furthermore, in addition to a trajectory toward market rate resale values (and therefore market rate rents), public/private redevelopment schemes necessarily operated on the terms of traditional tenancy and would therefore confront low income people as landlords.

The Lower East Side Coalition of Housing Development (LESCHD) was one of the most prolific of the public/private, corporate-backed redevelopment schemes. Headed by the conservative local politician Antonio Pagan, and further buoyed by his conservative coalition in the community, LESCHD partnered with the city to target squatted city owned buildings. In 1990 Community Board 3 approved a LESCHD redevelopment plan that included at least eight and as many as eleven squatted buildings, including some of the 13th Street buildings.⁸ During the early 1990s, as LESCHD sought to implement this plan, the divisions escalated between

squatters and other constituents of the antigentrification front in the neighborhood. Housing advocates that had aligned with Pagan and LESCHD often portrayed squatters as agents of gentrification, or as a destabilizing element working in the interests of real estate and the city. These adversaries charged the squatters with being a homogenous mass of white transplants to the neighborhood and often accused them of being drug dealers as well.⁹ In this manner, city policy and its reactionary allies on the Lower East Side effectively hijacked the antigentrification discourse and attached it to profit making low and moderate income housing developments that necessitated the evictions of squatters.

The 13th Street squatters, however, would not leave their buildings without a fight. Immediately after the buildings were threatened by the 1990 LESCHD plan, these squatters appealed directly to Community Board 3. Their argument against eviction rested upon three major points. First, the squatters had established a claim to social ownership over their buildings through several years of continuous inhabitation (and by 1995 over a decade, at least in the case of some residents), and for a brief period prior to eviction they sought legal title through adverse possession. Second, as has been noted above, their claim to social ownership was buoyed by the years of "sweat equity" that they had invested in their building. This work consisted of transforming buildings that were mere shells in the early 1980s into livable apartments by the early 1990s. As the squatters emphasized, the city likely would not have had buildings to offer to LESCHD on 13th Street if not for this labor. Their

efforts reversed patterns of building decay that led to the collapse of hundreds of poorly maintained buildings owned by the city throughout the five boroughs. Third, the squatters sought to dispel the negative conceptions of them that had begun to circulate in the neighborhood. In their request for support to Community Board 3, the squatters reframed themselves as the "East 13th Street Homesteaders" and wrote that their ranks, "contrary to the false impressions that some of their detractors are trying to create, include families and many minority people." In a flyer circulated throughout the neighborhood they noted, "squatters . . . are families with children . . . Vietnam Veteran . . . working black, latino, asian and white people." All of these arguments were inextricably tied to their nonmarket, social claim to ownership over their buildings. This claim was made possible through their commitment to mutual social support, a situation that was a far cry from the terms of traditional tenancy. The squatters understood the distinction between their work and the relations of tenancy that would be introduced by the low income housing proposed for their buildings, and they tried to articulate this distinction in their alternative social claim to ownership.¹⁰

Despite the threat of eviction in 1990, the squatters still held their buildings four years later. By then, however, the city and LESCHD were ramping up their efforts to remove the squatters and proceed with redevelopment plans. The final plan had yet to be approved by Community Board 3, so when the board met on September 29th, 1994 the squatters and their supporters showed up in force. More than eighty

people marched into the meeting with banners and drums. The vote could not proceed until a police barricade was erected. With just two votes against the LESCHD plan, the fate of 13th Street appeared sealed. The headline of the *New York Times* story about the board meeting sensationally read, “Squatters Vow a War,” and Peter Spagnuolo told the reporter, “We’ll barricade ourselves in our homes and they’ll have to use armed force to get us out.”¹¹ His words proved prophetic. After a winter and spring of unsuccessful last ditch efforts to use the courts to prevent eviction, the squatters braced themselves for battle. The city overcame the squatters’ legal challenges in an argument laced with brutal irony. Two of the buildings were supposedly in danger of imminent collapse and therefore the squatters would have to be immediately removed. This legal judgment cleared the path to eviction, despite the fact that the squatters had surely saved the buildings from probable collapse under city management. The ensuing May 30th eviction was an iconic moment of Mayor Giuliani era repression. The squatters did indeed barricade themselves inside of their homes—and barricaded the street with an overturned car— but the NYPD responded by rolling a blue and white armored tank down East 13th Street. It took hundreds of cops to evict the residents.

The city still faced legal obstacles to the eviction of the three other squats on East 13th Street, so the squatters continually attempted to retake 541 and 545 throughout the summer of 1995. On July 4th squatters took advantage of a fireworks display over the East River to burrow back into one of the evicted squats through a

hole made in the wall of an adjacent building. This action was just over a month after the original eviction and necessitated sneaking past a 24-hour police barricade.¹² By the end of the summer, however, it began to appear more and more unlikely that the squatters could retake 541 and 545—or even save the rest of the buildings. Near the end of the next summer the city cleared the final legal hurdles and quickly evicted the eighty or so remaining squatters in 535, 537, and 539 East 13th Street. In December the legal title to the five former squats was officially transferred to LESCHD for \$20,500, or \$500 each for 41 planned units.¹³ This money was paid to the city, which had earned it through evicting the squatters. Nothing, of course, was paid to the squatters, whose labor had maintained the use value, and therefore also the exchange value, of the buildings. According to tax records from November of 2012, the combined market value of 541 and 545 is \$3,513,000, while their assessed value is \$1,602,110.¹⁴ The assessed value reflects the gut renovation undertaken by LESCHD after receiving title to the buildings, but it also necessarily reflects the squatters’ work to maintain the structural integrity of the buildings prior to LESCHD renovations. While these buildings have theoretically offered low income housing in a neighborhood where it is sorely needed, this housing is provided in stark contrast to the system of mutual social support practiced by the squatters. Prior to the second round of evictions in 1996, Mayor Giuliani said, “It’s called dishonest. It’s called cheating. The squatters are basically people who are trying to chisel.”¹⁵ After the

city successfully removed these impediments to the development of the Lower East Side, after violently sending those property thieves packing—residents of East 13th Street now pay honest rent to their landlords, whether these are housing development corporations or not.

In a neighborhood that has come through to the other side of gentrification, the legacy of the antigentrification struggle is now enshrined in official record. The eleven squats that survived the 1990s campaign of expropriation became legitimate in a 2002 deal that also plunged them down a road of endless bureaucracy. After around half of the neighborhood's community gardens were bulldozed to make way for both luxury and low income housing, the remaining gardens operate with permission of the city's GreenThumb program.¹⁶ Even bicycling was once a flashpoint for contention in the gentrifying Lower East Side; the NYPD once bizarrely seized dozens of bicycles locked on the sidewalks around Tompkins Square Park in an apparent response to raucous critical mass rides. Now, however, Mayor Bloomberg nonchalantly champions the bank funded bicycle sharing program, without acknowledging the work of bicycle activists to get there. The founders of the Museum of Reclaimed Urban Space had these realities in mind when they began working to build the museum. They were frustrated with what they understood as the city "taking credit" for the widely accepted positive outcomes of the antigentrification struggle. Indeed, as is evidenced by the fate of the 13th Street squatters, the city took far more than credit. The second photograph of the museum's

introductory wall depicts the NYPD tank that helped the city claim over a decade of value invested in the buildings of 13th Street by squatters' labor. The story told by the museum helps us see the real social history that helped to transform the built form of the Lower East Side throughout the 1980s and 1990s. It demonstrates that the value embodied by century old tenements in the neighborhood is not merely a reflection of the movement of real estate capital back into the neighborhood, but also a reflection of the social activity and social struggle of residents there. But this story is also one of expropriation. It is in this respect that an anticapitalist struggle for housing—especially within the dual context of foreclosures and widespread gentrification—cannot rest upon a moral condemnation of evictions, but must identify the ways that state actions actively expropriate and commodify the value produced through the social activity—including squatting—in and around houses. While squatters are often portrayed as property thieves, we must spin it the other way and make it clear who is doing the thieving.

In transitioning neighborhoods the idea of property theft holds considerable currency. After the era of inner city disinvestment during the 1970s and 1980s, and the concomitant intensification of poverty and crime in these neighborhoods, the urban poor were perceived as "thieves" to the sensibilities of their more affluent and whiter neighbors. They were seen as having taken the city over from the respectable middle class. Late geographer Neil Smith interpreted this attitude through the *revanchism* of late 19th century Paris, where a reactionary bourgeois

constituency sought to exact revenge (*revanche*) on a post-Commune Paris. One century later, a politics of revenge was consolidated under the administration of Mayor Giuliani. The “theft” of the city would be redeemed through the wholesale evacuation of certain people—the homeless, the poor, the squatters—from certain neighborhoods like the Lower East Side.¹⁷

With a reinvigorated property market by the mid-1990s on the Lower East Side and elsewhere in the city, the character of the property thief was reimagined once again. The new thieves—struggling artists who snatch up derelict storefronts for their gritty gallery spaces or anticapitalist radicals living in low rent or abandoned buildings—were understood as the “foot soldiers” of gentrification. Like the front lines of a pillaging army, they run amok and take what is not theirs, helping to legitimize the wholesale confiscation of a neighborhood by real estate capital. But the question of who is or who is not a foot soldier is at least partly a matter of casting on the stage of state and capital intervention. As the theft of the 13th Street home-steads demonstrates, arguably more “community-based” antigentrification constituencies can also participate on the front lines of gentrification, and especially as they become active partners of public and/or private redevelopment schemes. Newcomer milieus in gentrifying neighborhoods consistently demonstrate social geographic amnesia, a willful forgetfulness that is compounded by their hypermobility, and are almost always on the front lines of cultural gentrification. However, they are usually no more able to behave as property thieves as they are to stay on

a rental contract for more than a year. So who exactly are the real property thieves in an increasingly gentrified urban landscape?

The battle lines should not be drawn in the sands of representation, but rather among the elements of the built form as real commodities, and in the ossified reality of class composition in a gentrifying neighborhood. An anticapitalist analysis, as well as the strategy that it informs, likewise should not stop at the aesthetic level of gentrification. If we ever hope to form strategies that might at least disrupt and forestall the theft of the city, we must probe deeper into the actual strategies of real estate capital and the state, and the collusion between these two forces. As the story of 13th Street demonstrates, the state and capital in a united front can be challenged by the alternative social ties forged in situations like squats, especially as these alternative social ties are rooted in the use of buildings and land, and even more especially as they can manifest in an affective web across entire neighborhoods. Therefore, an anticapitalist strategy must locate the terrain on which claims to the *use value* of buildings and land possess a socially transformative potential and then actively build upon this potential. Such practical insistence on the full realization of the use value of the urban built form might eventually be incompatible with the continued realization of the market value of the landscape. In other words, a practiced isolation of use value from exchange value holds the potential for a more durable de-commodification of the built form. These efforts will get nowhere, however, without a defense of their terrain and

therefore a contestation of the expropriation of this terrain by the state in order to realize the latent *exchange value* there. Despite the strength of our protests, this struggle nonetheless forms the provocation that—in the case of the 13th Street homesteads—inspired capital’s summoning of an unprecedented demonstration of state repressive powers behind an eviction. While we struggle for a revolutionary use of the urban landscape, they will be waiting to capitalize upon the value of our efforts. The heist on East 13th Street offers a vision of transformative social practices toward a revolutionary use of the city’s built form, but it is also a warning of the pitfalls that loom on the front of housing resistance.

ENDNOTES

1 For the sake of simplicity, “subsidies” here refers to a broad set of financial supports and incentives for housing development. These include tax credits for corporate funders, property tax abatements (such as the J51 abatement, which is still in effect for the low-income housing corporation currently managing 541 and 545 East 13th Street), and actual subsidization through the original cross-subsidy plan on the Lower East Side.

2 “This Land Is Ours Demonstration,” *The Quality of Life in Loisaída*, July-August 1982; “The Plan ~ El Plan,” *The Quality of Life in Loisaída*, July-August 1984; Janet Abu-Lughod, “Defending the Cross-Subsidy Plan: The Tortoise Wins Again,” in *From Urban Village to East Village: the Battle for New York’s Lower East Side*, ed. Janet Abu-Lughod (Oxford, UK; Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1994).

3 Martha Rosler, “The Artists Home Ownership Program,” in *If You Lived Here*:

The City in Art, Theory, and Social Activism, ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991); Grace Glueck, “The Mayor’s Lower East Side Story: Tenements into Co-Ops for Artists,” *New York Times*, Aug 11, 1981; Leslie Bennetts, “16 Tenements to Become Artists Units in City Plan,” *New York Times*, May 4, 1982.

4 Rosler, “The Artists Home Ownership Program;” Jack Waters, e-mail with the author, June 5, 2010.

5 Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, “The Fine Art of Gentrification,” *October* 31, no. Winter (1984).

6 William Sites, *Remaking New York: Primitive Globalization and the Politics of Urban Community*, Globalization and Community, v. 12 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 121–122.

7 Abu-Lughod, “Defending the Cross-Subsidy Plan.”

8 Andrew Van Kleunen, “The Squatters: A Chorus of Voices. . . But Is Anyone Listening?,” in *From Urban Village to East Village*, 292–293.

9 “Executive Director’s Report, LESCHD, INC,” October 2, 1990, Folder 15, Box 1, Squatters’ Rights Collection: Peter Spagnuolo Papers, Tamiment Library; Malve von Hassell, *Homesteading in New York City, 1978–1993: The Divide Heart of Loisaída*, Contemporary Urban Studies (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), 122; Kleunen, “The Squatters.”

10 1990, Request for support to Community Board 3 from East 13th Street Homesteaders, Folder 2, Box 1, Squatters’ Rights Collection: Peter Spagnuolo Papers, Tamiment Library; Kleunen, “The Squatters.”

11 Marvin Howe, “13th Street Plan Clears Latest Hurdle; Squatters Vow A War,” *New York Times*, Oct 2 1994.

12 David Stout, “The Tenement Battle Is Over, but Not the Fight,” *New York Times*,

Jul 6 1995; Shawn G. Kennedy, "Squatters of 13th Street vs. Power of City Hall; More Than a Symbolic Battle for Control," *New York Times*, Jul 12, 1995.

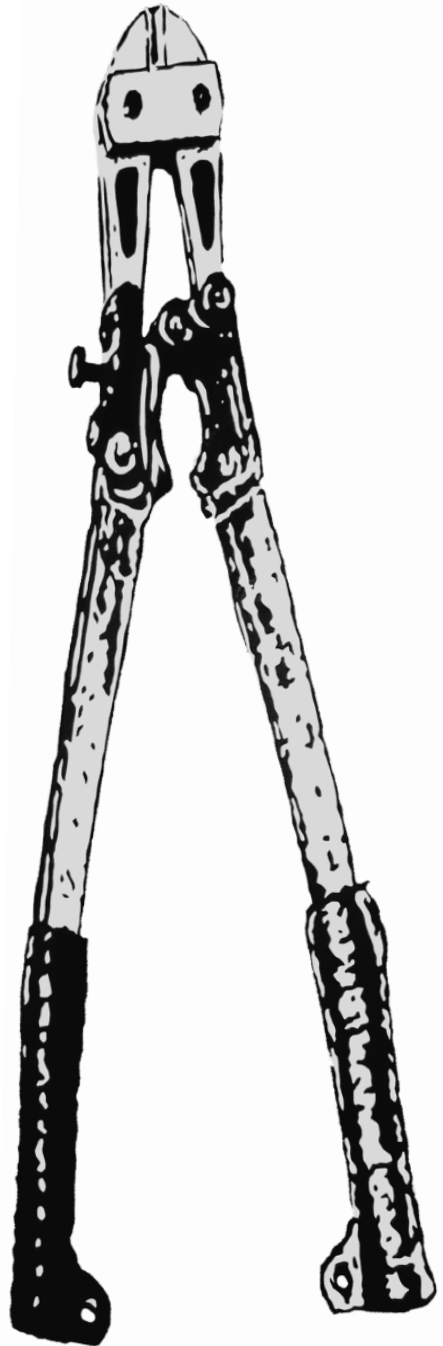
13 December 17, 1996, Deed for 535, 537, 539, 541, and 545 East 13th Street, between City of New York and Dora Collazo Plaza Limited Partnership (c/o Lower East Side Coalition of Housing Development), accessed through New York City Department of Finance ACRIS database. After purchasing the five buildings from the city for \$20,500, the Dora Collazo Plaza Limited Partnership (housed under LESCHD) apparently took out a mortgage on the properties worth over \$3 million. I am still attempting to make sense of this, including conducting further research on the post-squat life of these buildings.

14 November 30, 2012, Property Tax Bill Quarterly Statements for 541 and 545 East 13th Street, accessed through New York City Department of Finance ACRIS database.

15 Thomas J. Lueck, "Police Evict Squatters From Three City-Owned Tenements in the East Village," *New York Times*, Aug 14, 1996.

16 The Lower East Side has probably the largest concentration of community gardens in the nation, and there were once even more. Many of the gardens were started with a similar ethos as the squats; people saw so many empty lots and simply started cleaning them up and planting vegetables, rather than wait for official approval.

17 Neil Smith, "After Tompkins Square Park: Degentrification and the Revanchist City, in *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st-Century Metropolis*, ed. Anthony D. King (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996).





THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE: AN ANARCHIST PERSPECTIVE

A REVIEW OF *ANARCHISM AND
THE BLACK REVOLUTION: THE
IDEA OF BLACK AUTONOMY*,
LORENZO KOMBOA ERVIN
(DENVER: P&L PRESS, 2013)

JONATHAN W. HUTTO, SR.

Jonathan W. Hutto, Sr. helped initiate the Prince Georges County Maryland People's Coalition to halt a tide of police brutality and repression in the late 1990s. He then enlisted in the Navy and helped launch "An Appeal for Redress," which organized active duty military to end the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Jonathan returned to grassroots organizing and is currently pursuing a PhD at Howard University.

Anarchism and the Black Revolution is the political treatise of Lorenzo "Komboa" Ervin, an anarchist Black revolutionary and currently an organizer for the Black Autonomy Federation based in Memphis, Tennessee. Ervin served thirteen years in federal prison from 1970 to 1983 for hijacking a plane to Cuba. The hijacking was Ervin's response to a summons he received to appear before a grand jury in Memphis during the aftermath of the urban rebellions following Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968. First published in 1979 as a critique of the North American anarchist movement as being too white, middle class, and intellectual, this book provides an anarchist framework for the Black liberation movement and has now been republished by P & L Press. It is Ervin's desire to influence a new generation of Black activists and organizers by providing anarchist principles with the hope of building an autonomous movement independent of ruling-class, Communist, or liberal tendencies. The purpose of this book according to Ervin is:

To inspire an international anti-racist and anti-cop brutality federation, which would be anarchist-initiated or at least have large participation by anarchists; to create a coalition of anarchists and revolutionary autonomous people of

color organizations; and to spark new revolutionary ferment and organizations in the African-American and other communities of color, where anarchism is currently a curiosity, if those ideas are known at all. (Ervin, 9)

Ervin's ideology, which is best described as Black anarchism, was shaped through the cultural milieu of his upbringing and his practical engagement in social struggle. Ervin was born in the segregated apartheid American South in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1947. In 1960, he was baptized into the Black freedom struggle during his participation in a citywide desegregation campaign. Drafted into the Army in 1965, he would be court martialed for his anti-racist and anti-war activities within the ranks. After his dismissal from the Army, Ervin joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1967 under the leadership of H. Rap Brown, and then the Black Panther Party (BPP), when elements of SNCC's leadership began working in coalition with the BPP for a brief period. His early experiences with SNCC and the BPP, coupled with his introduction to anarchist philosophy through the teachings of Black anarchist Martin Sostre while incarcerated, helped shape Ervin's revolutionary outlook and political theory. It is Ervin's desire to spread anarchist ideas, not to lead people, but to teach them how to better organize themselves. In comparison to scholar activist contemporaries such as C.L.R. James and Huey P. Newton, Ervin's advocacy is a nexus between point of production and grassroots community organizing.

Ervin defines anarchism as Libertarian Socialism, an ideology that

seeks to unite individual self-interest with social wellbeing. In contrast with the Leninist Left, which seeks to seize State power, Ervin advocates the overthrow of all State power. According to Ervin, an anarchist fights for people power not political power. Ervin opposes all forms of domination and coercion, whether they come from a ruling class of corporate elites and their political structure within a capitalist society or a ruling party within a Leninist society. Ervin views the State itself, both in theory and in practice, as the root of all oppression within society when he says:

But what is the State? It is a political abstraction, a hierarchical institution by which a privileged elite strives to dominate the vast majority of people. The State's mechanisms include a group of institutions containing legislative assemblies, the civil service bureaucracy, the military and police forces, the judiciary and prisons and the sub-central State apparatus. The purpose of this specific set of institutions which are the expressions of authority in capitalist societies (and in so-called "socialist States"), is the maintenance and extension of domination over the common people by a privileged class, the rich in Capitalist societies, the so-called Communist party in State Socialist or Communist societies like the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). (Ervin, 46)

ERVIN VIS-À-VIS JAMES

C.L.R. James, born in Trinidad in 1901, was one of the leading voices and advocates of class struggle during the twentieth century. James was a prolific writer authoring numerous works, such as *World Revolution*

(1937), a history of the rise and fall of the Communist International and *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938), an acclaimed history of the Haitian Revolution. James began his activist career in his youth by writing short stories against colonialism. By the early 1930's, he was an adherent of Leon Trotsky while working in London. During the lead up to Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, James would champion the ideology of Pan-Africanism while chairing the organization African Friends of Ethiopia. It was during the struggle against Mussolini's fascism that he became close friends with George Padmore, another leading Black voice for class struggle. Both James and Padmore would become disillusioned with the Soviet Union due to its alliance-making with imperial powers while compromising its stance against colonialism. In the late 1930's, James debated Trotsky on the Negro question, believing Southern Blacks in America would develop their movement independent of the Communist Party thereby making a contribution to the broader anti-imperial struggle. By the mid-1950s, James concurred with Ervin's view on the function of the State and Leninist parties, disavowing all Leninist parties and becoming an adherent of shop floor point of production organizing. The model for James, through his 1956 work *Facing Reality*, was the Hungarian Revolution which challenged the hegemony of the USSR and demanded direct people power through workers councils rather than a dictatorial State of bureaucrats. Concerning the Hungarian Revolution's contrast with the rule of traditional Leninist parties, James says:

One of the greatest achievements of the Hungarian Revolution was to destroy once and for all the legend that the working class cannot act successfully except under the leadership of a political party. If a political party had existed to lead the revolution, the political party would have led the revolution to disaster, as it has led every revolution to disaster during the last thirty years. There was leadership on all sides, but there was no party leading it. The parties, the administrators and the planners have claimed always that without them society will collapse into anarchy and chaos. We are the various groups in every country who have seen that the totalitarian State and the Welfare State are both varieties of State capitalism. We know that nothing but the reorganization of society from the ground up can check the accelerating disintegration. (James, 10)

While both James and Ervin oppose vanguard parties and State bureaucracies, Ervin has a broader vision of organizing the working class which encompasses James worker council model along with community organizing. Ervin is an advocate of an International Black Labor Federation modeled after the League of Revolutionary Black Workers which was an outgrowth of the Dodge Revolutionary Movement (DRUM) of Detroit in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ervin envisions point of production organizing as a spark and catalyst toward mobilizing the entire Black community against capital with a special emphasis on the unemployed. Ervin advocates for a Black workers movement to organize unemployment councils, sparking a movement of the unemployed:

The employed and unemployed must work together to struggle against the Boss class if they are to obtain any serious gains against low wages and poverty during this period of economic crisis. The unemployed, who would even walk the picket lines with workers and refuse to scab just to get a job, could support workers who are on strike or protesting the boss. In turn, workers would form an unemployed caucus in their trade unions to allow union representation of these workers and also force such unions to provide food and other necessities, make funds and training available to the unemployed, as well as throw the weight of the unions into the fight for decent jobs and housing for all workers. The Capitalist bosses will not be moved otherwise. (Ervin, 182)

ERVIN AND NEWTON

Ervin finds common ground with Huey P. Newton's analysis of the need for organizing those considered unemployables. Newton, along with Bobby Seale, co-founded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in 1966. The spark and catalyst for the party was the rampant police brutality and repression taking place against the Black population of Oakland, California. The BPP organized armed self-defense units against the daily onslaught of the police which Newton, Seale and other party members referred to as "pigs." By 1967, California Governor Ronald Reagan, along with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, considered Newton and the Party the greatest threat to the internal security of the United States and targeted the BPP through its infamous Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). The ruling class of the United States took great exception

to a disciplined organization of Black men and women committed to defending their community by any means necessary while also providing for the people's basic needs. The lumpen Black proletariat was the primary basis of the Panther's focus through their survival programs and community advocacy, which included no-cost breakfast programs for youth along with sickle cell anemia testing for the community. However, Ervin's vision is a contrast to Newton's belief that Blacks are the vanguard of the struggle through the BPP. Newton espoused:

We say that Black people are the vanguard of the revolution in this country, and since no one will be free until the people of America are free, that Black people are the vanguard of world revolution. We don't say this in a boasting way. We inherit this legacy primarily because we are the last, you see, and as the saying goes, "The last will be first." (Hilliard and Wise, 194)

Ervin believes Blacks are positioned to strike first at the system due to the dual nature of Black oppression which is based on race and class. Nevertheless Ervin rejects vanguardism, believing the initial strike at capital from Blacks will ignite the entire working class (of all races and ethnicities):

Although anarchists do not believe in vanguard political parties, the reality is that because of the peculiarities of the United States of America's social development and especially racial slavery, Africans in America and other peoples of color with a shared history, are predisposed to lead at least the beginning stages of social revolution,

thereafter enlisting or being joined by its potential allies in the white working class. (Ervin, 105)

Ervin also differs with Newton's belief in "progressive States" and the ability of the State to bring about world socialism. For Ervin, the State is the basis for all oppression, while Newton believes in the notion of progressive States, leading to his belief in revolutionaries being able to seize State power through vanguard parties in the people's interest. Newton articulates this progressive State model in a speech given at Boston College in 1970:

Socialism would require a socialist State, and if a State does not exist how could socialism exist? So how do we define certain progressive countries such as the People's Republic of China? How do we describe certain progressive countries or communities as we call them, as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea? How do we define certain communities such as North Vietnam and the provisional government in the South? How do we explain these communities if in fact they too cannot claim nationhood? We say this: we say they represent the people's liberated territory. (Newton, 33)

Newton believed US imperialism prevented these progressive States from claiming statehood. By 1970, Newton and the Panthers progressed from being revolutionary nationalists to subscribing to an ideology of Inter-Communalism. Newton believed the US had risen to empire status, eliminating all nation-states, thereby creating a world of communities connected by US imperialism and oppression. It was Newton's hope this "reactionary communalism"

could be transformed into revolutionary communalism. Newton also articulated this position in his Boston talk:

We see very little difference in what happens to a community here in North America and what happens to a community in Vietnam. We see very little difference in what happens, even culturally, to a Chinese community in San Francisco and a Chinese community in Hong Kong. We see very little difference in what happens to a Black community in Harlem and a Black community in South Africa, a Black community in Angola and one in Mozambique. We see very little difference. So, what has actually happened is that the non-State has already been accomplished, but it is reactionary. The Black Panther Party would like to reverse that trend and lead people of the world into the age of Revolutionary Intercommunalism. This would be the time when the people seize the means of production and distribute the wealth and the technology in an egalitarian way to the many communities of the world. (Newton, 33)

Ervin espouses African Intercommunalism. This encompasses Newton's belief in the interconnectedness of imperial oppression while advocating against the construct of nation-states and pushing for an international Black labor movement to connect with liberation movements on the ground rather than heads of States. Ervin elaborates on his ideas of African Intercommunalism:

The anarchist ideals lead logically to internationalism or more precisely transnationalism, which means beyond the nation-state as an institution. Anarchists

foresee a time when the nation-state will cease to have any positive value at all for most people and will in fact be junked by a social revolution. But that time is not yet here and until it is, we must organize for inter-communalism, or world relations between African/people of color in America and other communities, tribes, neighborhoods and their revolutionary social movements around the world, instead of building unity with their governments and heads of state. (Ervin, 217)

Ultimately, Ervin is calling for a new Black protest movement which not only challenges the State but also the Black liberal establishment. For him, the most progressive aspect of the civil rights movement was its autonomous formation. The leadership of the movement had to deal with the upsurge of activism from the masses, evident by the rebellions in cities such as Watts, Detroit, Newark, and Buffalo which were not led or initiated by trained leaders. Dr. King had to address the poverty of the northern ghetto and the War in Vietnam to remain relevant to the movement. The Civil Rights movement sprung from the depths of Black oppression in the American South. Black left radicalism of the 1930s and 1940s was defined through the prism of Marxism. Hence, leading Black advocates during the depression era, such as Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Dubois, were also supporters of Communist Russia. Hence, the Civil Rights movement was not controlled from the outside by the Communist Party, such as the National Negro Congress of the 1930s which was chaired by Asa Phillip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. James affirms Ervin views on autonomy

when he says:

The American Negroes did not wait for the Vanguard party to organize a corps of trained revolutionaries, including Negroes, to achieve their emancipation. They have gone their own way, and in intellectual matters (for example, the study of Negro History) as well as in practical, they have in the past twenty-five years created a body of political achievement, both in striking at discrimination and influencing American civilization as a whole, which makes them one of the authentic outposts of the new society. (James, 150)

However, Ervin has sharp critiques of the civil rights movement, including its reliance on liberal politicians, protective legislation, and charismatic leadership. Ervin's desire is to elevate our present struggle to a more grass-roots movement relying less on the established political structure and more on the people themselves to radically change the basis of society. Ervin's hope is to integrate new tactics in the movement such as a Black Tax Boycott, a National Rent Strike, and a boycott of American businesses which would be expanded to a Black general strike as the initial spark of an overall working-class strike against the capitalist State. As an alternative to the State, Ervin advocates for the Black commune with its own subsistence economy and political structure to further undermine the people's reliance upon the state for their basic needs.

Ervin's book is challenging. The notion of living in an anti-authoritarian society stimulates and intrigues the senses of any activist or scholar that has ever struggled with issues of social progress.

This book hits at the very core of our socialization. Most if not all societies advocate that their young and working class respect and submit to authority. This has a negative impact on a community struggling with historical systems of oppression where the authorities enforce racial and class stratification. Hence the youth of Birmingham in 1963, most of whom went against the wishes of their parents, rebelled against the establishment represented by Bull Connor in order to bring Jim Crow to its knees. The same scenario presented itself to young SNCC activists, many of whom also went against the desires of their families and communities to risk their lives in the freedom struggle.

More recently, the State judicial system of Florida found George Zimmerman not guilty for the murder of Trayvon Martin. President Barack Obama's response was simply, "we're a nation of laws and we must respect the verdict." The electoral support of ninety plus percent of America's Black population could not alter a President's views on the Martin verdict despite the race of the Commander in Chief. Ultimately, the President serves the interest of the State, which has been in opposition to the interest of the Black masses from its beginnings.

Ervin presumes one's class background determines one's class aspirations. His advocacy is focused on Blacks at the margins of society, but being born within the underclass does not make one an automatic class warrior. The proletariat is drowned in individualist messages daily from mass media on how one can "make it" in this society. While advocating for the Black underclass, Ervin advocates for serious ideological training among this segment

to win them over to the need for a long-term struggle for social transformation. Unfortunately, ideological training has not been a strong, consistent factor in many of our movement organizations and we should rectify that.

Anarchism and the Black Revolution is a solid blueprint for anyone desiring to build a social justice movement based in the Black working class that is anti-oppressive, autonomous and seeks to link up with other freedom organizations across the progressive spectrum. In the end, Ervin and other Black autonomy activists struggle for a Stateless, classless, voluntary cooperative federation of decentralized communes based upon social ownership, individual liberty, and autonomous self-management of social and economic life.

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REFUSING THE PLANETARY WORK MACHINE

A REVIEW OF *REVOLUTION AT
POINT ZERO: HOUSEWORK,
REPRODUCTION, AND FEMINIST
STRUGGLE*, SILVIA FEDERICI
(OAKLAND: PM PRESS, 2012)
AND *IN LETTERS OF BLOOD
AND FIRE: WORK, MACHINES,
AND THE CRISIS OF CAPITALISM*,
GEORGE CAFFENTZIS (OAKLAND:
PM PRESS, 2013)

KEVIN VAN METER

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Organizing to Make a Revolution Possible*
(Team Colors, 2010).*

In the immediate aftermath of the Seattle World Trade Organization protests in 1999, at the peak of the counter globalization cycle of protest, I stumbled into an office at Long Island's Hofstra University. Amongst piles of books and photocopied lefty fliers I found a copy of the Midnight Notes collection *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War, 1973-1992*¹ and had a chance encounter with feminist activist-scholar Silvia Federici. Since then I—and the Team Colors Collective, in which I participate—have drawn on the work of Federici and the Wages for Housework Campaign of which she was part, philosopher George Caffentzis and historian Peter Linebaugh of the Midnight Notes Collective, and economist Harry Cleaver, who, along with Caffentzis and Linebaugh, wrote as part of the short-lived Zerowork Collective that predated Midnight Notes. I do not offer this personal introduction as a justification for celebrating the release of these two collections, as much as they should be celebrated; rather, I do so because revolutionary politics are “something, which in fact happens” in “human relationships,” as E.P. Thompson offered.

In what follows I explore the history that situates this work and review the concepts and ideas offered by Federici's *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist*

Struggle and Caffentzis's *In Letters of Blood and Fire: Work, Machines, and the Crisis of Capitalism*.²

A SHORT, INCOMPLETE HISTORY OF AUTONOMIST MARXISM IN THE UNITED STATES

In the “Introduction” to *Reading Capital Politically*, Harry Cleaver proposes a “political-strategic reading” of Marx's *Capital* that takes the perspective of working-class struggle. Cleaver argues, “[R]evolutionary strategy cannot be created from an ideological critique; it develops within the actual ongoing growth of working-class struggle” (Cleaver 2000, 57). He then locates this perspective in a series of heretical Marxist organizations that he broadly defines as purveyors of an “autonomist” politics. Beginning with the publication of the 1947 pamphlet *The American Worker* by autoworker Paul Romano and Ria Stone (pen name of Raya Dunayevskaya), Autonomist Marxism was forged in 1950s Detroit in the former-Trotskyist Johnson-Forest Tendency and subsequent organizations Correspondence Publishing Committee and Facing Reality. These organizations, each with their own publishing arm, included figures such as Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James, Works Projects Administration Historian and documentarian of American slavery George Rawick, retired factory worker and Wayne State Professor Martin Glaberman, and Chinese-American Detroit luminary Grace Lee Boggs.

The connections between the Detroit-Torino auto industry and *The American Worker* resonated with Raniero Panzieri, Romano Alquati, Mario Tronti, and Antonio Negri in various journals-qua-organizations *Quaderni*

Rossi (Red Notebooks) and *Classe Operaia* (Working Class). These projects drew on the Johnson-Forest Tendency, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and various ultra-left tendencies in the Italian Communist Party. Following the 1969 Hot Autumn in the Fiat factories and corresponding student struggles, a new phase of struggle in the social factory was launched with figures such as Paolo Virno, Sergio Bologna, and Franco “Bifo” Berardi, and similar journal-organization hybrids were launched including *Lotta Continua* (Continuous Struggle) and *Potere Operaio* (Workers Power). The Detroit-Torino proletariat attacked capital at its highest points of concentration in the auto industry. Subsequently, working class struggle in the auto industry pushed capital to seek new areas for accumulation. Hence capital moves the factory model beyond the factory gates to encompass all of society, in what Autonomist Marxists have termed the “social factory.”

The working class response to the development of the social factory was typified in Italy under the broad movement called *Autonomia*, which in turn traveled to Germany via the squat movement exemplified by the *Autonomen*, and was developing in the US and UK during the same period. Militants Paolo Carpinano and Ed Emery, the latter of Red Notes in the UK, served as conduits of this discourse, as did Federici, who was at the heart of the US-wing of the International Wages for Housework Campaign. Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa initiated the Campaign, based in London and Pauda, Italy respectively, and circulated its call via Dalla Costa’s monumental *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. With the advent of

the feminist movement in Italy, the UK, and the US, Wages for Housework took Autonomist Marxism in a different direction than its initial focus on male autoworkers. Herein the Campaign centered the housewife and the unpaid reproductive work they performed, thus furthering the discourse on the social factory.

As a result of the work of the Campaign in the US, and in New York City particularly, a men’s group came together to form Zerowork and launched a corresponding journal. The initial meetings in New York included members of Facing Reality, Wages for Housework, and featured Cleaver, Caffentzis, Linebaugh, and others. Zerowork released two journals in 1975 and 1977 respectively (and produced an unreleased third) before splitting, with Cleaver moving to Austin, TX and a number of remaining members launching Midnight Notes, along with Bostonian educator Monty Neill.

At this time New York City was in the midst of the Fiscal Crisis, mass firing of CUNY faculty, and repression of social movements that echoed the 1979 mass arrest of Italian militants. New York was entering ‘midnight’ with the endless imposition of work, while Cleaver continued to argue that capital was moving toward ‘zero’ work in Austin amidst the tech boom. The Midnight Notes collective, which continued until recently, along with Zerowork, was amongst the first to theorize the importance of the NYC Fiscal Crisis for future International Monetary Fund / World Bank structural adjustment programs. Furthermore, they contributed key analysis on the importance of hydrocarbons—wood, coal, oil, gas—and uranium for neoliberal

capital, intervened in the antinuke movement, described the process of “new enclosures” (i.e. structural adjustment, privatization of land and forced urbanization/proletarianization, increasing penetration of capital into everyday life), and furthered the Zapatista slogan “one no, many yesses.”

As the 1980's began Autonomist Marxism found its expression in the continuing work of the Midnight Notes collective and with the related project Processed World that was launched in San Francisco. Initiated by Chris Carlsson, who would later go on to found Critical Mass, and feminist Caitlin Manning, Processed World focused on the new forms of work, specifically temporary office work and precarious labor. Combining the aforementioned projects with influences such as the Situationist International, early punk rock, and a playful San Francisco counter culture, Processed World participated in various street actions and theatre in addition to an irregularly published journal.

REVIEWING *REVOLUTION AT POINT ZERO* AND *IN LETTERS OF BLOOD AND FIRE*

In *Revolution at Point Zero*, Federici locates the beginnings of the Wages for Housework Campaign in the Welfare Rights Movements rather than the assumed burgeoning white, middle-class feminist movement. It is these various perspectives that Federici utilized in her organizing with the Campaign in New York, and appear in *Revolution at Point Zero* as well as her well-received 2004 volume *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Moreover, her “Counter-planning in the Kitchen” written with Nicole

Cox, is an application of Bill Watson's “Counter-planning on the Shop Floor” to unwaged work, and further illustrates her position within the Autonomist tradition. “Counter-planning in the Kitchen” offers an important remark— “[p]ower educates” (37). Specifically, against the liberal notion that racialized, gendered, and other oppressive behaviors change through education or changes in consciousness, Federici and Cox argue that the education process comes through refusal, struggle, and political recomposition.³

Revolution at Point Zero opens with Federici's 1975 essay “Wages against Housework.”⁴ Challenging the notion that the wages for housework demand was simply about the figure of the housewife and wages due, she argues that “[w]ages for housework [...] is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it forces capital to restructure social relations in terms more favorable to us and consequently more favorable to the unity of the class” (19). Put clearly, the demand is for the unwaged work of social reproduction—that is, the reproduction of a particularly important commodity for capital: the workers' ability to work— to be recognized as such through its refusal. Hence the refusal of gendered, unwaged work is part of class struggle and a class project beyond capital's imposition of such work. Earlier in the chapter she notes, “women have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatized way. The problem, then, becomes, how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and the bedroom and into the streets” (18). Here I see reflections of the women's consciousness-raising

movement of the time but with an added class struggle component. By the 1980s capital was in the process of restructuring its technical composition and attempting to decompose the power that various sectors of the working class obtained in the previous cycle of struggle. In "The Restructuring of Housework and Reproduction in the United States in the 1970s" she argues, "[t]he clearest evidence that women have used the power of the wage to reduce their unpaid labor in the home has been the explosion of the service sector in the '70s. Cooking, cleaning, taking care of children, even problem solving and companionship have been increasingly 'taken out of the home' and organized on a commercial basis"(49). The predictive quality of these comments should be obvious, as the new forms of labor that capital has developed in the advancing decades has simply created a sector of low waged 'housework' performed in others homes while maintaining, and even increasing the imposition of, unwaged housework. Federici argues in her later chapters that what is now called affective work (the "service industry") is simply capital taking the demand of wages for housework to extreme levels by imposing a form of low waged housework upon the planetary working class, most specifically poor women of color. Finally, Federici calls attention to the need to center reproductive work in our movements: "We cannot build an alternative society and strong self-reproducing movements unless we redefine in more cooperative ways our reproduction and put an end to the separation between the personal and the political, political activism and the reproduction of everyday life"(147).

In Letters of Blood and Fire commences with Caffentzis' monumental "The Work/Energy Crisis and the Apocalypse". Originally published in 1980s *No Future Notes: the Work/Energy Crisis & The Anti-Nuclear Movement*, listed as Midnight Notes number two, "Work/Energy Crisis" finds Caffentzis at the apex of his powers. Using multifarious language, he decodes the magic of the market and the energy crisis of the late 1970s. Amongst a wide range of concerns—the state of the antiwar movement, increased imposition of unwaged work on women, the shifting technological composition of capital, theory of machines—he offers two particular cogent insights, amongst many: first, capital transforms value from low sectors (unwaged, service, factory, and farm work) to high sectors (finance, energy); and second, not unrelated, capital seeks "low entropy" workers. "The less the entropy, the greater the 'efficiency' [and less resistance offered]: hence the greater the work/energy ratio, the greater the profit" he states (55).

In Letters of Blood and Fire contains three sections, beginning with the imposition of work, continuing with the theory of machines (a rich discussion that counters the often dismissive analyses of technology that predominate among radicals today), and concludes in understanding capitalist crisis and its origins in class struggle.⁵ Taking each chapter in kind might abscond with the red thread that ties these pieces together, and Caffentzis's writing, while stirring and written with a question/answer approach, could confuse those not familiar with these discourses. Thus, it's worth describing two aspects of this thread: first, how "counterplanning from the shop floor to the kitchen"(4)

reveals class composition; and second, how centering class autonomy in the understanding of capitalist crisis illuminates various possibilities for class struggle and in turn critiques those who see crisis as a result of the internal contradictions of capital. On this second point, crisis in capitalism according to Marxian theorists such as David Harvey, Paul Sweezy of *Monthly Review*, and others, is caused by the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, a crisis of overaccumulation, or the internal contradictions of capitalism; herein the role of working class struggle in causing crisis in capitalism is secondary if it appears at all.

Against these analyses, Caffentzis urges us to “read the struggles,” by assessing how struggles are politically composed, how the struggles are overthrowing “capitalist divisions,” how they are reaching their limits and directly confronting the technical composition of capital. By centering class struggle, and the autonomy of the working class from capital, the working class becomes a living, political project rather than a “structure” or “category.” Further contained within this insight is the notion that in refusing work (which encompasses “counterplanning”) in its waged and unwaged forms, the working class moves from a class ‘in itself’ (technically composed for capital) toward being ‘for itself’ (politically composed against and beyond capital), as revealed in struggles. Further, “[f]or much of the history of the working class, this power to be able to refuse work has been rooted in the existence of common property resources or commons that people could access independent of their status as waged workers.” (249) Hence, the struggle ‘for itself’ contains elements of the commons and practices of commoning.

Autonomist Marxism, and this is clear in Caffentzis’s work, sees the seeds of the new society—counterplanning, self-reproducing movements, commoning—as material rather than ideological seeds in the shell of the old.

Revolution at Point Zero and *In Letters of Blood and Fire* are not collected works nor are they illustrative of the broad scope of these militants’ contributions. Rather, as much of their prior solo and collaborative work, these collections function as particular interventions: Federici’s into the continued gendered nature of social reproduction and the need for movements to center their own self-reproduction, Caffentzis’s into Marxian crisis and machine theory as well as the continued imposition of work. Radicals interested in this American legacy ought to supplement these collections with the work of Midnight Notes, including the aforementioned *Midnight Oil, Auroras of the Zapatistas: Local and Global Struggles in the Fourth World War* (2001), *New Enclosures* (1990), and the more recent *Promissory Notes: From Crisis to Commons* (2009) addressing the current fiscal crisis. Further, Federici’s recent collection serves as a complement to her ingenious *Caliban and the Witch* and various articles on witch-hunts. A collection of materials from Federici and Caffentzis’s years in Africa is yet to be compiled.

There are various resonances between the collections. Caffentzis includes “Mormons in Space” co-written with Federici, and while the Wages for Housework “Copernican Revolution” is omnipresent, his final chapter “On the Notion of a Crisis of Social Reproduction: A Theoretical Review” directly engages with the

material in *Revolution at Point Zero*. Additionally, Federici draws on the larger literature of refusal of work, Marxian crisis theory, and Autonomist Marxism, while critiquing the search for a particular revolutionary subject and the latent Leninism of Negri, Hardt, and others; Caffentzis complements this by arguing that “immaterial labor” does not in fact exist. These similarities are unsurprising as Federici and Caffentzis have been partners and political comrades for forty years.

CONTINUED IMPORTANCE OF HYDROCARBONS, REPRODUCTIVE LABOR, AND REFUSAL OF WORK

Federici and Caffentzis (as well as their comrades in *Midnight Notes*) have illustrated the continued importance of hydrocarbons (wood, coal, oil, gas) and uranium, reproductive labor (unwaged housework), and the refusal of work (struggles of waged and unwaged workers against and beyond the wage) for our present moment. To conclude I briefly review these concepts and then read them as tools and weapons for contemporary anarchist and radical currents.⁶

Hydrocarbons, along with labor-power, is a base commodity that in turn affect all other commodities in a capitalist society; the energy sector, as the intersection of both, thus holds a particularly important place for class struggle. Moreover, “energy” is in fact work, as value is transferred from low sectors (unwaged, service, factory, and farm work) to high sectors (in this case energy). The anti-nuke movement, of which Federici and Caffentzis were active participants and commentators, effectively prevented capital from using nuclear power as an option for

accumulation. In a similar fashion, current climate change, anti-fracking, pipeline, and mountain top removal struggles have a role in defending the earthly commons in addition to resisting the ability of capital to plan.

Reproductive Labor serves to conceptualize the myriad of services and tasks, predominately performed by women and those outside of the gender binary, which reproduce labor-power. This encompasses both unwaged reproductive labor and a significant sector of female laborers “employed in the service sector and [as] domestic labor” [who have] migrat[ed] from the Global South to the North” (71). This underlying materiality of reproductive labor is suffering under an increasing imposition of work as welfare benefits are cut, state services are pawned off to the non-profit sector, and the continued precariousness of waged work leaves the working class seeking other avenues for reproduction. To this complex set of realities and struggles, Federici proposes the centering of reproduction in revolutionary movements, in what she calls “self-reproducing movements.” This strategic assemblage takes a few forms: “recognizing domestic work as work” (Federici 2012, 8 and Caffentzis 2013, 269-270), in both unwaged and waged forms; active solidarity with those refusing this work and wages’ struggles associated with this work; and “undoing the gendered architecture of our lives and reconstructing our homes and lives as commons” (148).

Refusal of Work when read through a particularly American counter-cultural lens becomes the simple rejection of work and celebration of slack, as tends to happen in our contemporary radical movements. Rather, the rich tradition

of Autonomist Marxism in Europe, America, and elsewhere views the refusal of work as a temporal reality at the core of capital—the class antagonism. Refusing forms of unwaged and waged work make this work visible. With the left abandoning struggles around wages and only giving tacit comment to debtor-creditor struggles, revolutionaries have the opportunity to organize against precaritization, divisions of labor, and the imposition of work.

Finding ourselves in the post-Occupy moment, or may I suggest malaise, anarchist and radical movements are apparently stuck in the search for a singular revolutionary subject, the simplistic attraction of moralistic arguments, and the pairing of the desire for immediate results with the rapid turnover of movement participants. Refusing the planetary work machine whilst constructing common resources and common practices can be scaled “all the way down” to everyday lives and “human relationships”—and address the current stuckness of radical movements by reading class conflict from the perspective of working class struggle. Herein mountain top removal is simultaneously about preventing ecological destruction and the capitalist use of energy, debt resistance is concerning debt and the lost wages and incomes that debt represents, and the refusal of unwaged reproductive labor resists the imposition of care-work as it seeks to create relationships based on care-giving. And in turn, refusing the endless imposition of work is about wages due and a world without such an imposition. This “political-strategic reading” begs the question: where do we see refusals against the planetary work machine and what is the political

composition of these struggles? It is here—in reading working class struggle as it exists rather than as a “structure” or “category”—where we can begin to develop anarchist and radical movements that move.

REFUSING THE PLANETARY WORK MACHINE

Caffentzis, never to miss an opportunity to address the pressing issues of the day, gave a retirement speech at the end of the Spring 2013 semester. As an active participant in Strike Debt and other campaigns, he titled the talk: “My Penance, Student Loan Debt.” Caffentzis’s, as well as Federici’s, recent interventions in the Occupy and Student Loan Debt movement—calling for jubilee—is just the most recent action in a long, illustrious career as militants, revolutionaries, and theorists. Refusing the planetary work machine concomitant with the practices of commoning has been the thrust of their solo and collaborative work. *Revolution at Point Zero* and *In Letters of Blood and Fire* thus serve as introductions to the thought of Federici and Caffentzis and as a node in a much larger undertaking.

ENDNOTES

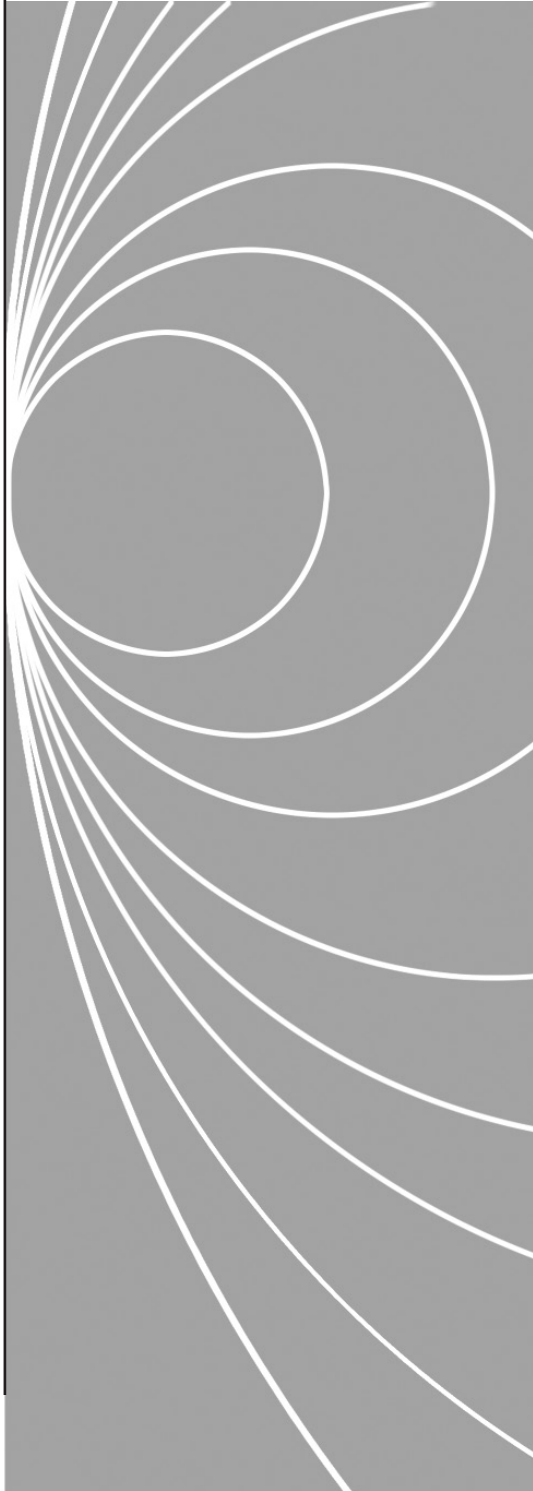
- 1 Midnight Notes Collective (eds.) *Midnight Oil: Work, Energy, War 1973-1992* (New York: Autonomedia, 1992); www.midnightnotes.org.
- 2 Both collections are published under the Common Notions (www.common-notions.org) imprint of PM Press (www.pmpress.org) and in association with Autonomedia (www.autonomedia.org).
- 3 “By political recomposition” the Zerowork collective states, “we mean the level of unity and homogeneity that the

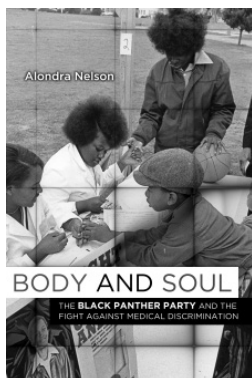
working class reaches during a cycle of struggle in the process of going from one composition to another. Essentially, it involves the overthrow of capitalist divisions, the creation of new unities between different sectors of the class, and an expansion of the boundaries of what the 'working class' comes to include." Zerowork Collective, "Introduction to Zerowork 1" in *Midnight*, Midnight Notes Collective (eds.).

4 Federici's collection is organized chronologically from 1975 to 2010, with the exception of one chapter; additionally, there is a gap between 1985 and 1998. One clear error in the collection is the absence of an index.

5 Rather than being organized chronologically as Federici's collection, Caffentzis's book is thematic in its construction. Chapters begin in 1980—eschewing his early work with *Zerowork* and *Midnight Notes* no. 1 entitled "Strange Victories"—and conclude in 2010; the three undated chapters are from his more recent period.

6 For our previous application of these concepts to the contemporary period see: Team Colors Collective. *Winds from below: Radical Community Organizing to Make a Revolution Possible* (Portland, OR: Eberhardt Press & Team Colors, 2010); Kevin Van Meter. "To Care is to Struggle" in *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2012); and Team Colors Collective, *Occupied Zuccotti, Social Struggle, and Planned Shrinkage* (New York: Team Colors Collective, 2012).





INSURGENT HEALTH: THE CASES OF THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY AND THE SANDINISTAS

A REVIEW OF *BODY AND SOUL: THE BLACK PANTHER PARTY AND THE FIGHT AGAINST MEDICAL DISCRIMINATION*, ALONDRA NELSON (MINNEAPOLIS: UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS, 2011) AND *HEALTH AND REVOLUTION: THE NICARAGUAN EXPERIENCE*, RICHARD GARFIELD AND GLEN WILLIAMS (OXFORD: OXRAM, 1989)

JAVIER SETHNESS CASTRO

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In investigating how knowledge, science, or understanding can help change the world, it becomes apparent that any philosophy, which cares for human life, must concern itself with what Herbert Marcuse calls the “concrete distress” of human existence. The centrality of environmental destruction within this likely terminal phase of capitalism—terminal, for either capitalism will die, or much of complex life will—demands a great deal of thought and action. Direct action, such as that which has been taken recently to block the construction of the remainder of the planned route of the Keystone XL pipeline, as well as the developing tar-sands infrastructure in North America, must be our central focus, with a mass movement intervening to overthrow the economic system impelling eco-catastrophe. As Bakunin said, we should be “think[ing] more of strikes than of cooperatives.” In this sense, the Industrial Workers of the World’s (IWW) concept of an *ecological general strike* holds a great deal of promise.

Yet this essay will not directly focus on environmental politics. Instead, we will examine two political movements from the latter half of the twentieth century that intersect at the points of health and revolutionary politics: the Black Panther Party (BPP) and the Nicaraguan Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). In part, these two movements are prime examples of revolutionary counter-power, as well as historical models usually considered outside of the anarchist galaxy. Both cases show, as Don

Fitz argues in *MRZine* (December 2012), with regard to Cuban medicine, “a world facing acute climate change that it can resolve many basic human needs without pouring more CO₂ into the atmosphere.”

THE BPP AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST RACISM IN HEALTHCARE

As Alondra Nelson describes in *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination*, one of the major contributions made by the activism of the BPP was its struggle to both overturn racial and economic health disparities by making quality healthcare more equitably distributed, especially among people of color in US cities, and to present a philosophical critique of mainstream medicine as betraying its potentially humanist and even revolutionary meaning. Such perspectives were codified by the BPP in 1972 with a formal revision of its original Ten-Point Program to demand “completely free health care for all Black and oppressed people” as well as “mass health education and research programs” designed to “give Black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information” (49, 73). In this way, the BPP significantly advanced the concept of social health, whereby biomedical status is not divorced from consideration of social and environmental determinants—as it is in mainstream healthcare. Indeed, the BPP developed into something of a “health social movement,” as Nelson argues, in its “challeng[ing of] health inequality [...] by supplying access to medical services, contesting biomedical authority, and asserting healthcare as a right” (18).

Perhaps the most famous means by which the BPP lived out its critique of the socio-medical system was

its establishment in thirteen cities of People’s Free Medical Clinics (PFMC). These sites, often named for Black Power martyrs like Fred Hampton (Portland) or George Jackson (Berkeley), were volunteer-run institutions that extended basic preventive and diagnostic care and referrals to the urban poor, as performed by trusted health professionals and community allies tied to the BPP, and provided advocacy services such as for employment or housing assistance. As Nelson explains,

... these clinics were sites where the Party’s health politics were translated into social practice by providing free basic care and advocating on behalf of patients. The Party provided healthcare services to populations who lacked them. The clinics addressed local needs, reflected local priorities, and drew on and mobilized local resources. The work of these chapter-based institutions did not end with providing health services. The clinics were exemplars of the Party’s commitment to the *total* well-being of its constituents (19).

The clinics themselves sought to demystify the hegemonic professional authority of medical practitioners by encouraging patient and community participation in healthcare decisions and clinic operations, as well as by observing a philosophy which validated popular perspectives on health and disease (79, 88, 112). Beyond this, clinic staff facilitated training by providers of local residents in such areas as basic medicine and first aid, so as to be consonant with the long-term goal of devolving control of these communal services to the people (99). Furthermore, and radically, PFMC culture consciously sought to undermine

the elite status of health professions, in accordance with ideas of egalitarianism. Intriguingly, many of the medical professionals who volunteered at BPP clinics were exposed to “reeducation” classes administered by Panthers which sought to have these largely privileged practitioners engage with the works of Mao and Frantz Fanon (81).

Nelson frames the BPP’s social health movement within the broad continuum of historical civil rights struggles in the US, extending previous campaigns for liberal rights to concern for the realization of economic ones. Its healthcare activism shared many ideological and practical concerns with the broader radical health movement of the 1970s—particularly the Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR), which in 1971 declared that “community-worker councils” composed of “patients and health workers” should run all health facilities (78, 89). Specifically within the politics of the BPP itself, Nelson reveals that the move to establish PFMCs (a requirement for all Party chapters by 1970) was related to the Party’s shift toward community survival following Huey Newton’s arrest (1967) and the murder of several of its members by police. For this reason, the PFMCs, like the BPP’s breakfast program for children, came to be conceived of as “Survival Programs, Pending Revolution.” What is more, the shift to an emphasis on “serving the people” reflected the ascendancy in power of Newton over Elridge Cleaver: Newton called the social programs a means of “contradict[ing] the system while you are in it until it’s transformed into a new system,” while Cleaver largely dismissed their importance, instead envisioning the BPP’s mission as a commitment to urban guerrilla warfare (63).

Building on the self-determinist ethics of Black nationalism, the PFMCs served to embody the BPP’s attempt to meld social revolution with revolutionary conceptions of medicine: to open provision of care to neglected and marginalized peoples, as the examples of Che Guevara and Fanon had inspired them to do. The impetus to extend Panther healthcare outreach was strengthened as well by the Party’s ideological and affective ties with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), which in fact received two delegations of BPP “ambassadors” in the early 1970s. In particular, the Maoist concept of the “barefoot doctor” proved highly instructive to Party members, who upon return to the US implemented a strategy through the founding of systems of mobile healthcare vans (65, 70-1). The examples of Guevara and Fanon combined with the lived example of the PRC to animate the Party’s advocacy of a deprofessionalization of healthcare work. Taking from the “Third World, Marxist model” of the PRC, which the Panthers held in esteem, the counter-hegemonic vision of healthcare, which they advanced, proposed that it be decommodified, socialized, and participatory (70, 71-3).

Practically speaking, many of the PFMCs survived for about a decade, after which they faced greater difficulties sustaining themselves, amidst the rise of Reaganite conservatism in the 1980s. Nonetheless, two live on to this day: the Harriet Tubman Medical Clinic in West Oakland, and the Carolyn Downs Family Medical Center in Seattle (xiv-xv). Moreover, the Berkeley Free Clinic, which collaborated famously with a healthcare coalition that included feminist collectives and the George Jackson PFMC four decades ago, continues

to this day to provide "Health Care for People, Not Profit." Additionally, another BPP-inspired clinic was opened by former Panther Malik Rahim, with Scott Crow, in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

SOCIAL HEALTH IN SANDINISTA NICARAGUA

In *Health and Revolution*, Richard Garfield and Glen Williams investigate the impressive health gains made by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua during the decade following their overthrow of US-backed dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979. As Garfield and Williams summarize, the revolutionary changes mandated by the FSLN in the health-care system upon its capture of the Nicaraguan State essentially constituted "monumental efforts to make health care available to the poor majority through a new system of primary health care" (8). This social transformation thus carried into practice a strategy that had at that time been increasingly favored in international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) for implementation in materially poorer societies. The idea was that healthcare reform in such contexts should focus on the provision of "basic services for the whole population [that is, primary care], rather than focusing on highly specialized and technologically sophisticated medical care." (8, 4, 25). Before Somoza's ouster, health outcomes in Nicaragua ranked among the worst in Latin America, with exceptionally high infant and child mortality rates seen throughout the country, especially in rural areas. Naturally, these problems were related to Nicaragua's marginality within the capitalist world-system, as reflected in high poverty rates, generalized landlessness and malnutrition, as

well as gross disparities in healthcare distribution, with an estimated 90% of the country's health resources being spent in the 1970s on the upper 10% of the population (13).

The movement toward a new healthcare system in Nicaragua began in the collaboration of healthcare providers and community volunteers (*brigadistas*) with the FSLN insurgency against Somoza, and continued precipitously after July 1979. The Ministry of Health (MINSa) drew up plans to reorient healthcare services to the marginalized, such as "urban and rural laborers, small-scale farmers, and women and children," who had been most neglected by the system upheld by Somoza, and to prioritize focusing on the most pressing causes of preventable death, such as diarrhea, respiratory disease, violence, and accidents (25, 195). These goals were pursued through a frenetic campaign to build new healthcare posts, especially in rural regions, during the first years of the Sandinista regime—300 were constructed, as were 5 new hospitals—and by means of a considerable expansion of education for new healthcare professionals—especially auxiliary nurses, who by 1986 would constitute nearly 50% of the country's health personnel involved in primary care (44-5, 48, 50-3). Young *brigadistas* were similarly assigned *en masse* to assist with primary care and help extend doctors' and nurses' reach in communal settings by, for example, organizing immunization campaigns on "People's Health Day" (27-9, 92, 174).

Such new, popular approaches to healthcare administration unsurprisingly met with opposition from some established Nicaraguan doctors, who felt these innovative community-based programs served to deprofessionalize their practices

and infringe upon their field of work. On the other side, many Sandinista activists welcomed these initiatives for precisely these reasons, as they showed “how much ordinary citizens could achieve *without* the help of doctors.” (61-2). During the first decade of Sandinista rule, conflict between doctors and the state was a constant. The FSLN, not desiring to lose large numbers of doctors to an exodus (as previously had occurred in Cuba and Chile), sought to retain the allegiance of doctors, and for this reason failed to mandate either the socialization of medicine or extensive reforms in medical practice, whether in clinical or hospital settings (141-3). Clearly, such positions problematized the regime’s stated commitment to expanding equitable access to the most oppressed. The retention of private medicine in Sandinista Nicaragua, then, was just one of the contradictions seen in the FSLN’s advocacy of a “mixed economy” rather than a popularly managed, fully socialized one (174).

Besides the highly negative ways in which Nicaragua’s development had resulted in poor health outcomes for most people before the fall of Somoza, the Sandinistas’s proactive commitment to dramatically improving public health was in reality gravely threatened by the emergence in 1983 of the brutal counter-revolution led by US-armed *Contras* in much of the Nicaraguan countryside. In forcibly displacing hundreds of thousands of Sandinista supporters and injuring, disabling, and murdering thousands of others, the *Contras* significantly undermined the FSLN’s efforts to expand healthcare access, both directly through attacks on health posts and workers and indirectly through disruption of agricultural production (leading to greater malnutrition) and declines

in earnings through lost production. (63-80, 177, 185). The virulence of this reactionary insurgency thus led to greater malnutrition rates and a higher amount of resources having to be used to finance an increase in food imports. Similarly, a large proportion of total health spending had to be diverted to addressing war-related injuries, thus further limiting the realization of the FSLN’s overall vision for universal health care (80). Yet another aspect of the war against the Sandinistas was US aggression in the international arena, with the Reagan administration imposing a trade embargo on the country in 1985 (previously and for decades, the US had been Nicaragua’s primary trading partner), successfully pressuring other Western governments to drastically reduce or altogether cancel economic aid to the embattled country, and even using the Navy to mine Nicaragua’s port cities (181).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

These two historical examples, while not explicitly anarchist—and sometimes expressly contradictory to the spirit and aims of anarchism—are worthy of the consideration of anarchists and anti-authoritarians today. Both the BPP and the FSLN arose out of the popular desire of oppressed peoples to actively bring such oppression to a halt. The two movements diverge in the precise strategies they ultimately adopted to further their aims: the FSLN inherited an entire country following its victorious war against Somoza, whereas the Panthers did not have the fortune to similarly liberate a considerable territory. Arguably, this discrepancy in fate in the case of the Panthers may have had to do with a combination of overwhelming

State repression and internal divisions within the Party.

Against some of the specific strictures within which primary care was provided in these two cases—for example, tolerance for private medicine within the FSLN, and a hierarchical sense of emancipation associated with the influence of Leninist and Maoist doctrine in both cases—the Panthers' and Sandinistas' still embodied insurgent conceptions of health. They also—realized the values of humanism, care, solidarity, and mutual aid, which are consistent with anarchist thought and practice. While it was the Panthers who presented a more systematic critique of mainstream, capitalist medicine, neither group rejected medical science. It was by means of this—coupled with a strong emphasis on direct action—that both groups contributed most to changing the world, at least in terms of social wellbeing. It is in this way that the BPP and FSLN utilized science in the “utopian” fashion Kim Stanley Robinson argued it tends toward at the 2013 Anarchist Book Fair in San Francisco—by practically introducing social relations of communal solidarity, on the one hand, and by indicting capitalist egoism and imperialism, on the other.

That the Panthers and Sandinistas proved in part to be “utopian” actors should lead no one to overlook the various limitations of both movements. As anarchists know well, it is a questionable strategy for a revolutionary movement to take State power, as the Sandinistas did. It is also problematic that some of the Panthers' PFMCs applied for and accepted funding from State and corporate interests (Nelson 102-6). Furthermore, it is unclear to what degree a critique of the use of animals demanded by modern medicine (particularly pharmacology)

informed either the Sandinistas' or the Panthers' visions of transforming the functioning of healthcare systems (one can speculate on whether either group would have welcomed the Indian State's ban on animal experimentation within university courses in 2011).

In the end, the contributions made by the BPP and the Sandinistas to the creation of participatory means of advancing popular wellbeing and self liberation should be clear. A resurrection of radical health movements today—incorporating considerations of gender and ecology into the models—is crucial to provoking a movement to do away with capitalism, patriarchy, and borders. Either that, or they could help with human adaptation by providing dignified palliative care to a dying humanity in a future climate devastated world.

Capitalism is propelling humanity and much of life toward oblivion—as we see in the regularly dire projections made by climatologists as regards the ever-increasing likelihood of a future climate-devastated Earth, the continued thoughtlessness of Fukushima and all other nuclear plants, and the entirely unprecedented pollution levels experienced in major Chinese cities in recent years, to consider but a few examples. As a counter to such trends, an insurrectionary community health movement could represent one effort within an overall anarchist development against domination.

Nonetheless, it remains clear that, without the intervention of what Adorno called a “global self-conscious subject,” the result is likely to be what Marx termed the “common ruin of the contending classes,” a socio-historical context within which health movements could help by providing dignified care as humanity unravels.



THE VIOLENCE OF BUREAUCRACY

A REVIEW OF *RED TAPE: BUREAUCRACY, STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, AND POVERTY IN INDIA*, AKHIL GUPTA (DURHAM AND LONDON: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2011)

DALEL BENBABAALI

Dalel Benbabaali is a postdoctoral fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, where she is part of a research program on "Inequality and Poverty in India: Dalits and Adivasis." Her thesis explored the relation between dominant caste and territory in South India. She speaks seven languages and plays classical guitar, mandolin and sings in an Arabo-Andalusian orchestra.

According to anthropologist Akhil Gupta, the structural violence of the state in India kills two to three million people every year, mostly lower caste or tribal women and children. Yet, numerous anti-poverty programs target a population that actively participates in the democratic project through the electoral process. Gupta tries to explain this paradox in his new book, based on a detailed ethnography of the Indian bureaucracy.

"To be governed is to be at every operation, at every transaction, noted, registered, enrolled, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorised, admonished, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished."¹ Without directly referring to this quote from French anarchist Proudhon, Gupta provides a similar description of the Indian government that perceives poor women and children as "segments of the population that had not been as extensively surveyed, counted, classified, measured, injected, or schooled in the past" (261).

In fact, his references are less Proudhonian than Foucauldian. Basing his argument on the concept of biopower as it was elaborated by Michel Foucault, Gupta suggests that poverty in India has been normalized through numerous statistical projects aimed at measuring it. As a consequence of this

normalization, the killing of the poor is neither considered a violation (of law, justice, morality or the Constitution), nor a scandal that delegitimizes power.

A KILLER STATE

Biopolitics operates through bureaucratic procedures that ignore the suffering of the poor and accept their death as natural, thus depoliticizing the violence of the state. This violence does not merely consist in “allowing” the poor to die, but in a “direct and culpable killing,” due to indifference or lack of care, though these premature and untimely deaths are preventable (5-6).

According to Giorgio Agamben’s work on Nazi Germany, “those who can be killed must first be known, codified, recorded, and enumerated” (261). The categorization of the poor through an “imaginary income line invented by the State” (58) is typical of the biopolitical project that consists in classifying the population in order to manage it. Agamben’s writings complement Foucault’s since they look at “bare life,” i.e. the very survival of men and women, and not only at the control mechanisms that restrict those bodies, some of them being condemned to death in total impunity, as their lives don’t qualify for protection. This analysis offers an interesting paradigm to explore forms of violence that are often invisible, affecting refugees, minorities, and the poor.

However, Gupta borrows the concept of governmentality from Foucault and that of sovereign power from Agamben in a critical way. Among other things, he reproaches these two authors with basing their arguments on a unified theory of the state, a monolithic

approach that he tries to deconstruct in his book thanks to “a disaggregated view of the State [that] makes it possible to open up the black box of unintended outcomes by showing how they are systematically produced by friction between agendas, bureaus, levels, and spaces that make up the State” (47).

STUDYING THE LOWER LEVELS OF THE INDIAN BUREAUCRACY

Gupta’s thesis is based on an ethnographic study conducted during one year among local administrators in a rural area of Uttar Pradesh that allowed him to observe the interactions between officials and the public. In the introduction of his book, he gives the example of a development camp aimed at providing pensions to indigent, elderly people. The organization of this camp is characterized by its contingency, since the letter informing the Block Development Officer (BDO) was discovered by chance after being lost. Moreover, the applicants can rarely provide the documents necessary to prove their eligibility, the main criterion being their age, which is therefore “guessed” by a doctor (10). The distribution of pensions is thus arbitrary, contrary to bureaucratic “rationality,” as theorized by Max Weber.

Gupta organizes his argument around three themes that correspond to the different parts of his book: corruption, inscription and governmentality. He first looks at corruption which, according to him, is an essential factor to understand the contradiction between the large sums allotted to development programs and the persistence of poverty. The chapter on inscription insists on the importance of writing in the administration and raises the problem

of illiteracy among the poor. In the last part, Gupta examines the role of the local administration by comparing the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), a program targeting destitute children and their mothers during the “socialist” period, and the *Mahila Samakhya*, also aimed at poor women, during the post-1991 neoliberal period. The author shows the continuity that exists in the implementation of these poverty alleviation programs, despite the ideological differences that characterize their conception: both cases expose the indifference of the bureaucracy and the structural violence exercised on the most vulnerable sections of the population (251).

THE VIOLENCE OF THE STATE: A VIOLENCE WITHOUT PERPETRATORS?

Gupta borrows the concept of structural violence from Johan Galtung, who defines it as “any situation in which some people are unable to achieve their capacities or capabilities to their full potential,” and in which it is impossible to identify a culprit (20).² It is thus an impersonal violence, rooted in the very structure of power. However, certain classes have an interest in perpetuating a social order in which the suffering of the poor is not only tolerated but considered normal: “In a country like India, the perpetrators of violence include not only the elites but also the fast-growing middle class, whose increasing number and greater consumer power are being celebrated by an aggressive global capitalism” (22). Gupta’s analysis seems to confirm the Marxist thesis according to which the state is a tool used to guarantee the status quo, thus serving the interests of the dominant class.

The author tries to unveil the rhetoric of the welfare state by exposing the discrepancy between its discourse and its actions: “The repeated statements of good intentions by politicians and bureaucrats are cynical ploys to obtain votes and legitimacy, respectively” (22). The problem doesn’t only concern lower-level bureaucrats, contrary to what the urban middle class tends to believe, thus reproducing the contempt of the British administrators for their indigenous subordinates. Accusing the subaltern officials of inefficiency reflects a class bias that doesn’t help in explaining the violence perpetrated by the state, because “even if all state officials were sincerely devoted to the task of eradicating poverty, the question is whether the procedures of the bureaucracy would end up subverting even their best intentions” (6).

FROM CORRUPTION TO STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

In a corrupt system, the goods and services that are supposed to be free are made inaccessible to those who need them most but cannot afford to give bribes to the administration. This is what makes corruption “a systematic form of oppression” (25). This phenomenon is prevalent throughout the Indian bureaucracy, the only difference being that “whereas higher-level state officials raise large sums from a relatively few people, lower-level officials collect it in small figures and on a daily basis from a very large number of people” (91). Because of this generalized corruption, the middle class has become cynical and even hostile to anti-poverty programs that are seen as useless since the money rarely reaches the target population.

Somehow, counterintuitively, the author suggests that literacy

is not essential to fight structural violence and bureaucratic arbitrariness. According to him, the Indian democratic system provides illiterate citizens with means of action that do not necessarily require writing. Since they are aware of the importance of the millions of poor voters, politicians declare that they want to improve their lot through inclusive growth. Though democracy has prevented major famines since Indian independence, as argued by Amartya Sen, it is not a guarantee against government's neglect: "More people die in India each year from humdrum causes inflicted by the failure of the developmentalist state to provision the poor with basic necessities like food, water, medicine, and housing than if there had been a major famine every ten years" (138).

The last part, on governmentality, is about the permanence of structural violence in India. The author argues that liberalization does not constitute a turning point in that matter, since the "war on the poor" existed before (273). Finally, the epilogue offers an interesting analysis of the Maoist rebellion which, according to Gupta, is not due to the failure of the welfare state in tribal areas, but to development induced land grabbing: "India's indigenous population constitutes what Agamben means by *homo sacer*, people whose deaths will not even be considered a sacrifice on the altar of development. Unlike those who are recognized as project-affected persons owing to their displacement from big dams and other infrastructure development projects, the tribals who flee from the armed conflict will have no special status that entitles them to compensation or to resettlement aid" (289).

BUREAUCRATIC ARBITRARINESS OR SYSTEMATIC EXCLUSION?

Though Gupta clearly shows how tribal people have become the first victims of state structural violence, by exposing the link between the exploitation of mining resources in forest areas and displacement, he doesn't emphasize enough the importance of caste as a factor of systematic exclusion. It would have been interesting to study the collusion of officials with rural elites who belong mostly to upper castes, at the expense of poor villagers who are mostly Dalits. As I have shown in my study of the Indian bureaucracy: "Caste favoritism leads to unequal allocation of resources and to misappropriation of government funds at the expense of the target groups, that is, the underprivileged sections of society."³ In order to reach this conclusion, one has to look at the caste identity of the administrators. Gupta chooses to limit his survey to the lower levels of the bureaucracy by studying a block (administrative subdivision), but the higher civil servants of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) play an essential role in the implementation of development programs at the scale of the district. While the author is reluctant to express harsh judgments against subaltern officials, he could have included in his analysis a critique of the administrative elites, who have a much more important responsibility in the violence exercised on the poor.

Red Tape is based on a relatively old fieldwork, conducted in the early 1990s, which doesn't allow one to understand the transformations that happened during the last two decades, in the era of globalization. It seems difficult to make a comparison between the pre- and post-liberalization periods,

as Gupta tries to do, since the reforms had just been initiated at the time of his fieldwork. In the epilogue, the author tries to update his findings by discussing Indian economic growth, but he doesn't elaborate on the consequences of this type of growth based on neoliberal policies that marginalize, and even exclude a large section of the population in a systematic way, not through mere neglect.

Though he mentions the radical critique of development by Arturo Escobar,⁴ Gupta describes it as utopian and warns against a revolution whose benefits would not be seen in the lifetime of the poor: "Bringing down the system of which the State is a part is not the only politics possible and certainly not one that will bring any solace to the poor in the near future—the only future that matters to them" (109). What is the alternative, then? By insisting on bureaucratic arbitrariness, he minimizes the structural causes of inequality and discrimination such as caste, class and gender privileges, so much so that John Harriss and Craig Jeffrey accuse him of "depoliticizing injustice."⁵ Despite occasional anarchist tones, Gupta's critique of power is in fact far from revolutionary and fails to really unmask the nature of the Indian state, an instrument in the hands of the dominant castes and classes whose objective is to perpetuate their domination.

ENDNOTES

1 Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *General Idea of the Revolution in the Nineteenth Century* (Freedom Press, London, 1923), 293.

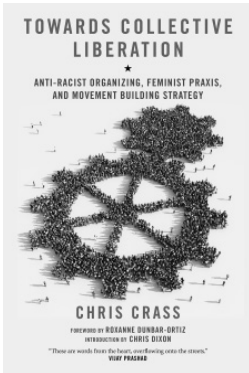
2 Johan Galtung, "1969, Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace*

Research 6 (3), 167-91.

3 Dalel Benbabaali, "Questioning the Role of the Indian Administrative Service in National Integration," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, Sept. 2008, 28, <http://samaj.revues.org/633>.

4 Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

5 John Harriss & Craig Jeffrey, "Depoliticizing Injustice," *Economy and Society* 42 (3), 2013, 507-20.



WE ALL HAVE A STAKE, WE ALL HAVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO MAKE

A REVIEW OF *TOWARDS COLLECTIVE LIBERATION: ANTI-RACIST ORGANIZING, FEMINIST PRACTIS, AND MOVEMENT BUILDING*, CHRIS CRASS (OAKLAND: PM PRESS, 2013)

ANDREW CORNELL

Andrew Cornell is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Haverford College, where he teaches classes on labor and social movement history. He is the author of Oppose and Propose: Lessons from Movement for a New Society (IAS/AK Press: 2011) and is completing a book on the culture and politics of US anarchism in the mid-20th century.

The first time I met Chris Crass he was handing out copies of the Bay Area anarchist newspaper *Slingshot* to slightly bewildered Democratic Party types attending a union organizing training held by the AFL-CIO. The next time we crossed paths he was giving a talk to hundreds of young radicals at the National Conference on Organized Resistance, convincingly arguing that they needed to bring millions of people into the movement, which was only possible if they consciously worked to overcome divisive manifestations of sexism and racism. These moments cemented my respect for Crass and showed me what he was about: pushing through the comfortable bounds of cultural and ideological communities to find allies wherever they may be hiding; insisting on the need for radical analysis amongst organizers, and need for patient organizing amongst radical activists. It is this vision of what is to be done—and how to do it—that animates the varied chapters of Crass' first book, *Toward Collective Liberation: Anti-Racist Organizing, Feminist Praxis, and Movement Building Strategy*, released earlier this year.

Toward Collective Liberation (TCL) is a valuable resource, especially for activists and organizers fairly new to movement work. The book may look intimidating at three hundred pages of

small type, but the conversational, non-academic tone and footnotes defining unfamiliar terms, make it an accessible, engrossing read. Another inviting feature is that Crass varies the length and format of different chapters. The historical case studies, searching personal reflections, theoretical interventions, and interviews with a variety of exemplary organizations included in *TCL* provide something useful for nearly anyone with a commitment to social transformation, and invite the reader to dive in at whatever point seems most relevant to his or her own concerns.

Three interrelated themes unite the book's varied chapters: ways in which men can challenge sexism, whites can fight racism, and the complex ways anarchism is related to the process of winning a more egalitarian society. One certainly does not need to be an anarchist to benefit from the feminist and anti-racist perspective put forward in *TCL*. Crass opens with "What I Believe," a succinct six page summary of precepts for making change that, taken together, feel empowering because they feel so *orienting*—even for an old head like me. Having these axioms stated in a few concise paragraphs is a resource in itself—a distillation of organizing lessons very useful in that moment when one tries to assess their relationship to a certain struggle, organization, or tactic. Throughout most of the book, however, Crass goes beyond telling you what he believes to explaining how he came to grasp these ideas: through personal mentorship (especially by a number of experienced radical female organizers of color) and by movement work in everything from campus struggles, to radical service provision in Food Not Bombs, and direct organizing in multi-racial issue campaigns. These varied experiences

allow Crass to draw out organizing lessons based on real examples derived from his own organizing experiences—moments where he made mistakes or missed potential opportunities.

For example, in the chapter "Going to Places that Scare Me," he recounts in painful detail (painful because it rang so true to my experiences as well) the defensive and evasive responses he and the other men participating in an anarchist collective gave when the women of the group confronted them about the ways their ideas were ignored and dismissed. He recounts how, upon finally acknowledging the problem, the men wanted to fix it immediately, in one discussion, and how the group eventually accepted that unlearning such behavior took time and was a process that required ongoing commitments. In a chapter on learning to be an anti-racist ally, Crass describes his participation in a multi-racial alliance of community college students. The coalition enjoyed broad support when it fought tuition hikes, but found itself isolated when pushing for ethnic studies courses. Crass missed a march lead by the Latino/a student group MECha to go to attend his job, and was shocked to learn later that his friends had been attacked by the police. He writes:

It was a critical mistake on my part to have left—regardless of work. I should have been there. I thought of it as just one of many marches, and I'd been to dozens. But the reality is this: when Latino/a students take to the streets of Orange County, it is different than when mostly white activists do it. The threat of communities of color mobilized is enormous and it scares the police to their bones (131).

Concrete examples, such as this, abound in the book. This mode of teaching through gentle self-criticism has multiple benefits. It allows Crass to avoid consistently pointing fingers at the shortcomings of other groups—which can easily breed resentment amongst already taxed movement participants. But it also indicates that missteps are also inherent in the process of learning to organize. As Crass notes, “Doing anti-racist work as a white person doesn’t mean not making mistakes, but rather that we are committed to doing this work, even though we will make mistakes” (138).

Crass also insists that activists—especially those with gender or racial privilege—be aware of how much they are speaking in meetings and at events and encourages them to listen attentively to others. This is anti-oppression activism 101—but it’s the type of lesson that has to be repeated consistently, by new and reputable voices every few years, because it is crucial for every new cohort of activists to learn as early as possible. What’s exciting about *TCL* is that Crass actually models this practice by turning over a third of the book to the voices of other organizers.

I was at first wary of these chapters—perhaps because I unfairly think of interviews as ephemeral and often shallow. But, upon diving in, I found them both inspiring and incredibly instructional. For example, Crass opens an interview by asking Amy Dudley about the genesis of Oregon’s Rural Organizing Project. She responds:

ROP developed as a progressive rural response to homophobic ballot measures initiated by right-wing organizations that considered rural Oregon to be their

political base.... By equating being queer with pedophilia and a list of evils, the Right was able to whip up homophobic fears, focus the mainstream on a non-existent threat, scapegoat a vulnerable group of people, then enter the divide that they had created with anti-queer policies that would distract from the real focus of their platform—to create unfair tax structures, subsidize the rich, establish corporate welfare, and destroy the social safety net (197).

Bam! Straight out of the gate, Dudley unpacks the sophisticated strategy used by specific conservative organizations, and then goes on, in the rest of the interview to describe ROCs massive effort to defeat it, noting along the way how classism can generate false stereotypes about rural whites. Interviews with organizations in Kentucky, Wisconsin, and California are equally enlightening.

So how does anarchism fit in with all of this? In multiple ways. As a teenage punk in suburban Los Angeles, Crass helped form a group called the United Anarchist Front, which affiliated with the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation. As a mainstay of San Francisco Food Not Bombs, and a global justice organizer, especially with the Catalyst Project, which he co-founded, Crass has always kept at least one foot firmly planted within the anarchist milieu. As a historian, I see *TCL* making a valuable contribution simply by providing documentary accounts of how these groups functioned and the work they undertook, written from an insider’s perspective. Crass also provides a brief and lively “Introduction to the Anarchist Tradition,” that, when paired with the incisive book introduction

penned by Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS) board member Chris Dixon, might serve as a useful overview for those seeking to understand the historical development of contemporary anarchism, and how it relates to other initiatives, such as women of color feminism.

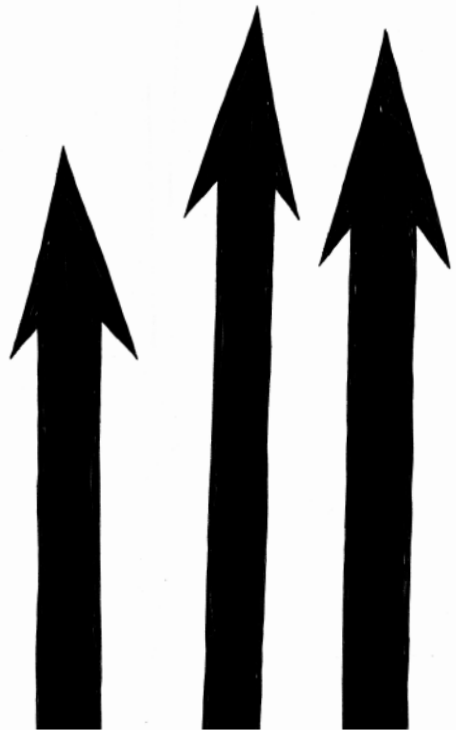
TCL also reprints a few essays that Crass wrote in the early 2000s that were originally published online or as pamphlets. These include two pieces that challenge the skepticism many anarchists feel about the role of “leadership” in social change work, as well their ambivalence towards organizing other people into the movements. Crass reaches into the history of US social movements, and shows that visionary organizers affiliated with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee of the early 1960s shared many of the concerns anarchists feel towards organizations lead by authoritarian and charismatic individuals, and worked out sophisticated alternatives that didn’t abandon the necessary work of coordination and changing peoples’ minds. These chapters remain absolutely relevant ten years later, as anti-organizational tendencies remain rife within the current US anarchist milieu.

This points to what I see as one of the main shortcomings of the book (the other being that it was inadequately copy-edited). Crass says relatively little about the competing strategic orientations within the contemporary US anarchist circles—including insurrectionary tendencies that continue to value spontaneity over organizing, and those focused on building counter-institutions to the exclusion of campaigning. In addition, the nature and role of “the state” is under-theorized, as it nearly

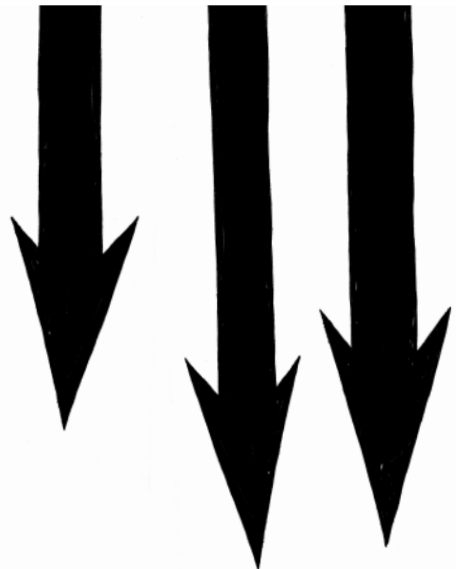
always is in anarchist texts. At certain points in the book, Crass lists “the state” as a form of domination akin to systems of oppression such as patriarchy. Later he suggests that it is often strategically important for activists—anarchists included—to participate in campaigns for social reforms that may include electoral politics. Anarchists have traditionally avoided such work, seeing direct advocacy for politicians and legislation as hypocritical or corrupting. Some anarchists, notably Noam Chomsky, however, have more recently suggested an approach that recognizes revolutionary change is not likely soon, so an approach that promotes empowerment and improvement in the lives of broad swaths of people—including defense of welfare state entitlements—is necessary in the near term. If this is Crass’ position, I wished he had made a stronger case for it and explained precisely why he thinks other strategies are inadequate.

Though I am eager to hear Crass’ perspective on these issues, I recognize the difficulty he would have had in addressing them adequately in *TCL*. This is due, in large part, to the multiple audiences Crass hopes to address in the book. Through his work with the Catalyst Project, the Unitarian Universalist church, and other groups, Crass has spent much time collaborating with people inspired by other intellectual traditions, who may have historically seen anarchism in distorted, largely negative terms. While directly addressing anarchists in some chapters, Crass also seems to be speaking to these other groups—introducing the expansiveness of the anarchist critique and the movement’s historical achievements to explain why it appealed to him at an

early age and continues to inspire many activists today. *TCL*, then, should be seen as a bridging book. To activists that already identify as anarchists, it offers one vision of what that anarchist movement should look like and for what it should strive. To non-anarchists on the Left, it indicates the attraction of the anarchist position, and its potential—implicitly counseling organizers to seek to understand and engage anarchists rather than dismiss them out of hand. Crass clearly states that, “One of the main lessons throughout this book is that we need a revitalized, dynamic, and visionary Left politics that draws from many traditions, not just anarchism, but also Marxism, socialism, feminism, revolutionary nationalism, and others.” This is a project that strongly appeals to me, and I see *Towards Collective Liberation* as a vital contribution that will hopefully push forward conversations about vision and strategy, while helping newer organizers avoid at least some of the most glaring pitfalls in the road to a life of generalized freedom, equality, and dignity.



IAS UPDATES



A NOTE ON *PERSPECTIVES* NUMBERING

With this issue we have moved to a simple numbering system. The first issue of *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* came out in the Spring of 1997. This is the twenty-seventh issue to be published over the last seventeen years. Many previous issues are archived both on Scribd (<http://www.scribd.com>) and the IAS website (www.anarchist-studies.org).

RECENT PUBLICATIONS FROM IAS GRANTEES

China Martens, *Radical Childcare: The Kidz City Model*, first edition self-published for the 2013 Allied Media Conference.

Kristian Williams, Will Munger, and Lara Messersmith-Glavin, eds., *Life During Wartime: Resisting Counterinsurgency* (Oakland: AK Press, 2013).

Judith Arcana, *Keesha and Joanie and JANE: Characters, Dialogue and Conflict Including Opinions, Memories and Strategic Planning Filled With Hope, Disappointment and Inspiration* (Portland, OR: Eberhardt Press, 2013).

APPLYING FOR AN IAS GRANT

The IAS awards writing and translation grants once per year. The deadline for applications is January 15 (late applications are not accepted). You can apply online at <http://anarchiststudies.org/grants-for-radical-writers-and-translators>.

The IAS prioritizes work from people who are reflecting on struggles and organizing in which they participate. We welcome applications from people who do not think of themselves as writers and who are not rooted in university contexts. We especially encourage women, queer people, people of color, working-class people, people with disabilities, grassroots activists, and others often excluded from scholarly life to apply. For more information on our grants and applications, including an FAQ, follow the link above, and feel free to email us with any further questions.

NEW AND IMPROVED IAS WEBSITE

At long last, thanks to the beautiful design work of Morgan Buck with Antumbra Design (<http://antumbradesign.org/>), we have a new and improved website. Like many websites, it's still a work in progress, but the basics are in place, and we're really excited about the results. You can now donate to the IAS, fill out a grant application, and sign up for our occasional e-updates online. You can also keep up with our latest projects, including our journal and book series, both of which you can also order directly from AK Press via our website. We've included downloadable PDFs of the five titles in our Lexicon pamphlet

series for you to print out and distribute. And you can look through our list of Mutual Aid speakers and then bring one (or several!) to your school, organization, or collective. We also hope to include more and more online content, so if you have thoughtful antiauthoritarian scholarship to share, send it our way—from translations and written works to audio and video pieces.

Head over to our website and take a peek: <http://anarchiststudies.org>.

You can also still find us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/InstituteForAnarchistStudies>.

HELP SUSTAIN INDEPENDENT RADICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The IAS grant-giving program is entirely funded by the generous donations of people and collectives like you. And while we try to cover the print costs of our journal and book series through sales, we usually fall far short. Your support for these and other IAS projects allows us to help grow and nurture anarchist debate and discourse around the world. Please consider making a donation as small or large as you like! Every little bit helps—from \$20 to \$200 to \$2,000.

It's easier than ever to donate to the IAS online. Visit our "Support the IAS" page at <http://anarchiststudies.org/support-the-ias>. Using PayPal or Network for Good, along with your credit or debit card, you can sign up as a monthly sustainer for as little as \$5 to whatever larger amount fits your budget, or give the IAS an annual or one-time donation. You can also send cash and/or checks or money orders made out to the Institute for Anarchist

Studies to: Institute for Anarchist Studies, P.O. Box 15586, Washington, DC 20003.

Another way to contribute financially is by hosting one of the many speakers on the Mutual Aid Speakers' List at an event in your town and donating the honorarium to the IAS. For a list of our speakers, see <http://anarchiststudies.org/mutual-aid-host-an-anarchist-speaker>.

Thanks in advance for your generous contributions!

PERSPECTIVES CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Are you an organizer or activist currently engaged in movement work? Are you interested in taking time to reflect on the lessons and ideals of this work in order to help advance anarchist theory and praxis? Do you have ideas, experiences, or questions that you would like to develop and share with a wider audience?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, the *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* editorial collective would like to hear from you. As the global political terrain continues to shift and tremble, it is crucial that those of us with visions of a free society share our work and ideas so that we can create a solid, common foundation on which to build a better world.

We are currently interested in reading work related to the following themes (although other proposals or topics will be considered):

- Feminism(s)
- Sports and Games

- Faith
- Justice
- Intergenerationality/Aging/Children

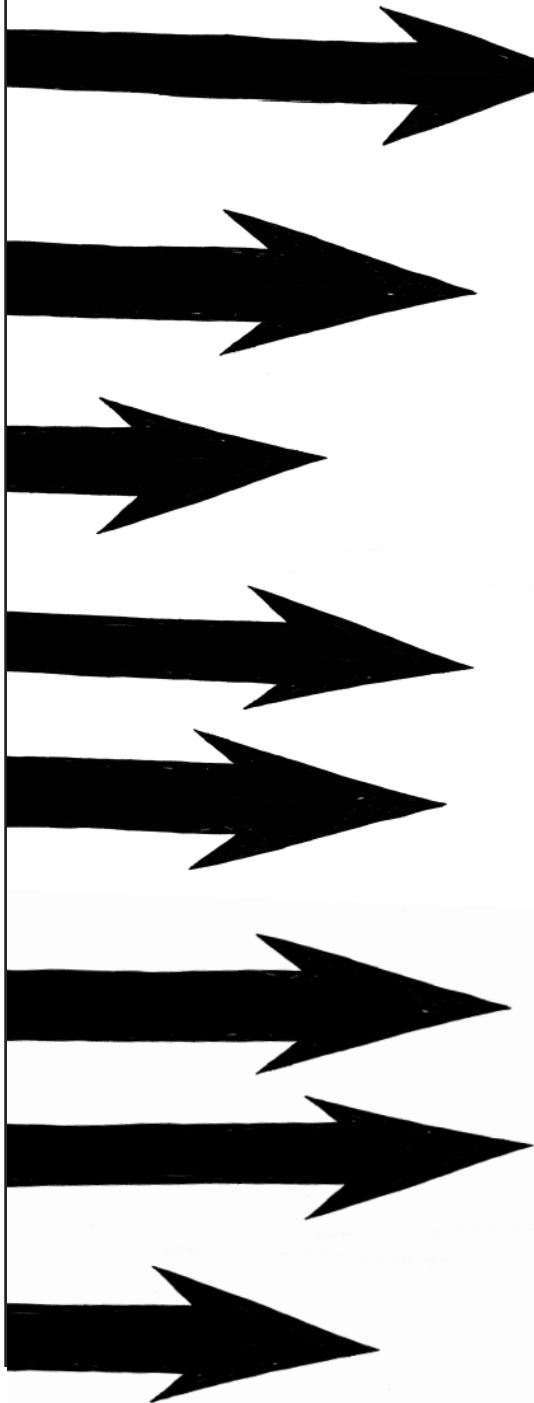
Our deadline for the next print issue is July 15th, 2014.

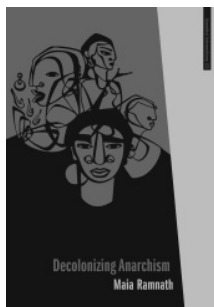
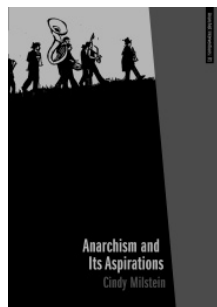
All submissions should conform to the following format requirements:

- Please follow the Chicago Manual of Style for general format and citation guidelines.
- Please use endnotes rather than footnotes.
- Type your endnotes directly into the text. Please do not use the “insert note” function in Word, as it is incompatible with our layout software.
- Do not include page numbers on your manuscript.
- Be sure to include your name and reliable contact information, as well as a brief (3-5 sentence) bio that you would like printed alongside your article.

Please prepare your manuscript as thoroughly as you can before sending it along for consideration. If you have a concept for an article but are unsure how to develop and refine the ideas or language, we are happy to help you out with the writing process, particularly if you have never written for publication before. Please contact us as soon as possible in order to ensure you are able to meet the publication deadline.

Send your essays or queries to: perspectivesmagazine@googlegroups.com.





ANARCHIST INTERVENTIONS

IAS/AK PRESS BOOK SERIES

The IAS is excited to announce that titles five and six—*Anarchists Against the Wall*, coedited by Uri Gordon and Ohal Grietzer, and *Undoing Border Imperialism*, by Harsha Walia—of our growing collection of books are now in print. They are part of the Anarchist Interventions series, a collaborative project with our friends at AK Press and Justseeds Artists' Cooperative.

Anarchists Against the Wall: Resisting Occupation and Apartheid in Palestine/Israel

Edited by Uri Gordon and Ohal Grietzer

Preface by Alfredo Bonanno

This multiauthor collection serves as an introduction to *Anarchists Against the Wall*, an Israeli initiative maintaining active solidarity with the Palestinian

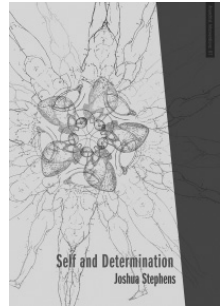
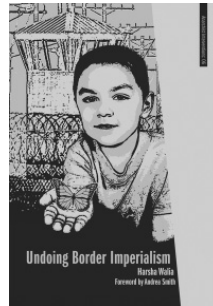
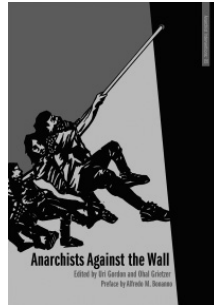
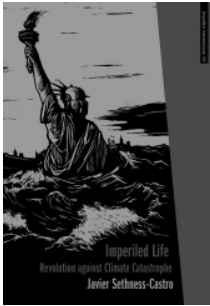
popular struggle in the West Bank as well as other solidarity activities inside Israel. The book investigates the nature of the solidarity principle in the dichotomized anarchist/state paradigm, and offers individual and collective reflections on close to a decade of direct actions and demonstrations against the construction of the Segregation Barrier as well as the daily violence and dispossession in occupied Palestine. To order copies, go to <http://www.akpress.org/anarchistsagainstthewall.html>

Undoing Border Imperialism

Harsha Walia

Preface by Andrea Smith

Undoing Border Imperialism combines academic discourse, lived experiences of displacement, and movement-based practices into an exciting new book. By reframing immigrant rights movements within a transnational systemic analysis of capitalism, labor exploitation, settler colonialism, state building, and racialized empire, it provides the alternative conceptual frameworks of border imperialism and decolonization to understand the freedom to stay, move, and return as essential for



self-determination. Drawing on the author's experiences in No One Is Illegal and the recognition that social movements themselves produce critical theory, this work also offers relevant insights for all organizers on effective strategies to overcome the barriers and borders within movements in order to cultivate fierce, loving, and sustainable communities of resistance striving toward liberation. Several of the chapters delve into the challenges of building broad-based alliances while maintaining radical political principles, fostering antioppression leadership while opposing hierarchies, and affecting tangible change while prefiguring transformation.

The author grounds this book in collective vision, from a roundtable on movement building with No One Is Illegal organizers to interspersed narratives from dozens of bold activists and writers of color from across North America. Contributors include Yogi Acharya, Carmen Aguirre, Tara Atluri, Annie Banks, Mel Bazil, Nazila Bettache, Adil Charkaoui, Yen Chu, Karen Cocq, Jessica Danforth, Ruby Smith Díaz, Nassim Elbardouh, Craig Fortier, Harjap Grewal, Mostafa

Henaway, Freda Huson, Syed Khalid Hussan, Jane Kirby, Aylwin Lo, Karla Lottini, Alex Mah, Robyn Maynard, Graciela Flores Mendez, Cecily Nicholson, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Toghestiy, Sozan Savehilaghi, Mac Scott, Lily Shinde, and Rafeef Ziadah.

FORTHCOMING IN THE SERIES:

Self and Determination: An Inward Look at Collective Liberation
Joshua Stephens

Self and Determination examines the way selves are constructed through physical experiences, social forces, and cultural meanings. This process determines the conditions and limitations of social transformation. Utilizing cognitive science, political philosophy, Buddhism, and practices of existing social movements, Stephens tackles “the self” as a site of intervention and decolonization, in the service of building stronger social movements.

All books are or will be available from AK Press: www.akpress.org

RECENT GRANTS

We'd like to congratulate Mikael Kopimi Altemark, Tamara Lynne, Kristin Herbeck and Anne Yukie Watanabe, Layne Mullett, Heather Pipino, Griffin Shumway, Reid Kotlas, Sandra Cuffe, Dawn Paley, Che Gossett, Carla Bergman, Nick Montgomery, and Jorell Meléndez on their recent IAS grant awards! Here's a glimpse of the nine projects that we recently funded:

LATE 2012

Theatre and the Art of Transgression

Tamara Lynne

This article explores questions raised through participation in the international movement of theatre artists practicing Forum Theatre. Through examination of experiences from an international festival of Theatre of the Oppressed hosted by Jana Sanskriti in West Bengal, through conversations with practitioners here in the US, and through direct experience creating work with communities, Tamara Lynne explores the question of making and breaking rules and the radical possibility that occurs in the moment of transgression.

A Freebooting Union Breaking New Grounds: Episodes from One Hundred Years of Swedish Syndicalism

Translation into English by Mikael Kopimi Altemark

The Swedish syndicalist labor movement, being one of the few libertarian mass organizations to survive World War II, deserves a kind of attention going beyond the meager information provided by academic journals and outdated magazine interviews. The revolutionary union SAC (*Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation*) has had to operate in the context of the world's most successful welfare state (now rapidly becoming one of the most deregulated states), and the shop floor experiences of its members offer more interesting material than sectarian bickering or yearning for glories past. In this translation of *Fackliga fribrytare*, railway worker and longtime SAC member Ingemar Sjöo presents selected episodes from the history of Swedish

syndicalism—an engaging narrative that sparks many intriguing questions. What is the background to the current ongoing reorganization of SAC? Why is it that paperless restaurant workers and cleaners have taken to reviving the tactics of “the registry method”? And what is it? Sjöö sketches the changing landscape within which SAC has had to navigate these past hundred years, contextualizing the story of how workers in forests and quarries as well as on the rails (and now service workers) might combine direct action and gradualism in order to disarm bosses of their powers to set wages and control the hiring and firing of employees.

EARLY 2013

Scarcity Is a Lie! Building Social, Emotional, and Analytic Capacity for Transformative Justice and Decolonization on Stolen Land

Kristin Herbeck and Anne Yukie Watanabe

This essay explores the ways in which colonialist logic and ideologies of domination are reproduced in transformative justice/community accountability (TJ/CA) efforts. The coauthors ground their analysis in the historical context that underlies these tendencies, especially settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, the state-based co-optation of feminist antiviolence organizing, the logic of criminalization, and the racialized pathologization of interpersonal violence. This project brings together Kristin’s and Anne’s own experiences with TJ/CA with a review of existing literature on the struggles and limitations of applying TJ/CA models in practice, focusing on the dichotomies constructed around

perpetrator/survivor/bystander identities, the reactive ways in which TJ/CA models are often applied, and the individualistic analysis of violence that excessively centers simplistic models of “perpetrator/aggressor accountability” as the avenue to healing harm to the community or communities and survivor(s). The coauthors aim to build on ongoing conversations that are critical of the ways that antiviolence activism has been incorporated or co-opted into state agendas/projects of colonization and institutionalized racism, and instead suggest how to incorporate this work into projects and visions of liberation that open up possibilities for what it would mean to live in as well as address interpersonal violence in a world without prisons or state-based violence.

LATE 2013

Brick by Brick: Toward a World Without Prisons

Layne Mullett

The US prison system and a broader web of related repressive apparatuses (surveillance, policing, etc.) are essential for the maintenance and growth of empire. If we are serious about ending empire, capitalism, and white supremacy, we must directly confront the prison-industrial complex. This essay will explore what might be needed to wage a successful struggle against that system, and what antiauthoritarian and intersectional politics can bring to this struggle. Specifically, the essay will address why fighting prisons is a key element of confronting state power, some lessons we can draw from antiprison movements and political prisoners past and present, and what it might mean to take a prefigurative

approach to antiprison organizing. The project will draw on Layne's own experiences as an antiprison activist as well as current examples of resistance coming from inside the prison walls. It will also look at radical queer and feminist work, and what this can and does bring to our efforts to construct a contemporary movement against mass incarceration.

Social Movements, Financial Resources, and the Role of the Radical Flank

Heather Pipino, Griffin Shumway, and Reid Kotlas

Money is a key resource for social movement organizations, but there is little history on the role of financial resources on reaching movement goals. People's movements have been derailed or co-opted by elite dollars, and elite influence increasingly works hand in hand with state repression to block radical social transformation. Yet scant research shows that social movements were successful from a combination of elite, outside donations and a strong, organized radical flank of the grassroots. This essay will explore the role of class solidarity and the radical flank in relation to movement dollars in order to find out what it would take to resist marginalization and change the politically possible in the face of increasing state repression.

Antiauthoritarian Organizing in Postcoup Honduras

Sandra Cuffe and Dawn Paley

In an investigative essay, the coauthors will explore the role of the groups that decided to continue their resistance outside mainstream politics following the 2009 coup d'état in Honduras. Cuffe and Paley will carry out interviews with antiauthoritarian activists and

groups in the lead up to the November 2013 election period as well as during and after the elections. Their essay will examine not only how non-political-party-affiliated activists believe change can happen but also gauge how their work impacts the electoral discourse of LIBRE (the leftist party formed after the coup), and what the future holds, from their perspectives, if the Left is to take power.

"My Dungeon Shook": James Baldwin, Prison Abolitionist Solidarity in the Face of the Ongoing Nakba, and Antiblackness
Che Gossett

This essay will address the legacy of black American radical anti-Zionism through the anti-Zionist (but not anti-Semitic) writing of Baldwin. Problematic liberal racial justice slogans and rhetoric that compare racist segregation and the Israeli apartheid conditions that Palestinians are made to endure to that of blacks in the United States prior to the onset of the civil rights movement often fail to take into account the social truth of antiblackness in contemporary US society, invisibilize Afro-Palestinian resistance, and downplay black radical anti-Zionist legacies. While antiblack de jure segregation was struck down in the courts, de facto segregation and antiblackness continue, as mass incarceration and stop-and-frisk policies make abundantly clear. This project will ask what political solidarity formations might challenge the use of carceral violence as an instrument of settler colonial and racial apartheid regimes through political alternatives to Islamophobia and Orientalism as well as Cold War racial liberalism and liberal antiblack racism found in the work of Baldwin. How might, from Palestine/

Israel to the United States, abolitionist collectives work in solidarity to abolish the prison-industrial complex as well as end occupation, Israeli apartheid, and the prison system as an apparatus in the perpetuation of a racial capitalist order? How might we build stronger solidarity movements against the ongoing Nakba waged through Israeli state violence and ongoing carceral violence in the United States? Finally, in a time of pinkwashing and branding of Israeli apartheid, how can Palestinian and black queer and/or trans solidarity in the United States be strengthened?

Trust Each Other: You Don't Have to Be Sad to Be a Militant

Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery

This project aims to articulate two interrelated concepts: joyful militancy and sad militancy. In the spirit of openness and figuring it out as we go, the coauthors avoid firm definitions of these terms. Broadly speaking, they use the concept of joyful militancy to stand in for conviviality, friendship, kindness, vulnerability, generosity, mentorship, and love in radical social movements today. Sad militancy, by contrast, stands in for the elements of condescension, fear, resentment, competition, and control that plague our movements. Carla and Nick think that people can participate in actions of resisting and creating alternatives to the dominant order, and at the same time can and must carve out moments and spaces of joy, of a thriving life. They are most interested in the conditions that sustain joyful and sad militancy, and how joyful militancy can be cultivated and sad militancy can be warded off. This project is also empirical, grounded in interviews with organizers from a variety of radical

social movements, with these questions in mind. The coauthors expect to get a number of different (maybe even contradictory) responses, with the aim of reflecting this diversity while charting out resonances and points of convergence in this essay.

Voces Libertarias: The Origins of Anarchism in Puerto Rico

Jorell Meléndez

This essay will be comprised of translations of the core three chapters of Jorell Meléndez's book *Voces libertarias: Orígenes del anarquismo en Puerto Rico* into English. In these he traces the origins of anarchist ideas on the island at the turn of the Twentieth Century, as the country faced a change in the imperial matrix, hurricanes, famines, changes in the modes of colonization and production, as well as the construction of workers' identity along with their radicalization. This translation aspires to give a new generation of radicals a history that has been forgotten by anarchist historiography, that of Puerto Rican anarchism. It seeks to create transhistorical conversations that might allow us to envision new strategies based on the victories and failures of the past.

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Anarchism emerged out of the socialist movement as a distinct politics in the nineteenth century. It asserted that it is necessary and possible to overthrow coercive and exploitative social relationships, and replace them with egalitarian, self-managed, and cooperative social forms. Anarchism thus gave new depth to the long struggle for freedom.

The primary concern of the classical anarchists was opposition to the state and capitalism. This was complemented by a politics of voluntarily association, mutual aid, and decentralization. Since the turn of the twentieth century and especially the 1960s, the anarchist critique has widened into a more generalized condemnation of domination and hierarchy. This has made it possible

to understand and challenge a variety of social relationships—such as patriarchy, racism, and the devastation of nature, to mention a few—while confronting political and economic hierarchies. Given this, the ideal of a free society expanded to include sexual liberation, cultural diversity, and ecological harmony, as well as directly democratic institutions.

Anarchism's great refusal of all forms of domination renders it historically flexible, politically comprehensive, and consistently critical—as evidenced by its resurgence in today's global anticapitalist movement. Still, anarchism has yet to acquire the rigor and complexity needed to comprehend and transform the present.

The Institute for Anarchist Studies (IAS), a nonprofit foundation established in 1996 to support the development of anarchism, is a grant-giving organization for radical writers and translators worldwide. To date, we have funded some sixty projects by authors from countries around the world, including Argentina, Lebanon, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Nigeria, Germany, South Africa, and the United States. We also publish the online and print journal *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*, co-publish the Anarchist Interventions book series with AK Press, create and distribute the *Lexicon* pamphlet series free of charge, and offer the Mutual Aid Speakers List. The IAS is part of a larger movement to radically transform society as well. We are internally democratic and work in solidarity with people around the globe who share our values.