



Rolling Thunder

ISSUE NUMBER FOUR / SPRING TWO-THOUSAND SEVEN / A SALVO FROM THE CRIMETHINC, EX-WORKERS' COLLECTIVE

an anarchist journal of dangerous living

They have carved up the whole world;
if you're lucky they'll offer you a piece of it back, at a price—
they call that *freedom*.

But it is still possible to be free
in thoroughfares reserved for soulless traffic,
in locked buildings slated for demolition,
in the ruins of forests bulldozed to make way for warehouses,
in cities in which everything is for sale,
even under the martial law of soldiers who shoot to kill—
provided that you march,
that you trespass and occupy,
that you plant new gardens and defend them,
that you give and share without measuring:
that you *resist*.

“We must be the trouble we wish to see in the world.”

—*Friends of Brad Will*



OAXACA RECYCLES

Bottles are lined up at Cinco Señores barricade, ready to be transformed into molotov cocktails for the defense of the city's last autonomous radio station. Mexico leads the world in the consumption of Coca-Cola, the worthless commodity par excellence—but the refuse of this world can become the seeds of a new one.

XVII



A requisitioned bus serves as a barricade and as sleeping quarters for those who guard it. In the era of neoliberal capitalism, when commodities move freely across borders but human beings must sneak across them in fear for their lives, it is only possible to move forward by shutting down the routes upon which we are running in circles.

XV

OAXACA TRAVELS

table of contents

OPENING SALVO

- 2 About the Cover: Brad Will Presente!
- 3 A Big Yes and a Little No

LETTERS AND WORDS

- 5 Letter to Infiltrators (Read at the CrimethInc. Convergence in Winona, 2006)
- 6 Glossary of Terms, part IV

BRAND NEWS

- 11 Resistance in Oaxaca, August to November 2006: Timeline, Testimony, and Photoessay
- 24 The Saga of South Central Farm: The Defense of the Last Green Space in Los Angeles

TESTIMONIALS

- 34 The Really Really Free Market: Instituting the Gift Economy
- 43 The Art of Staying in Limbo: Stealing Houses in the Rust Belt
- 51 Not Fighting for an Occupation: Inside the CPE Protests
- 59 Report from the Press Box: Mainstream Media Confidential

ART

- 62 Entartete Kunst: The Exhibition and Suppression of Degenerate Art in Nazi Germany

OLD NEWS

- 66 Lucy Parsons: Forerunner of 21st Century Anarchy

RECIPES FOR DISASTER

- 69 Urban Exploration
- 75 Prisoner and Defendant Support

REVIEWS

- 84 Featuring Books on Trespassing, Arson, and Consensus

COMICS

- 88 Selection from "Abolish Restaurants: A Worker's Critique of the Food Industry"

MUSIC

- 91 The Big Rock Candy Mountain, drawn by Nate Powell

CHILDREN'S FICTION

- 98 The Secret World of Terijian (excerpt)

ACTIVITY PAGES

- 99 Message in a Bottle!
- 100 Stencils

BACKMATTER

- 102 Catalog
- 104 Prometheus



"All this gave Francois a new lease on life. He would shake me and say, 'What a ball! Just think! What a celebration if after all this there is not a chance! They are just ghosts, the ones who think people fight to win! They fight because they like it.'"

—And There Was Light, Autobiography of Jacques Lusseyran, blind hero of the French Resistance

"If you survive me, tell them this: I never gave up. That's a quote, all right?" —Brad Will to a friend with a video camera in Amsterdam, November 2000

About the Cover

Brad Will was an activist, independent media reporter, and anarchist who gave his life to the struggle for a better world. In the 1990s, he squatted and defended buildings and gardens in New York City, and traveled the country carrying out guerrilla theater and speaking about gentrification and squat defense. Long before most of today's anarchists attended a summit demonstration, he attended the Active Resistance gathering at the Democratic National Convention in 1996; he went on to organize for and participate in the historic WTO protests in Seattle and the series of demonstrations that followed them in DC, Los Angeles, Prague, and elsewhere all around the globe. He then turned his attention to Indymedia work, and traveled South America documenting resistance movements there. He was known throughout anarchist communities as a brash, tireless, joyful free spirit with an iron in just about every fire. The editors of this journal last saw him at the CrimethInc. convergence in Minnesota, not long before he left for Mexico.

On October 27, 2006, at age thirty-six, Brad was shot to death by government officials while filming the defense of Barricade Three in Oaxaca. He had traveled to Oaxaca to cover the popular uprising described elsewhere in this issue; in his last report he had written about another victim of the paramilitaries, Alejandro Garcia Hernandez. The Mexican government exploited Brad's death as a justification to send thousands of militarized federal police into Oaxaca to "restore order," shamelessly condemning countless others to Brad's fate. At the same time, Brad's killing brought the plight of those in Oaxaca to the attention of thousands in the US at the very moment at which that attention was needed most—though it remains frustrating that it takes the death of a Brad Will or Rachel Corrie¹ to make some people take notice of injustice.

¹ Rachel was a US activist who was brutally murdered by the Israeli Defense Forces while doing solidarity work in Palestine. She put her body between a bulldozer and a Palestinian home and a soldier drove right over her, callously claiming afterwards that he had not seen her.

On Monday, October 30, solidarity demonstrations took place at Mexican consulates across the US; some consulates were occupied or physically damaged. On November 11, hundreds of mourners packed St. Mark's church in New York's Lower East Side for a four-hour memorial service in Brad's honor. Afterward, a marching band led the raucous crowd in an unpermitted parade throughout lower Manhattan. The march eventually arrived at the bolted doors of Charas Community Center, which had served New York's Puerto Rican and radical communities for twenty-two years before the city closed it down. Locks were cut and hinges



I have this really vivid memory of looking down from the second floor of the convergence space building and seeing Brad Will amidst a sea of people in the courtyard and he was singing that Desert Rat song, fiercely, loudly, proudly:

So I called upon you brother, and you asked what I would do
And I told the truth dear sister when I spoke these words to you
I will stand beside your shoulder, when the tear gas fills the sky
If a National Guardsman shoots me down I'll be looking him in the eye
I will wash their pepper from your face and go with you to jail
And if you don't make it through this fight I swear I'll tell your tale.
I will stay with you in the prison cell in solidarity
And I will not leave that cursed room 'til you walk out with me
For we the people fight for freedom, while the cops just fight for pay
And as long as the truth is in our hearts we're sure to win someday.
I will not falter when that iron fist comes out of the velvet glove
I will stand beside your shoulder to defend this land we love.

—from Sascha Scatter's *In Memory of Brad Will: Old Friend, Mad Revolutionary, Taunter of Death*

broken, and the crowd surged into the building. The walls were painted with messages of hope for those in Oaxaca and merry voices once again echoed in rooms where Brad's had years before. The photo on this issue's cover was taken from the scaffolding looking over the crowd in front of Charas.

Although Brad's death is a tragic loss, his life stands as a courageous triumph. Few who die of old age have ever traveled the country by freight train, lived rent-free in New York and in the canopy of old-growth forests in the Northwest, studied with their favorite beat poets, stopped wrecking balls and chainsaws and bulldozers with their bodies, made love on top of a grain silo in a thunderstorm, or fought the police—and

sometimes won!—on three continents. To die at thirty-six having done all this is a victory, and a reminder for the rest of us that we, too, can do such things—and probably even live to tell. We all die one day, anyway; the question is what happens first.

No charges have been filed in Brad's slaying as of this writing, even though he caught his murderers on video and the footage has been viewed around the world²; the scum who took him from us will never be brought to justice so long as their bosses make the rules. To save the lives of the thousands who will otherwise be slain by their bullets as well, we have to overthrow the system that maintains their power.

Brad Will Presente!

² His last video should still be accessible on the internet by the time you read this. It shows paramilitaries crassly firing guns at civilians armed only with rocks and sticks. The killers have been identified by Reporters Without Borders as municipal policeman Juan Carlos Soriano, municipal personnel chief Manuel Aguilar, public security director Abel Santiago Zárate, and former paramilitary Pedro Caramona.

a big **YES!**
to power **to**
to *human beings* in all their
complexity

to FREEDOM and GIFT GIVING

to communities coming
together every Sunday morning

to *fancy clothes*, ACTION-PACKED
ENTERTAINMENT, and *vegan delicacies*

to ADVENTURE, *romance*, and humor

to parlor games and field sports

to the enjoyment some
derive from soy products

to **DO-IT-YOURSELF**
PUNK ROCK and all other
expressions of rebellion and independence

to the Jewish kibbutz

to **AUTONOMY** for all peoples,
including the Lebanese

to the French uprisings of
MAY 1968 & 2005-2006

to all who fight for
freedom, in Mexico and
around the world

to constructive criticism and
analysis

to all the **HEARTACHE** and **TRAGEDY**
life inevitably contains

to making entire meals with food from
our gardens!

to **rediscovering** the world
through the EYES OF CHILDREN!

to *writing fiery* manifestos with
kittens sleeping in our laps!

to **living to the fullest and**
fighting to the death!

to **ANARCHY!**

and a little **no**
to power **over**

to the UNIVERSAL PRESCRIPTIONS OF
MORALITY AND LAW

to FREE MARKETS and FREE TRADE

to **superstition, shame**, and
REPRESSION

to *buying them* from our enemies
at the expense of our lives

to adventure movies, romance novels,
and the comedy channel

to video games and **spectator** sports

to the monoculture that
produces them

to subcultural
isolation and
provincialism

to Israeli Zionism

to NATIONALISM, however ANTI-IMPERIALIST,
including that of Hezbollah

to the glamorization of the Situationists
and overseas rioting in general

to OPPORTUNISTS and AUTHORITARIANS,
even in the ranks of groups like APPO, who would
turn popular struggles to their own advantage or
impose limits upon them

to the **grudge matches** of
career theoreticians

TO THE UNNECESSARY SUFFERING AND
TRAGEDY WE POINTLESSLY INFLICT UPON
OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER



Letter to Infiltrators

Read at the opening ceremony of the fifth CrimethInc. convergence, July 26, 2006

At last summer's CrimethInc. convergence in Indiana, there was at least one federal infiltrator present disguised as a human being. She insinuated herself into a circle of friends and used their trust to frame them with conspiracy charges after buying them bomb-making supplies and renting them a wiretapped cabin¹. We can only assume that we are similarly infiltrated this summer. I would like to address the following to our infiltrator or infiltrators:

Some of the most beautiful, compassionate, socially conscious young people in North America have traveled

across the country to gather here. They have come to meet like-minded friends, to exchange skills for caring for themselves and their communities, to build a struggle for justice and freedom, to fall in love and make a world conducive to falling in love. But not you. You have come, cynically, to hunt like a wolf in sheep's clothing for young people you can entrap and ensnare. Where others see comrades, you see quarry. We are here to create; you, to destroy.

You may tell yourself that you are here to keep an eye on antisocial elements—but who is the deceitful one, lying to everyone, disguising malice as common cause? You may tell yourself that you are here to protect others from violence—but you are the only one who has come expressly to do harm. Your employers, the FBI, have a history of murder and injustice stretching back long before the notorious COINTELPRO assault on the Black Panthers. They spied on Martin Luther King. When Earth First! activist Judi Bari was bombed, either by right wing terrorists or government agents, the FBI refused to investigate and instead tried—and failed—to frame her for bombing herself.

Anarchists, not the FBI, are the ones who oppose violence in this society. In the past twenty years of anarchist activity, the only injuries have been minor ones in cases of self-defense, in contrast to the slaughter and mayhem the US government perpetrates indiscriminately across the globe. If you really hope to protect others from violence, why aren't you working at a rape crisis center? Do you really think anarchists pose a greater threat to people than rapists do? Or is it the threat to hierarchy, not people, that concerns you?

¹ As of this writing, Eric McDavid, the only one of the three defendants who has refused to sign a plea agreement, has been held in solitary confinement on a starvation diet for a year without trial. The litany of injustices and tribulations he has suffered at the hands of the government is enough to bring tears to the eyes of any feeling person. Please consult www.supporteric.org for more information about the case and what you can do to help.

You may tell yourself you are nobly serving your country—but there are nobler causes to serve. Your masters want power for themselves at any expense, while we struggle for respect and coexistence among all living things. You may tell yourself that you are here to do good—but you are the one on salary; we do what we do for free, for our consciences, not for a paycheck. Essentially, you are a prostitute²; and should you have sex with your targets in order to entrap them, as other infiltrators have done, that will come as no surprise. Imagine the conscience of a person who sleeps with others not out of love or desire, not just in return for money, but in order to ruin their lives!

You must be ashamed of yourself. Think how many people in the world would be disgusted with you, if they knew what you are doing. Anyway, the gulf between us is too broad to be crossed now. The most we can ask is that you do your job badly, like a worker at McDonalds who must feed his family even though he knows his employers are destroying the rainforest, the health of their customers, and the future of all species. If one shred of humanity remains within you after a lifetime of brainwashing, please—do your job badly.

As for the rest of you, who are not infiltrators or informants—if you disapprove of paid agents coming here to endanger you and your friends, don't do the same thing for free. Don't speak of your involvement in illegal activities, don't speculate as to others' involvement—and above all, should you ever find yourself in an interrogation chamber with the ones who really hate our freedom attempting to terrorize you into helping them frame your friends, don't cooperate, don't sell out everything you believe for them.

Our freedom, our safety, are under our control, not theirs. Freedom is not a matter of how many fences are around us, but of abiding by our consciences in any situation. Safety is not the condition of being temporarily outside the grasp of our enemies, but of being able to trust ourselves never to deliver others into harm's way, never to become something we despise.

The FBI, which exists to protect the interests of the most powerful, selfish, and destructive men in the world today, hopes to intimidate us out of our struggle for a better world. But we are here because we feel that the lives waiting for us in their society are unlivable, because we see that the injustices that create the foundation of their power are unacceptable, because we know that the pollution and destruction of their economy are unsustainable. There is no future for us except through change—so attacks on our freedom can only mobilize us to struggle more urgently.

Even if there are one hundred federal infiltrators here and only two human beings, those two human beings can be more powerful than the entire apparatus of the state. Find each other and do something beautiful. Thank you.

² This is not intended to be taken as a slight by honest sex workers. The author extends the utmost respect to wage laborers in all fields, while dreaming of a day when both wages and work itself will be things of the past.

While we're at it, another big **YES** to non-cooperating defendants Nathan Block, Daniel McGowan, Jonathan Paul, and Joyanna Zacher. Almost a year after the FBI witch-hunt Operation Backfire made its public debut with indictments, arrests, and threatened life sentences, the four accepted a plea agreement in which they plead guilty but under no obligation to inform on anyone but themselves. Their suggested sentences range from five to eight years, though they could still receive up to twenty more years under so-called "anti-terror" rules. The four maintained their dignity through months during which it seemed they would spend the rest of their lives in prison; their courage stands as an example to all. The government offered them this deal in return for their lawyers dropping a motion demanding information about whether National Security Agency wiretaps were used in this case—presumably they didn't want to be caught breaking their own laws once again.

An angry little **NO** to the Operation Backfire defendants who readily signed plea bargains promising to testify against others and to cooperate in both current and future government investigations. The non-cooperating defendants' successful plea agreements are one more reminder

that we are stronger when we fight our oppressors than when we beg them for mercy and that much of the fear they inspire is based on bluffing. There is no reason to render your comrades into their hands, no matter what they tell you.

Speaking of arson and legal repression . . . a big **YES** to the Greek anarchists who used smoke bombs and molotov cocktails against police stations and vehicles in Athens and Thessalonica this past December in protest of police brutality and the continued incarceration of anarchists on hunger strike. When the minister of law enforcement reacted by prompting the use of lethal force against such demonstrators, anarchists responded by setting eight banks on fire in Athens. In two cases, anarchists rang the doorbells of nearby residents so they could move their cars before the banks went up in flames. That shows class! A little **NO**, of course, to police, banks, ministers, and cars.

Speaking of class, a big **YES** to the folks who disrupted a speech last fall by the racist, quasi-fascist founder of the anti-immigrant Minutemen Project at Columbia University in New York City. A little **NO** to "Facebook"—some sort of internet photo-sharing service that is popular with college kids but inscrutable to luddites like

your humble editors—which Columbia administrators announced they would be perusing as part of their security probe. We can only agree with Columbia student Marcus Johnson: "As a University Senator and chair of the student affairs committee, I will do my best to make sure that all students are as safe as possible. On another note, everybody should quit Facebook right now." Please don't do your investigators' work for them by uploading information about yourself onto a publicly accessible corporate-owned webpage.

Finally, while of course we support the anti-CPE occupations and demonstrations in France with a big **YES**, we have to send a little **NO** out to one assembly that, carried away in an excess of direct democracy, playfully voted to abolish winter. Thanks to centuries of industrial pollution, it seems their whimsical petition has been granted: as this issue goes to print, we are experiencing the warmest winter in recorded history. Unseasonably warm weather is good for outdoor Really Really Free Markets, but bad for ecosystems and polar ice caps. Not to be stodgy, but next time we hope they'll vote for the abolition of global warming—and with something more effective than ballots.

Contribute! We're always looking for eyewitness accounts, gripping testimonials, instructive recipes, incendiary analyses, scandalous photographs, degenerate artwork (see "Entarte Kunst" elsewhere herein), amusing games, and scathing reviews to fill out each issue.

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www.crimethinc.com
rollingthunder@crimethinc.com

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Glossary of Terms, part IV

Capitalism—Just as monarchy means rule by monarchs and communism means rule by communists, capitalism means rule by capital itself; the wealthy rotate in and out of power, but wealth remains the constant determining force (see *Market*)

Chaos—The sum of all orders

Disorder—A disruption of the anarchy that otherwise characterizes our world. Any organically ordered system—a rainforest, for example, or a circle of friends—is an anarchic harmony that tends to perpetuate itself; disorder, on the other hand, can only be maintained by ever-escalating exertions of force. The precarious discipline of a high school classroom, the factory farm in which sterile rows of genetically modified corn are defended against weeds and insects by a host of technological innovations, the fragile world-domination of a superpower—these are not examples of order, but of disorder imposed from above.

Some confuse disorder with anarchy, misunderstanding it as the absence of any system. But disorder is the opposite of anarchy: enforced over a long enough period of time, it systematizes itself, stacking up hierarchies according to its pitiless demands. One of the most developed forms of disorder is capitalism: the war of each against all, rule or be ruled, sell or be sold. One might call capitalism a social disorder in the same way that bulimia is an eating disorder and sickle cell anemia a blood disorder.

Gallows Humor—Revolutionaries, facing the guillotine: “We die because the people are asleep. You will die because

they will awaken!” Executioner: “Don’t put all your heads in one basket!”

Hygiene—An ascetic regimen designed to weaken children’s immune systems, discourage them from interacting with the natural environment, and deprive them of the information and pleasure otherwise communicated by pheromones. (“Will arrive soon; don’t wash.” -dispatch from Napoleon Bonaparte to his lover Josephine)

Market—The mysterious netherworld in which commodities, having seduced investors and enslaved producers, compete to complete their subjection by reducing them all to consumers. It is unclear who is really in charge, the capitalists or their capital; the economy grants less security and freedom of movement to its human participants than to the objects they consider themselves to possess and control. (see *figure i*.)



Economy (seated), to Middle Manager: “More of their blood now, on the double!”

In the words of a former addict of heroin, the commodity *par excellence*, “The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer; he sells the consumer to his product; he does not upgrade and refine his merchandise, he degrades and simplifies his client.”

Media—An assemblage of tools with which to expand an audience’s conception of what “the world” is to such an extent that their own lives and capabilities seem utterly insignificant; a means of psychological warfare by which people are overloaded with information and desensitized to their own and others’ suffering; the sum of all means by which human beings reduce the infinite complexity of reality to a dead-end maze of abstractions—such as the ones in this sentence. So let’s try a story instead:

A team of anthropologists once traveled far across the outback to live



alongside an aboriginal group that had experienced little contact with the European settlers. The visitors found their hosts not only peaceable but also welcoming; life among them was for the most part joyous and uncomplicated, and mutual aid was taken for granted as the basis of social relations.

A few months into their stay, the anthropologists received a delivery of additional equipment, including a radio with which they were able to tune in news reports from their civilization. The locals listened with interest, asking for assistance when the newscasters used unfamiliar words. One of the first stories told of a town that had been devastated by a flood.

The entire settlement immediately erupted in activity: bags were packed, tents disassembled, supplies collected. The anthropologists, startled, inquired what was happening. They were answered in the tone one adopts when explaining something obvious to a small child: “We’ve got to go help those unfortunate people!”

The visitors pleaded with their friends: “But that village is thousands of miles away, across mountains and deserts and wastelands! You could never make it there—and by the time you arrived, if you ever did, the survivors would all be gone and the village with them.” At long last, they were able to persuade their hosts to stay put.

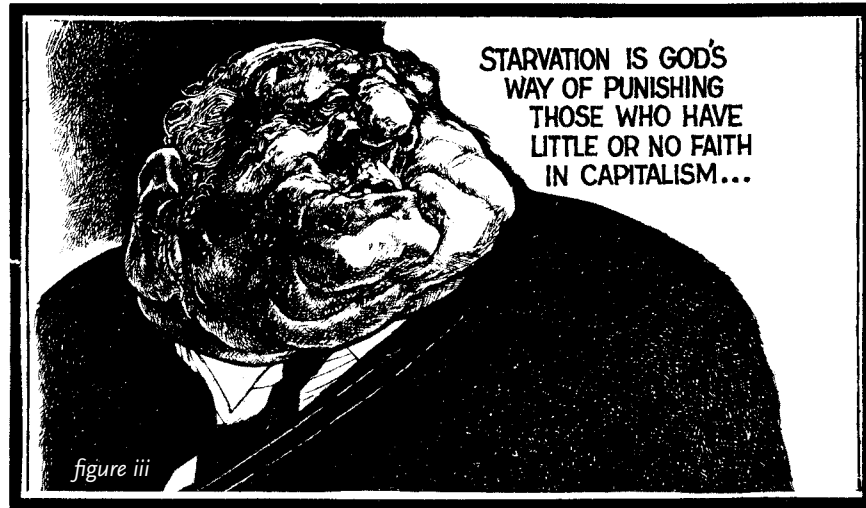
This series of events repeated itself over the following days as further news bulletins announced disastrous fires, famines, storms, explosions, massacres, and wars around the world. Each time, the troubled aborigines prepared to break camp and hurry to the assistance of the stricken people; each time, with great difficulty, the anthropologists talked them out of it.

Finally, an entire news program passed without any response, and then another, and another. The anthropologists congratulated themselves: at last they had impressed upon their protégés what it meant to live in a global village. Over the weeks that followed, they noted further changes in their hosts. Many who had been lively and outgoing grew increasingly sullen and listless. They sat around, listening to radio reports of calamities from Dover to Peking, rarely lifting a finger to help one another or themselves.

Oedipus Complex—According to a certain psychoanalyst, little children want to follow in the footsteps of the Greek hero Oedipus by killing their fathers and fucking their mothers. Transposed to the political sphere, this theory is used to suggest that revolutionaries are pathologically mired in adolescence, endlessly rebelling against authority as a representation of the father figure. But there is a precursor of the Oedipus

story in which Cronus, having become king of the gods by castrating his father and marrying his sister, devours his children as they are born so they will never replace him. In this earlier, more complete version of the narrative, we can see that in fact it is the autocrat who is pathologically frozen in one stage of development, struggling to impose the moment of his power upon eternity (see *figure ii*). The State is a terrorist attempt to halt time itself—to achieve, in its abettors’ words, “the end of history”—by slaughtering those who would inaugurate the world to come; the bullets of riot police are *Saturn Devouring His Children*, Goya’s terrifying rendition of the Cronus myth, come to life. Seen in this light, the Oedipus Complex looks like the paranoid projection of patriarchs seeking to justify their crimes. Fortunately, if the conclusion of the Cronus myth is any indication, history cannot be held hostage forever.

Religion—Etymologically speaking, “hierarchy” originally meant “rule by the sacred.” In theory, religion is not necessarily oppressive—one could hold, as certain revolutionary heretics have, that everyone and everything is sacred. In practice, the only religions that survived the conquest and colonization of the world were the ones that were willing to make themselves accomplices to



conquest and colonization (see figure iii.)—not to mention the ones leading the charge¹. Of course, subtle forms of dissent thrive in even the most oppressive contexts, and today there are still people who use the word “God” where others use words like liberation, mutual aid, and community.

Samizdat—The production of literature banned by the former communist governments of eastern Europe; the term is a play on the term for the Soviet state press, and translates to “self-publishing.” Throughout the greater part of the twentieth century, the best literature, philosophy, and history in the Soviet Union and its satellite states was copied by photo-reproduction and distributed through underground channels—just as it is here in the United States today.

Schizophrenia—A long-term mental disorder involving a breakdown in the

¹ As Jesus explains in the Gospel of Matthew, “Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother...”

Likewise, it is edifying to consult the words of Martin Luther, who appears at first myopic glance to have been a reformer and radical, on the proper treatment of those who resist authority: “Here, let whoever can give blows, strangle, stab—secretly or openly—and remember that nothing can be more poisonous, harmful, and devilish than a revolutionary; just as one must kill a mad dog, for if you do not slay him he will slay you and a whole land with you.”

relation between thought, emotion, and behavior, leading to faulty perception, inappropriate actions and feelings, withdrawal from reality and personal relationships into fantasy and delusion, and a sense of mental fragmentation. When this takes place all at once throughout a society, it is no longer discerned as a disorder, but on the contrary lauded as “good citizenship,” “patriotism,” and even “hard-nosed pragmatism.”

Slogan—A pithy formulation convenient for mobilizing unreflective masses; as every politician and advertising executive knows, the less a statement means, the more people can rally behind it. (Punk rocker in a painted leather jacket, responding to an inquiry about his beliefs: “Any questions, read my back.”)

Some peoples imagine their dead, or certain of them, as fighting hosts. The Celts of the Scottish Highlands have a special word for the host of the dead: *sluagh*, meaning “spirit-multitude.” To quote one commentator: “The spirits fly about in great crowds like starlings, up and down the face of the world, and come back to the scenes of their earthly transgressions. They fight battles in the air as men do on the earth. They may be heard and seen on clear, frosty nights, advancing and retreating, retreating and advancing against one another.” The word *gairm* means shout or cry, and *sluagh-ghairm* was the battle-cry of the dead.

This word later became “slogan.” The expression we use for the battlecries of our modern crowds derives from the Highland hosts of the dead.

Soft Drink—Worthless things make the best commodities, as their prices are indisputable

Symptom—Once we had characteristics; now, thanks to medical science and psychiatry, we have symptoms

Totalitarianism—Ideology incarnated as a society; “the Word made flesh,” to appropriate Catholic lingo. After the great leader’s death, walls throughout the nascent Soviet Union were painted to read “*Even now, Lenin is more alive than the living.*” The implications could not have been wasted on the beleaguered workers for whom the boundless possibilities of life had been replaced with the inert prescriptions of the dead.

Trouble—Our ancestors were afraid of getting hurt; today, we stay in line out of fear of getting “in trouble”

What Experience Teaches—Note on a locked door: “Applicants for wisdom— inquire within”

Work—The curse of the drinking classes (that’s a Wilde ideal!); alternately, the meaningless routines the capitalist economy imposes on its participants in order to obscure the limitless potential of their own self-directed activity (see *Capitalism, Economics, Market*)

Word of the Issue: *Nature*

The term “nature” usually appears in conjunction with its supposed opposite, civilization. Together, these words imply that the activities and motivating forces of human beings differ from those of the rest of the cosmos. But once you dispense with the superstition that God created Man in His own image to give him dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, it’s hard to get around acknowledging that the same natural processes through which stars form and shellfish evolve must also be at work in every aspect of human activity.

All dichotomies are constructions, useful only for what they bring out when applied as frames to the infinity of existence; one who desires to get to the bottom of a dichotomy must begin by asking what it offers those who use it. For capitalists who don’t give a damn about ecology, the answer here is obvious: in differentiating nature from civilization, they establish a hierarchy with themselves on top, thus justifying the exploitation of the aforementioned fish and fowl. Ironically, ecologically-minded anticapitalists who use this dichotomy may also be unconsciously seeking to establish a hierarchy, but with everything non-human at the top and human beings at the bottom—with the possible exception of themselves.

This is most obvious in those who anthropomorphize Nature, attributing values and wisdom to it as if it were a sentient being. Some even cross the line into authoritarian mysticism, insisting we must adopt those values and abide by that wisdom. This is a ploy, conscious or not, to make their own values and “wisdom” seem more compelling; nature itself is so infinitely diverse that it would be impossible to distill one lesson or party line from its example¹ (see *Abstractions*).

Contradictions abound in every normative attempt to define nature. Nature is characterized as that which is “sustainable,” as if it were something constant, when in fact the natural world is always in flux. Nature is differentiated from civilization according to vague criteria such as language or domestication, in spite of bees communicating the locations of flowers to each other¹ and certain ant colonies practicing animal husbandry. Nature is said to have ordained a specific role for every organ in a body and every species in an ecosystem—but these claims are based only on circumstantial evidence. Anyone who believes in fixed natural laws or purposes has more in common with the priests who describe sodomy as a “crime against nature” than with the naturalists who have observed homosexual behavior in countless species.

Here is another account of what nature, and humanity as a subset of it, might be: Imagine an infinite, dynamic chaos, in which experiments are endlessly taking place. Some of these immediately give way to other experiments; others create feedback loops in

¹ It is as impossible for bees to survive without their cultural conventions as it is for human beings to live in snowy regions without the tools we’ve passed from one generation to the next since before we left Africa. Just like us, the bees *are* their culture—their culture is their nature!—it only appears to be something static and dictated by an autocratic deity (“Mother Nature”) because we view it from such a distance. That’s trans-species culture shock!

* You want to *live* “according to nature”? O you noble Stoics, what deceptive words these are! Imagine a being like nature, wasteful beyond measure, indifferent beyond measure, without purposes and consideration, without mercy and justice, fertile and desolate and uncertain all at the same time; imagine indifference itself as a power—how *could* you live according to this indifference? Living—is not that precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is not living estimating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different? And supposing your imperative “live according to nature” meant at bottom as much as “live according to life”—how could you *not* do that? Why make a principle out of what you yourselves are and must be?

In truth the matter is altogether different: while you pretend rapturously to read the canon of your law in nature, you want something opposite, you strange actors and self-deceivers! Your pride wants to impose your morality, your ideal, on nature—even on nature—and incorporate them in her; you demand that she should be nature “according to the Stoics,” and you would like all existence to exist only after your own image—as an immense eternal glorification and generalization of Stoicism. For all your love of truth, you have forced yourselves so long, so persistently, so rigidly and hypnotically to see nature the wrong way, namely Stoically, that you are no longer able to see her differently. And some abysmal arrogance finally still inspires you with the insane hope that because you know how to tyrannize yourselves—Stoicism is self-tyranny—nature, too, lets herself be tyrannized: for is not the Stoic—a part of nature?

But this is an ancient eternal story: what formerly happened with the Stoics still happens today, too, as soon as any philosophy begins to believe in itself. It always creates a world in its own image; it cannot do anything otherwise. Philosophy is this tyrannical drive itself.

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good And Evil*

which similar processes repeat themselves, changing slowly over time. Within this context, certain members of one species have decided, not surprisingly, that they are special. The traits which they believe differentiate them from other animals—culture, language, free will—are not actually unique to them, but these appear very different when experienced firsthand than they do observed in others from afar. Most of these creatures can agree that moss tends to grow on certain sides of trees as a result of natural forces, but would exempt their own relationships and decision-making processes from such explanations. If one could ask the moss, it would probably argue that it has free will, too, but prefers the more hospitable side of the tree.

According to this account, everything is natural—from polyurethane to cannibalism, from space travel to breast implants. Free of responsibilities to nature, we can ask ourselves: what do we *want*? Do we desire to replace forests with asphalt and pump the atmosphere full of carbon monoxide, to supplant reality with virtual reality and ecology with technology? Those who do not need not base their objections upon arguments about what is natural any more than they should base them on superstitious notions of universal morality; they can take their desires as sufficient in themselves to justify action.

But what, a distraught conservationist might ask, are we to make of our species' impending murder-suicide at the expense of all life on earth? Doesn't that imply some kind of essential disjunction between human beings and other life forms?

This can be answered most easily in the form of a parable: Once upon a time, several herds of deer lived in relative symbiosis with the rest of a grassland ecosystem. They would eat the tops of the grass, then move on; the grass would grow back in their wake, fertilized by their manure. One day, a young deer tried eating the roots of the grass as well as the tops; this was natural, as each new generation experimented with new possible food sources. It turned out that the roots were edible, too: suddenly there was twice as much food available within the same area, and as more and more deer adopted this approach, the population of the herd skyrocketed. Other herds began eating the roots as well, so as not to be outdone in the struggle for resources and domination of the gene pool. Only a few marginalized groups retained the

earlier custom of eating the tops of the grass and nothing more, and these were driven to the edges of the plain.

After a few decades, almost all the grass had been consumed, and where it had grown only parched desert remained. There were huge numbers of deer by this time, in teeming, oversized herds, looking sleeker and healthier than their ancestors ever had; a year later, their corpses littered the desert by the million, bones sticking through emaciated flesh. That rotting flesh contributed nutrients to the scorched desert, and eventually the first shoots of a new crop of grass appeared. As new grasses spread slowly across the desert, a few deer could once again be seen nibbling at them. These were the descendants of the ones who had never begun to eat the roots.

The deer that ate the roots were as natural as any other deer—they were an experiment that worked for a while but could not continue indefinitely. The question is whether we want to follow in their footsteps.



Resistance in Oaxaca: CHRONICLE OF A MODERN UPRISING

During the second half of 2006, the Mexican state of Oaxaca was the site of one of the most dramatic uprisings in recent North American history. For several months, police and politicians completely lost control of Oaxaca City: the capitalist economy was brought to a standstill, radio and television stations were seized to transmit news of the struggle, and life throughout the city was organized according to consensus-based structures. Speaking both geographically and in terms of the forms taken by the revolt, this may be the closest our generation has come to seeing anarchist revolution.

What can we learn from the events in Oaxaca? It is too early to derive any conclusions about specific tactics, but a few basic lessons seem clear. First, revolutionary struggle in the Western hemisphere is most advanced south of the US border; any opportunity for significant social transformation here will likely be preceded by major upheavals there. Would-be revolutionaries in the US should stay abreast of developments in Latin America, establish relationships with people there, and find effective ways to support them in liberation struggles.

Mexico in particular is a powder keg right now. While the eyes of the world have been focused on the Middle East—including the eyes of some anarchists, who have wishfully tried to project an anti-authoritarian character onto the Iraqi insurgency—neoliberal capitalism has met fiercer and fiercer resistance there, much of which has been explicitly anti-authoritarian. The extent to which anti-authoritarian ideas and models play a role in struggles there over the years to come may well determine the viability of the anarchist alternative in North America.

Second, a great percentage of the population of Oaxaca is indigenous. Because their traditional customs include decision-making models that are comparatively more horizontal, they share a point of reference for an alternative to the hierarchical structures of capitalism and so-called democracy. This highlights the importance of a culture of resistance in any struggle. Without a counterpoint to the existing system, people are

much less likely to struggle against it and much more susceptible to being hoodwinked into struggling on behalf of some duplicate system. In North America, where most non-hierarchical traditions have been virtually wiped out by capitalist genocide or assimilation, we have to build new cultures of resistance from the ground up. A culture of resistance is not a clique in which people profess radical opinions while living according to the dominant social and economic norms—it is a subcultural space in which power flows differently and people become experienced in a radically different way of life.

Finally, whatever they say on television, it is possible in at least some parts of the world to involve the majority of the population in a full-on contest with the powers that be. The uprising in Oaxaca began the same way the Paris uprising in May 1968 did: one group demonstrated the effectiveness of direct action, managed to avoid alienating others while escalating the conflict until the state responded with intense repression, and the rest of the populace rose up to support them, taking up their tactics and organizational forms in the process. It may be that this could happen elsewhere, as well. Our hopes for transforming our own lives rest on whether we can find common cause on such a scale.

This poses the eternal question of how we organize ourselves and what criteria we use to recognize allies. There has been a fair bit of debate as to whether APPO, the consensus-based popular assembly of Oaxaca, deserves anarchist support, since it includes members of established political parties and has only made reformist demands. The perspective of the editors of this magazine, in brief, is that revolutionary impetus always comes directly from the people involved in a struggle, not from organizations. Organizations can only be pushed to revolutionary action by popular momentum and initiative; it is almost always the case that the apparent leaders of a liberation struggle are borne helplessly along on a wave of popular energy, struggling to keep up with it when it surges forward and inevitably moving to control and contain

OAXACA TIMELINE

December, 2004 – Ulises Ruiz Ortiz takes office as governor of Oaxaca after widespread claims of election fraud. He is a member of the PRI, the party that has maintained a stranglehold on the Mexican government for most of the past century.

May 22, 2006 – Section 22 of the teachers' union goes on strike in Oaxaca, demanding more schools and more resources for students, especially in impoverished rural and indigenous communities. According to human rights organizations, nearly 80% of Oaxaqueños live in extreme poverty. The teachers set up camp in the main square of the state capital, occupy public buildings, and organize several massive marches.

June 14 – 3000 state police attack the teacher's encampment, killing at least eight people, "disappearing" others, and injuring hundreds. Within hours, teachers and other Oaxaqueños fight off the police and regain control of the city square.

June 16 – 400,000 people march in support of the teachers. Over the following weeks, the teachers occupy seven city halls throughout the state of Oaxaca, and students at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca take over their campus radio station in support of the teachers. Teachers and others form the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO), a consensus-based network of over two hundred groups, to coordinate resistance and take care of the needs of their communities. They call for Ulises to resign.

August 1 – A women's march ends in the occupation of the broadcasting station



VI

it when they can'. While we see some organizational forms as more conducive to self-determination than others, even in the best case scenario the center of gravity for us is the liberating activity of human beings, whether it takes place inside or outside organizations.

In covering the events in Oaxaca, we are not cheerleading for APPO, per se, but celebrating the efforts people there have made to free themselves, including many that have taken place under the APPO banner. At the same time, we trust that the Oaxaqueños know better than we could what approaches are most appropriate to their context.

Oaxaca Photo Index

I. August 11: Funeral March (R)

Thousands of fists are raised in the Zócalo, the main square in Oaxaca City, as the first casket of a movement member killed by government forces is carried to the center of the crowd. On June 14, the Governor of the state of Oaxaca sent thousands of police here to clear out an encampment

¹ This lines up well enough with the reports that Flavio Sosa, an APPO leader who was active in the leftist PRD through the 1980s and '90s, called for the barricades defending Radio Universidad to be taken down on November 2 just before the epic battle that ended in the retreat of the federal police, but returned to the streets afterwards to claim victory with those who had defended them.

of striking teachers rather than face their demands. This turned the annual Section 22 teachers' union strike into a full-fledged popular struggle.

The state of Oaxaca is 70% indigenous and over half the population lives in poverty. The people are not poor in culture or in biodiversity, but both of these are being eroded at the hands of the corrupt government. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), comprised of a wealthy elite, has ruled the state for eighty years. The current and past governors of Oaxaca have lined their party's pockets by collaborating with multinational corporations and promoting neoliberal economic policies; this has resulted in the theft of indigenous land, the forced migration of massive numbers of workers and families, and the usual exploitation of resources and labor. All resistance has been met with severe governmental repression.

A few days after the attack in the Zócalo, the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) formed with the primary goal of forcing governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz out of power. APPO's main strategy was to stop the state government from functioning through nonviolent direct action: closing down all government buildings, reclaiming government vehicles, and gaining control of media outlets for movement communication. The state government responded with a series of violent attacks.

The man in the casket in this photo was a teacher's husband, fifty years old and a father of three, who had been shot by government gunmen and killed while walking in a march with 20,000 others against government repression.

II. September 15: Communities Cook Food for the Movement Members Sleeping in the Streets (R)

Beginning with the encampment set up by the teachers' union in the Zócalo, more and more encampments were created as new actions occurred. Once a government building was shut down, an encampment would be constructed outside to maintain the closure. Camps were also set up to protect radio stations reclaimed by the movement. People from all over Oaxaca prepared food to bring to those living in encampments. This group of women live in a small village outside the city; although they themselves have very little, they would each bring an ingredient and together cook a meal for thousands of teachers.

III. September 15: Community Radio is Key in this Popular Struggle (R)

Recognizing the role of the media in discrediting the teachers' union and spreading disinformation, Section 22 decided to create their own means of communication during an encampment in 2005. With community support, they created the low-frequency

radio station, Radio Plantón. The station was so popular that it continued its diverse community-based programming after that encampment ended. During the June 14 police attack on the 2006 encampment, the radio station was destroyed. Immediately thereafter, students at the local autonomous university took over their own station for the movement. When the university station was attacked by paramilitaries, the movement reclaimed others, at one point controlling eleven altogether. The central role of these stations was easily recognizable, as they could be heard from numerous shops and homes and at all times you could see groups of people gathered around small hand-held radios.

IV. September 27: Teachers Encampment and Blockade near the Zócalo (R)

This is one of the fifty blocks that surrounds the Zócalo. No matter which way you entered, you had to slide through makeshift blockades of metal sheeting and barbed wire, large pieces of concrete, used tires, and, in some cases, reclaimed government cars and buses. These barricades were guarded by the teachers in shifts through the night to protect their sleeping compañer@s from government attacks. On either side of the street, multicolored tarps covered the blankets and cardboard used for sleeping. In the center square a community kitchen was set up to gather donations and prepare large pots of food. A clinic was set up by supportive workers in the medical field to serve those who left their villages and homes to live in the encampments. Walking through the encampments you could always find teachers embroidering, reading the latest communiqué, or gathered in circles at meetings.

V. October 1: We Are Ready (A)

During the night, the reclaimed radio stations coordinated communication between barricades and served as a voice for those who stood watch. The signs on this barricade read "We are ready" and "Ulises we are waiting for you."

VI. October 20: EZLN mural (A)

The mural reads: *While the worker continues, preoccupied with bourgeois values like patriotism, religion, the state, the government, laws, political officials, and soccer; the worker will continue to be exploited by the bosses and be deceived by politicians who take turns in power.*

Political graffiti like this decorated the streets of Oaxaca, leaving no wall untouched. Political slogans, stencil art, and tags were spraypainted on every possible surface; announcements, letters from political prisoners, posters, and handmade prints were wheat-pasted alongside them.

Messages of support arrived constantly from the EZLN's Other Campaign. The Zapatistas blocked roads and bridges in support of the central demands of APPO.

VII. October 20: Squat (A)

In the five months during which Oaxaca City was essentially an autonomous zone free from police and other government officials, squats sprouted up all over town—this one in the ruins of a crumbling jail. Casas Ocupadas provided space for shelter and work. This adobe compound held a library, two art workshops, a darkroom, a communal kitchen, numerous sleeping cells, and a garden in the courtyard.

"Para tod@s todo, para nosotr@s nada" is a saying popularized most recently by the Zapatistas. It means "Nothing for ourselves, everything to everyone."

The use of the arroba (@) is a written way to subvert the gender binary inherent in Spanish. By ending with a character including both an A and an O, a word ending with @ applies to all genders.

VIII. October 29: Federal Police Enter Oaxaca (R)

On October 29, 4000 Federal Preventative Police (PFP) moved into Oaxaca. The movement put up incredible nonviolent resistance. People lay down in front of bulldozers and other military machinery to prevent it from entering the city. In this way and others, they held the police off for hours. A friend that came into town by bus this first day said he saw a march of 2000 walking to the city on foot from their rural village to show support. At the time, they were over an hour away; who knows how far away they started.

The PFP killed at least two protesters and arrested thirty-six on the first day. At one point they were entering private homes and searching for people. They arrived in the Zócalo in the early afternoon, but due to the sheer number of people they were unable to occupy the space. Lines of PFP were forced multiple blocks up the street; people from the movement captured the busses that had brought the police to Oaxaca, moving them to

of television Channel 9. They broadcast footage of the bloody events of June 14, which the government-controlled media had refused to air.

August 10 – Paramilitary groups composed of out-of-uniform Oaxacan police and politicians from the PRI open fire on a march, killing teacher José Jiménez Colmenares.

August 22 – Paramilitaries attack and disable the broadcasting station. In response, residents set up barricades throughout Oaxaca and take over private radio stations.

October 18 – Teacher and APPO participant Pánfilo Hernández is murdered by paramilitaries. Many others have also been killed or "disappeared."

October 27 – Paramilitaries armed with pistols and rifles attack the barricades, and residents drive them back with sticks and rocks. The paramilitaries shoot several people and kill three, including US independent media journalist Brad Will. His killers, who are caught on camera, include a police chief and two officials from the PRI.

October 28 – Dupliciously exploiting Brad's murder, Mexican President Vicente Fox sends 4000 federal police to Oaxaca to "restore order." In full body armor, the police surround and invade the city, firing tear gas indiscriminately into unarmed crowds and residential neighborhoods. Countless Oaxaqueños are beaten, shot, and "disappeared."

November 2 – Thousands of police in helicopters and armored vehicles attempt to storm the university to shut down the last radio station controlled by the people of Oaxaca. In a seven-hour pitched battle during which tremendous quantities of tear gas are dropped into the university, locals equipped only with rocks and molotov cocktails succeed in fighting them off.



XI. October 30: Federal Police (R)

The day after the arrival of the federal police thousands of people joined in three marches that came together at a local church. The teachers who had been displaced by the police set up a new encampment there. This is another line of police blocking the entrance to the Zócalo. “Asesinos,” murderers, is painted on their shields. Within a few minutes they switched out the shields.

XII. October 31: Teachers Settle into New Plantón (R)

In the Santo Domino plaza, a teacher showed me her dinner, kindly brought by community members who support the movement. The teachers had not been paid since the end of August and many relied purely on support from the community in order to continue the struggle.

XIII. November 2: Muertos del Movimiento (A)

The Day of the Dead is one of the most important holidays in the state of Oaxaca, during which the dead are honored with altars typically bearing flowers and offerings of food and drinks. This altar honors twenty APPO supporters and teachers killed for their involvement in the movement.

XIV. November 4: Radio Universidad (A)

After Radio Universidad was sabotaged by government loyalists in early August who poured acid on the transmitter, a group of women took over the government-run media complex Channel 9, broadcasting their own television and radio programs. After they were attacked and taken off the air, supporters converged throughout the city, taking over twelve local radio stations in one night. By late October, Radio Universidad had returned to the air, but it was soon the only station broadcasting news and information for the movement. It survived an all-out police assault on November 2, but eventually its broadcast was blocked by a competing signal transmitting a single song on endless repeat.

XV. November 18: Cinco Señores Barricade (R) [inside front cover]

At one point during the struggle, there were over 1600 barricades set up autonomously throughout the city. Reclaimed buses and cars, tires, sandbags, old mattress springs,

and barbed wire were used to control the flow of traffic and protect the movement from attacks by paramilitaries and plainclothes municipal police. Neighborhoods came together to close down their main thoroughfares, setting up a barricade each night and keeping watch until the morning. Cinco Señores, seen in this photo, was the last remaining barricade. It spanned several blocks, closing the streets surrounding Autonomous Benito Juarez University with burned buses, rebar, and light poles to protect the radio station there. The majority of those who remained at the barricade were students and homeless youth who slept in busses like this one during the day. Women from the community set up a small kitchen to cook for the barricade.

XVI. November 18: Cinco Señores Barricade (R)

On November 2, Cinco Señores was the location of a seven-hour battle between the PFP and the movement. The police advanced on the university housing the radio station of the movement with water cannons, tear gas, and slingshots. The radio called for the people to come out and defend the station. Thousands responded and, after a seven-hour street battle, managed to force the federal police to retreat by means of molotov cocktails, fireworks, and rocks. As more and more barricades were cleared by the PFP and many of those who had maintained them were seized from their homes by police, Cinco Señores remained. The PRIistas and undercover police began to target this barricade almost daily. Facing automatic weapons, the compañer@s at Cinco Señores continued to protect the radio station.

XVII. November 18: Cinco Señores Barricade (R) [inside front cover]

People involved with Cinco Señores were disappeared, beaten, and arrested; on November 5, twenty-two-year-old Marco Sanchez Martinez was shot while guarding the radio entrance and sent to the hospital in critical condition. I spoke to a woman whose teenage son was taken from her home in the middle of the day by plainclothes police for allegedly spending time at the barricade. As these attacks increased, defensive measures were taken such as stocking molotovs and PVC pipe tubes used to shoot fireworks. At one point, two military officers were captured by young barricade guards and released two hours later to the Red Cross.

XVIII. November 19: Women’s March (R)

In response to the repression of the PFP and reports of rape and sexual assault by the invading forces, a women’s march was organized on November 19. This woman is painting “Ulises Out!”

XIX. November 19: Women’s March (R)

During the march, many women carried mirrors with labels reading “I am a rapist” or “...murderer” or “...repressor” which they held up to the federal police. Throughout the latter half of 2006, over 500 people were detained in Oaxaca; almost all who have been released reported psychological and physical torture. As of this writing over 140 remain in prison, the majority transferred to federal prison in states outside Oaxaca, far from their families and lawyers and denied medical attention. Stories coming out of these prisons include torture, sexual assault, threatened rape, and forced false confessions.

XX. November 19: Women’s March (R)

Women hold hands in a line between marchers and the federal police. As the march approached the first line of police, the police met their chants with pepper spray.

XXI. November 19: Women’s March (R)

This women was expressing her support for the movement. She is wearing a apron worn by many traditional Oaxaqueña women.

XXII. November 20: March Turned Skirmish (R)

Another march took place on November 20, marking the anniversary of the Mexican revolution. After the majority of people retreated, all that was left other than the police lines was a burning bus. The photographer found it highly ironic that it was burning next to a sign calling for recognition that Oaxaca was not governable and the three branches of government (poderes) are clearly not functioning.

XXIII. November 20: Cohete (A)

A cohete—a device for shooting fireworks—points at a line of federal police outside the Camino Real Hotel. Cohetes were fired most often out of PVC tubes called “bazookas” and were also used for communication between barricades.

The Camino Real Hotel was a favored canvas for graffiti and was targeted during the protests with rocks and Molotov cocktails. As one of the “finest” hotels in Oaxaca City, the fortress that used to be a prison and then

create more barricades around the Zócalo and then lighting them on fire. The police regrouped at two entrances at the south side of the Zócalo; the people gathered, facing the police and chanting.

IX. October 29: Federal Police Enter Oaxaca (R)

This photo is taken at the other corner of the Zócalo, where the police stood without advancing until 2:30 in the morning. Clearly, they were surprised by the diversity and numbers of people who came out to the streets and had to change their strategy. Many women took the opportunity to speak to the young men dressed in full riot gear. By the time the PFP did advance, the movement had decided to retreat and the police

occupied the square. They immediately destroyed all the tarps and belongings of the teachers and began to paint over the graffiti that filled the square, as if it were that easy to erase evidence of the resistance.

X. October 30: Federal Police (R)

For the next two days the PFP prevented access to all entrances to the Zócalo by standing shoulder to shoulder in full riot gear at each intersection. Caterpillar bulldozers were used in the police operation to take down barricades and clear out encampments. Once again, as in Palestine, equipment made by the American-based corporation Caterpillar is being used to clear away human beings fighting for dignity and freedom as if they were mere debris.

November 5 – Paramilitaries continue firing upon the radio station, shooting one young man in the chest. Tens of thousands of Oaxaqueños march in defiance of the police occupation.

November 20 – At the request of the Zapatistas, all major highways in Chiapas, the state immediately south of Oaxaca, are shut down in solidarity with those in struggle in Oaxaca. A march in Oaxaca ends in street fighting and fires.

November 25 – APPO holds a march with the intention of surrounding and reoccupying the Zócalo, the central square of Oaxaca which federal police have occupied since October 29. When the march reaches the Zócalo, violent clashes break out with the police; the confrontations continue into the night, at one point spanning fourteen blocks. By the end of the night, the police have murdered at least three and wounded, arrested, or disappeared hundreds more; meanwhile, demonstrators have set fire to government buildings including the Benito Juarez Theatre, the Secretary of External Relations, and the Superior Tribunal of Justice, not to mention a number of banks and hotels and dozens of cars and busses. PRI radio stations broadcast the streets where demonstrators are hiding, and encourage attacks on foreigners in solidarity with APPO.

December 16 – Many of the federal police hand over their positions to local and state police; the government releases forty-three political prisoners, many of whom leave the federal prison in Nayarit showing signs of torture and wearing clothing drenched in blood. Over a hundred more remain in prison. Section 22 of the teachers’ union formally breaks with APPO, though much of the union membership continues to identify with it. Two days later the National Human Rights Commission, a government agency, reports that 349 people have been arrested, 370 injured, and 20 killed; other estimates run much higher.

a convent is now the favorite lodging for Ulises Ruiz and the military elite.

XXIV. November 20: Media (A)

Reporters Without Borders named Mexico the second most dangerous place in the world for reporters in 2006, second only to



Iraq. The corporate media came to Oaxaca equipped with goggles, gas masks, and bullet-proof vests. Most attended protests on motorbikes, ready for a quick getaway.

XXV. November 20: Leading the March (A)

A girl leads the march on November 20 with a cacerola—a frying pan used as a noisemaker or weapon. Taken from its domestic context, the cacerola is an important symbol for the women's movement.

XXVI. November 25: Mega March (R)

On November 25, tens of thousands marched the eight kilometers from Santa Maria Coyotepec to the Oaxaca City Center. The police were in full riot gear at each of the entrances to the main square. In many of the entrances police officers could be seen atop armored vehicles equipped with live ammunition. Within half an hour street battles broke out between the movement and the police in at least two of the entrances. Eventually the police pushed the people north up the hill, at one point taking over the Santo Domingo plaza where the movement had been centered since the police forced them out of the main square. The police continued to fire tear gas into the crowd and burned the tarps and other

items in the Santo Domingo plaza. During this time, plainclothes police were arresting people in the streets.

After the police retreated to the main square, many movement members regrouped in Santo Domingo as night was falling. The police advanced over eight blocks, forcing the crowd to continue running north of the main square. Paramilitary groups also arrived on the scene, shooting into the crowd as people ran for their lives. Throughout the following hours federal police and plainclothes gunmen continued to attack members of the movement. Three movement members were killed, over 140 arrested, and over 200 injured, at least 40 with live ammunition. Since November 25, this repression has continued, leaving those involved in the movement unsafe in their own beds.

XXVII. November 25: Rocks (A)

The man scans the street with rocks in hand.

A mostly Spanish-speaking listserv has been started by anarchists involved in the struggle in Oaxaca in order to facilitate greater coordination throughout North America: anarkagalactica@lists.riseup.net

Photos courtesy of Rochelle Gause (R) and Ariel (A), available on www.flickr.com as mexicosolidarity and revolucionoaxaca, respectively









XVI



XXIII



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XXVII



XXV



The Saga of South Central Farm

South Central Farm was a collectively run community garden that fed 350 of the poorest families in Los Angeles. The city sold it to developer Ralph Horowitz in a back-room deal for \$5 million; he intended to build a warehouse there, possibly for Wal-Mart. The farmers raised beyond the \$16 million he demanded for the land—but, as Horowitz told the *Los Angeles Times*, he would not sell the land to them even if they offered \$100 million.

was laid to rest. The property slowly became an unofficial landfill, until the Rodney King verdict in 1992 set off an uprising throughout Los Angeles. After the riots, the city granted a food bank across the street permission to use some of the land as a community garden. Several local families joined in the effort to clean up and utilize the land. In time the space developed into South Central Farm.

At about four a.m. everything became soaked with morning dew. This woke me up just enough to think about how nice and cozy my little soft patch of grass was going to be when the warm sun came up. A couple hours later I was awakened a second time. A local songbird perched on a fence post was running through its favorite calls. I enjoyed its singing for a few minutes, then drifted back to sleep. At seven a.m., I was awakened for a third time by the roar of a helicopter circling very close to the ground. As its circles tightened, I sprang to my feet to see the yellow and green of the LA County Sheriff. It was my first morning at South Central Farm community garden.

The farm was also one of the only places in downtown Los Angeles where rainwater could actually soak into the ground, to be naturally filtered before becoming part of the city's drinking water.

In 1995 the city negotiated to sell the property back to Horowitz and his partners, but the sale fell through because of lack of support from the city council. In 2001, Horowitz filed a lawsuit to pressure the city council to approve the sale. The pressure succeeded and the council approved.

The songbird was another of the garden's miracles. Until a couple years ago, songbirds were not heard in that area at all. The garden offered them a habitat, demonstrably increasing the diversity of wildlife in otherwise desolate central Los Angeles.

In response to the sale, the farmers organized as South Central Farmers Feeding Families in an effort to gain enough support to save the garden. In 2004, under eviction notice, the South Central Farmers filed a lawsuit questioning the legitimacy of the land deal. The Los Angeles superior court issued injunctions to halt any development until the suit ran its course. In late 2005, the Los Angeles court of appeals overturned the injunction and the farmers faced the very real threat of losing the garden. It was around this time that some of the farmers began a round-the-clock vigil at the farm. Some hoped this would gain positive media attention. Some wanted to be there in the event that something could be done physically to stop an eviction. Some simply couldn't face the thought of leaving the garden forever.

At the time, South Central Farm was a fourteen-acre green space in the middle of South Central Los Angeles. It consisted of 350 individual garden plots. The farmers grew fruits and vegetables, cooking and medicinal herbs, flowers, and many rare and endangered plant species. As a haven from drugs, gangs, and the stress of living in an impoverished, over-industrialized, and extremely polluted area, the garden provided a safe space for children and community to grow. With weekly farmers' markets, educational and political events, and community celebrations, the farm offered a vital alternative to the suffocating gray of the surrounding area.

With all it had to offer, you'd think the city of Los Angeles would have guarded that garden as one of its most valued treasures. Maybe that explains the helicopter? The sad truth is that the machines of the state were circling to monitor and intimidate the protective occupation I had just joined.

The farmers' markets and community events continued in this atmosphere. Negotiations were underway for the potential sale of the property to the farmers. New lawsuits were filed. Support was growing. Then the political climate shifted. Horowitz became less open to negotiations and started calling for a forced eviction: "I want those people off of my land." The county sheriff began to hint at an impending forced eviction. South Central Farmers Feeding Families put out a desperate call for support. They asked for people to join the growing encampment. It was the middle of May, 2006. That was when I first heard of the garden.

My involvement with the South Central Farm had begun a few days before. I started out bringing food and supplies. I am truly sad to say I never witnessed the garden simply being a garden. I was never able to spend time with the farmers on an average day, tending their plots or harvesting vegetables for the coming farmers' market. My only time with them, although wonderful, was clouded by fear and uncertainty. For fourteen years this place had meant the world to an entire community and now its future was threatened.

And the garden itself was a wellspring of abundance. The air quality there had consistently been rated among the worst in California—but polluted air, while slowly poisoning humans, offers plants plenty of the CO₂ they thrive on. The farm was the last green space for miles in any direction, of immeasurable value in cleaning the air.

Let's back up a couple decades. In the late 1980s the city of Los Angeles, using eminent domain, took the land from nine private landowners, the largest of which was a development company headed by one Ralph Horowitz. The city wanted to build a trash incinerator there, but the local community protested and the idea

Knowing that a forced eviction could happen at any time, the farmers built up the encampment so if an eviction took place it would be delayed long enough

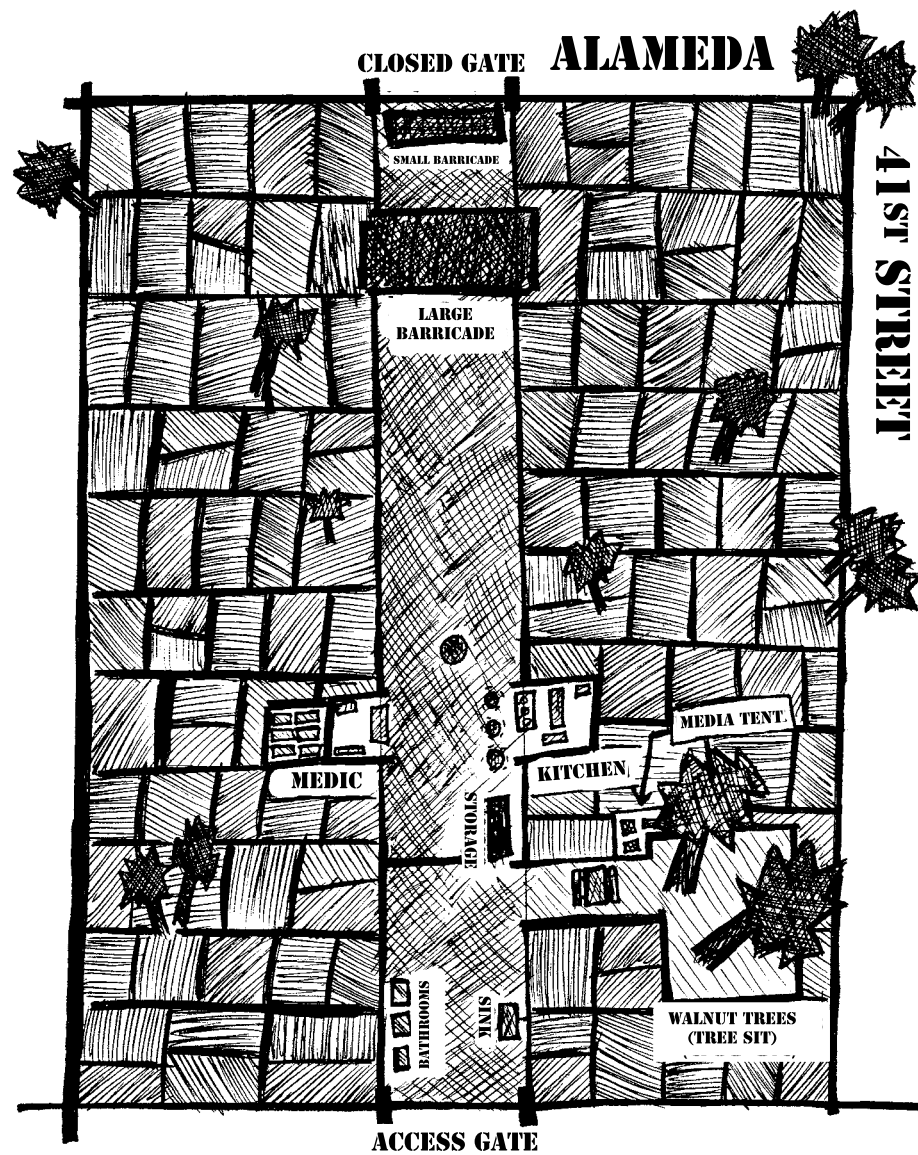


to attract the media and receive major network news coverage. They hoped that this might rally more local support. They couldn't have predicted that the camp would thrive for over a month, that some of those defending the farm would hold out for over eight hours on the day of the eviction, and the media attention and solidarity actions would go worldwide.

Perhaps you're thinking "Media attention? Do we really care about that? Let's pay a visit to this developer's house, fight the cops, set shit on fire, and save this fucking garden, right?" Many of those who came to help struggled with this question. Everyone was there to help the farmers who already had plans and ideas in motion. Although at times it was frustrating for some of the more radical fighters, the general decision was made to act within the constraints of the South Central Farmers' wishes. Those with more direct ideas were heard and were responsible for pushing the overall action further than it might have gone otherwise, but in the end some, as newcomers to the garden struggle, had to make trying concessions in order to fight for the farmers. The idea of stepping into a fourteen-year fight and staging a takeover in order to radicalize and direct it didn't seem right to any of us. We had to remember that we joined their fight.

Even if the farmers' strategies were a little passive for some of us, we couldn't forget that they had established an illegal occupation on land directly in the shadows of the Los Angeles skyline. The camp included a security team, medic tent, media press office, treesit, kitchen, daily civil disobedience training program, legal team, and resident celebrities, and it brought together people from all walks of life. Do we not dream of such things? Sleeping under the summer stars, spending our days preparing to confront the police, tending and eating from the organic gardens that surround us. Where were you?

Life in the camp was pretty comfortable. For starters, fresh food was everywhere. The camp also greatly benefited from a sympathetic water department that never actually turned the water off. I wish I could write about the amazing waterless composting toilets that we built from discarded corn stalks, but in fact we simply rented a few portable toilets. Everyone involved was able to come and go freely; presumably, it



would have taken more resources than the city possessed to control our movements in and out of the camp. A former child television star offered use of a biodiesel van equipped with solar power, generators, and even wireless internet broadcasting for the duration of the camp. Did I mention the bamboo forest showers? Life was comfortable indeed.

In addition to getting to know the others in the camp and gradually familiarizing myself with those who were involved in the aspects of the action that required tighter security culture, my first few days in the garden encampment were spent at the medic tent. A registered nurse and a paramedic served the camp as committed volunteers. I had brought with me some donated natural health products and a little knowledge of natural healing, so we decided this would be a good place for me to start.

The medic station was thoroughly stocked with first aid supplies, toiletries, vitamins, and natural options for everything from sun block to antibiotics. When I asked the mild-mannered nurse what she did when she wasn't defending occupied community gardens, she responded, "Roller derby." She had the brilliant idea to designate a quiet space with a few comfortable sleeping stations, which proved to be invaluable for the devoted and often sleep-deprived security team. The station also enjoyed a regular flow of holistic body workers volunteering to treat our many sore muscles and tired bodies. Overall, the medic tent was pretty slow throughout the occupation—the worst injuries were minor burns that occurred during the nightly candlelight vigils.

Directly across from the medic station was the kitchen—a vegetarian and vegan paradise. It was stocked with fresh-picked



fruits and vegetables and an abundance of donated and dumpstered goods from many of the natural food stores in the surrounding area. Fresh herbs grew within arm's reach. The kitchen was equipped with several gas burners and cookware borrowed from a local Food Not Bombs chapter. It offered ample space for preparing and serving large buffet-style lunches and dinners, and makeshift sidewalk café-style seating was to be had out front.

One of the most vital participants in the occupation spent her days in the kitchen. She was a farmer, one of the strongest and most self-sacrificing people I have ever met. She had taken time off that she couldn't afford from a job she would eventually quit just to cook for us full time. This inspiring woman was risking just about everything so that she could cook for us, her "kids." She was in the camp from eight in the morning until eleven every night; with two or three other volun-

teers she prepared amazing forty-person meals twice a day. We never tired of her beans and rice, nor of the incredible fresh nopal cactus salad. She did all this and took many risks and in the end thanked us for showing her so many new things. She was excited about cooking with olive oil instead of butter and learning about graywater and composting. She told me, "I've cooked with vegetables before but never with just vegetables. It's so much better." Wherever she is right now, I hope she's warm, loved, and well-fed.

Just behind the kitchen was the dish-washing sink and graywater collection pool. This was where we happened to be the day we learned a valuable lesson about handling police harassment. The LAPD and LA County Sheriff's helicopters were a regular and noisy part of our lives on the farm. For the first couple of weeks dangerously low fly-bys and "dustings" were common. "Dusting" is when the rear

rotor of the helicopter is tilted to send a blast of wind down, creating a disruptive and potentially harmful stir of debris and flying objects below. One of the treesitters had established a rapport with the LA County Sheriff, and when this harassment occurred she would immediately get on the phone to chew him out. Her persistence in reminding him of the dangers the illegal fly-bys presented to the treesitters often made him back down and withdraw the helicopters. The problem was that after a couple of hours he would "forget" and the circles would start up again.

The original plan for the drainage of the kitchen sink only accounted for a few days of use; after a couple weeks, the water collection pool was overflowing and the entire kitchen area was oversaturated. We began a digging project to revamp the drainage system. Apparently the authorities looking on from above were very concerned about this: as soon as a helicopter flew over, it began circling us. After about twenty dangerously low circles and a couple of dustings, our patience was running thin. One of my good friends stood defiantly offering her middle finger and brandishing a sign that read "PLEASE WASH YOUR OWN DISH." My treesitter friend was on the phone doing her thing.

That was the day we learned the power of the words "Watch Commander." Armed with information about FAA flight restrictions—as it turns out, circling lower than 200 feet is illegal in Los Angeles—and the name and number of the current watch commander, we cleared the skies. With one phone call the helicopter was gone. It returned a couple times in the following days, only to be met by signs reading "Can you say watch commander?" and "FAA 200 feet!" From then on, circling took place less frequently and at significantly higher altitudes, and the dustings ceased altogether. The signs were eventually replaced by middle fingers and we made sure we always knew the name of the watch commander on duty.

In the middle of the South Central Farm stood two large black walnut trees. The trees and the area surrounding them had served as a sort of town center for the farmers. The children of the community

¹ Regulations vary from one area to the next, but if you can easily read the tail numbers on a helicopter it's probably flying too low.

would gather under them and spend the days playing while the elders tended the gardens. One of the elders, a beautiful and vibrant woman, had a very lush garden just next to the trees. This woman was known and loved for her spontaneous singing and dancing. During the occupation, she maintained this habit and brought smiles to our faces many times.

A treesit was established in the walnut trees to attract attention; it also served as a vantage point from which to watch for signs of an impending police raid. Two experienced treesitters showed up almost immediately. For one of them, it was her first sit since an action that had won her worldwide notoriety. Her involvement brought a lot of welcome attention to the farm. A famous actress volunteered to be a third treesitter, bringing even more media attention with her. All three of them were in the trees almost every day and night, coming down only for daily press conferences, meetings, and, of course, visits to the wonderful camp kitchen. From high above these three spent every day pulling strings to help provide the camp with its basic needs, arranging visits from politicians and celebrities, and doing some serious fund-raising.

During the occupation the space under the treesit remained as vital as it had been before all the trouble. It hosted press conferences, rallies, meetings, ceremonies, children's games, and the songs of the aforementioned elder farmer. The little patch of grass that I slept on during my first few nights at the farm lay in the shadows of the walnut trees.

With its combination of class-based, ethnic, cultural, and environmental struggles, the fight to save the South Central Farm attracted a diverse array of supporters, including celebrities, journalists, politicians, riot-ready anarchists, labor organizers, environmentalists, religious leaders, and, of course, the farmers and their families. Our tactics included savvy media work, lawsuits, protests, and rallies, and some of us also made plans for a part of the struggle we all hoped would not be necessary. With favorable press, sympathetic politicians, and open negotiations toward purchasing the land, there were times when it didn't seem like the police raid and forced eviction were going to happen. Sometimes it was frustrating to

spend day after day preparing for a raid that might never come. We did it anyway.

There were plans for civil disobedience actions if a raid took place, and those plans were refined daily. We knew if the authorities raided us it would be at a time when they expected to catch us unawares, and it would happen very fast. With this in mind, we did our best to keep our guard up at all times. The security team and treesit lookouts remained on constant vigil, and those of us with specific roles tried to be ready to throw down at a moment's notice. It was a delicate business maintaining a balance between opening up the farm for a press conference or public tour and staying ready to spring into action. Whether we were making a presentation to school children or watering neglected tomato plants, certain of us had to keep in mind where our chains for locking down were and what the fastest route to our spot was. After my first week at the farm, I began sleeping with my chains ready around my wrists and my shoes on my feet.

Since my first few days at the medic tent, I had become familiar to the others at the camp. As I showed a respect for security culture and an understanding of the affinity group model, some organizers invited me to the civil disobedience trainings and meetings. Security culture was important, but new faces were readily accepted. This was a risk, but a necessary one: as the encampment continued, some of the participants had to leave and new people were needed to fill their spots. The secrecy and integrity of the plan was maintained by the use of a spokescouncil model for meetings, from which representatives reported back to larger groups. In this way, plans were coordinated without everyone having to be entrusted with or endangered by knowledge of everyone else's roles.

Our plan evolved every day that passed without a raid. The basic idea remained the same: block entry to the farm long enough to attract media attention. There were to be various kinds of obstacles blocking entry, with the treesitters as the last line of defense. Gates and entrances that weren't in use were chained and cemented closed. Similarly, nonessential pathways were blocked with barriers made from materials found around the farm. A "maze" was left as an emergency route to cut across the farm quickly if need be. Knowledge of the

maze was confidential, and its route was altered regularly. A road cut through the center of the farm, with gates on either end. On one end, the gate was secured shut and a large barricade was constructed to block the road. On the other end, the gate was locked and always guarded but remained accessible. Well-marked twine was tied across the road along most of its length to discourage attempts to land helicopters or rappel down from them.

Those were the inanimate barriers. The rest of the obstacles involved our bodies. Those of us who intended to resist in this way were divided into arrestable and non-arrestable. There were many noble but non-arrestable volunteers sleeping in the camp. In the plan, this group was to be called the "walkers." The walkers would play a vital role in buying precious time for those who planned to resist. For their safety, in negotiations with the sheriff, it was clearly laid out that most of the people on the farm would not resist in the event of a raid and would quietly follow orders to leave. The sheriff promised that the police would give fifteen minutes warning before a raid and that anyone who wanted to leave peacefully would be allowed to do so. Great care and planning, at least on our end, was given to assuring that the walkers would be safe. A specific route was planned for the walkers, and they were to be escorted by members of the security team as well as legal and police observers.

The next three levels of involvement in our action plan included the potential of arrest. After the walkers, the next obstacle in place was to be a group of campers called the "sitters." The sitters were organized in groups of six and assigned strategic locations blocking gates or pathways. These groups trained to lock arms and legs in formations that were difficult and time-consuming to dismantle. It was agreed that, for this group, resistance would end upon being removed from a formation, and the individuals would then exit the farm if they were not arrested. We hoped that the sitters would cause confusion among the police and slow them down long enough for others to get in place.

The next group of resistors was to be the "layers." They were to lay in similar formations behind the sitting groups. They were distinct from the sitters in that they were to remain limp and completely resist

arrest. We hoped that their arrests would force the police to send crucial personnel off the property to process them, thus slowing down the progress of a raid.

In my opinion, the Los Angeles county sheriff's department delayed the raid for a month in hope that we would exhaust our resources and lose our support. We did indeed lose many participants over this time. As the camp went on, many people decided to leave in order to keep up with

with a piece of rebar welded through the center to allow for "clipping in." We later learned of an innovation in which the box is smaller in size, so your hands fit snugly inside. An outline pointing to the location of the locked person's hand was drawn on the outside of each box. These boxes, although risky, proved very intimidating to those who had to cut them open. When one of these boxes was used, the authorities chose to go through the slow and costly

the farm. Six of them were placed at the gate that was not yet barricaded, and the other six were set up in a circle around the treesit. The barrels were filled with airport runway concrete; we were told that our source had yet to see one of these barrels broken. As these increased our prospects of holding out for a long time, new words like dehydration and pain compliance entered our planning vocabulary and we initiated new trainings. We looked into



According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the farmers of South Central Farm had created a "special, almost magical, place," but "no magic is so strong that it erases a landowner's right to either his property or its fair value."

their other obligations. When the raid finally occurred, we were short-handed. They were definitely wrong about us exhausting our resources, however. We were getting better at just about everything we were doing in the camp. A good example of this was our next level of resistance—the lock down. By giving us time to refine our plans, they allowed us to proceed from greased chains covered in duct tape to welded lock boxes and then further to 1000 pound barrels filled with airport runway cement.

In the beginning, we'd planned for arrestables to use chains and lock boxes to lock themselves around the trees while the treesitters locked to the trees themselves. As time passed and a couple of arc welders joined the camp, our inventory of lock boxes grew and we planned for additional locking positions at entrances and along pathways. That was when I began sleeping in my shoes and with chains around my wrists.

The boxes we had were pretty standard. Each one was made of half-inch steel

process of dismantling half a bulldozer rather than risk inflicting injury on the person using it.

The chains we used were secured around our wrists by a nut and bolt through two of the links, with enough links left to reach just beyond our fingertips. This extra length allowed for the attachment of a light weight c-clamp that was also clipped to the rebar in a box or barrel. The extra length on the chain also enabled the user to attach to another clip—either on the other wrist, or on the wrist of a partner sharing the box. This tip, given by visiting Humboldt County redwood defenders, proved invaluable: in dismantling lock boxes, police employees often begin by removing the rebar pin. If you're only locked to this pin, the lock box can be rendered ineffective in minutes.

With a whole month to prepare, we didn't stop at lockboxes—we brought in a dozen 1000 pound concrete-filled barrels. Late one night we welcomed a truck through the gates and, after some strategic planning, unloaded these barrels around

taking concentrated mineral drops to stave off dehydration and subsisting on peanut butter sandwiches on white bread in the hope of slowing down the frequency of our bowel movements.

In the end, our plan for locking down required twelve people for the barrels and six or so for the lock boxes. The lock boxes were to be used around a concrete picnic table that we moved to block the main path towards the walnut trees. In the circle around the tree, there would be six people, each with both hands clipped in a barrel. At the front gate, in order to block vehicle access, there would be two groups locked to three barrels. The groups of three formed small triangles; each person was to have both hands clipped to the others. The Achilles' heel of the barrels was that each one required two people. If only two of the three positions were filled, the two could only hold one barrel, not all three. Accordingly, we had a system to keep track of all the lock down crew members and kept understudies ready to take over un-

Editor's Addendum

Before I suddenly found myself at South Central Farm I'd heard of it only vaguely, the way I heard about Oaxaca before they murdered Brad. But late one night in the middle of a summer of adventures, my friends and I found ourselves at its fortified gates. We knew the farm was in the middle of a standoff with the entire police force of Los Angeles, so before going in we made sure each of us had a list of all the others' cell phone numbers; these lists later proved invaluable. We also debated at length about whether we should park on the street outside the farm, where our vehicles might be seized or trapped in the course of a police raid, or farther out in the neighborhood where they could be robbed or stolen without us noticing. We made the mistake of parking next to the farm.

"Welcome to the war zone," the grim Chicano security guard greeted us after opening the heavily fortified gate. "This is the front line of defense against the police state. Here you are under constant threat of invasion from the LAPD. No drugs are permitted in this area, no firearms, no . . ."

I'd been in squatted buildings from Lisbon to Białystok and stayed on several miles of farmland occupied by the MST in Brazil, but this was the first time I'd witnessed a fortified occupation on such a scale in my own country. The glowing night sky opened out where the buildings ended; the gardens extended endlessly before us like an urban jungle. Handmade signs celebrating the farm covered the twelve-foot chain link fences that encircled and divided it. Bleary-eyed men and women of various ages and ethnicities stood watch or conferred in small groups. We made our way to the art space near the walnut trees and fell asleep on the cold ground between half-finished banners and lush vegetation.

We woke to air horns and shouting. Dazed and disoriented, we threw our sleeping bags over our shoulders and followed the others out the secret escape route. A helicopter swooped low overhead, following our movements. On the sidewalk outside, people compared stopwatches and argued about how to improve coordination. It had been a drill—they had one every morning at dawn.

Later that morning we began to explore the place. It was huge. One could spend weeks just learning to navigate the twisting paths that snaked around the garden plots. As some of those who had plots on the farm lacked immigration papers and could not risk visiting their gardens while a police attack was imminent, we joined others in tending their land.

Some of us also participated in discussions of how better to protect the space. How were the lockdown barrels disguised from the helicopters? The ones around the trees were dressed up as hippy altars. Could the industrial dumpster the size of a train car be turned sideways to block one of the main entries? A sympathetic local with a forklift could come by to take care of that the next day. I called my friends who were experienced with tripods to see if they could come lend a hand.

We had discussions within our group to establish which of us would join in blocking paths when the police arrived. One of us did not wish to risk arrest at all, and so elected to sleep in one of our vehicles. Others chose to relieve the exhausted heroes who had handled the night watch shifts over the preceding weeks, and were briefed on how to use the walkie-talkies and the evening's codes.

attended positions. We camouflaged the barrels, hid the lock boxes nearby, trained constantly, and held daily drills.

A week or so after we acquired the barrels some good friends joined me at the farm. Like everyone who stopped to visit the gardens, they immediately fell in love with them; eager to make themselves useful, they volunteered for an all-night security shift. Exhausted from weeks with little sleep, I opted to take the night off; as I drifted off I thought about how I would spend the next day at the farm with them. A couple of hours later, as they sat on the corner at their security post, a reporter came up to interview them about their

out post had paid off. His voice set us in motion. I was on my feet and a few steps out of the tent before I actually woke up. Realizing that I had to pee, I took advantage of the time it took me to reach my post to do so along the way. When I reached the front gate where my barrel was, I took a couple of seconds to finish behind one of the portable toilets. As I surveyed the area, it became clear we were in a dire situation. "Shit! They're already in!" All of those awkward nights in my shoes and chains now made perfect sense.

The cops flooded in with a frightening efficiency. The walkers, sitters, and layers didn't get a chance to organize; had I not

there all day so that they could laugh at us while they simply went around us. My barrelmate and I looked up at the armored vehicle that had stopped just inches away from us with its motor running. The frustrated look on the driver's face was enough to tell us that they were lying.

They do a lot of lying. The sheriff had lied about giving us a warning. They also tried to tell us that only a couple others had locked down and that they had already unclipped. Out of the six of us on the front gate, four had locked down in time. We were missing two. I hoped that the turnout was better at the tree. Later on I would learn that they all made it into place and that the lockdown on the picnic table was successful as well. With the sixteen of us locked in place, a growing number of supporters, and spontaneous resistance actions on the streets around the farm, the eviction did not go easily. It was not completed for another nine hours. Nobody unclipped. Never believe a word a police officer says.

After they realized we weren't going to talk to them, the sexists focused on pressuring the women who had locked down, threatening them with pain compliance. With a well-placed knee to the back or, in one case, a dangerous choice to move one of the potentially bone-splintering barrels in order to hyperextend one woman's shoulder, they hoped to find weakness. They even made a surreal attempt at tickling compliance on my barrel mate. They found no weakness. Fortunately, they backed off before their incompetence caused injury.

Next came the heavy machinery. The fire department arrived with the most expensive tools tax money can buy. They showed up prepared to deal with the saw-busting tarmac concrete. We must have had an information leak somewhere along the line. They got right to work at tearing through the barrels and, to our surprise, they were eventually successful. I suppose it's time to invent some new impenetrable barrels. The process was slow and complex but yielded enough results for the cops to give up on compliance tactics. They just sat back and watched the sparks and concrete chips fly. They also enjoyed attempting to make fun of us but we countered by sending back as much verbal abuse as we could muster. The process of tearing down a barrel involved sawing away the metal



In the predawn light, through showers of sparks and clouds of chainsaw exhaust, I could see the fuckers storming in.

plans for the coming day. They thought his timing was a little weird, but brushed it off and continued their shift.

They didn't know that the media had been given advance notice of an impending raid. That's right—the police gave the media notice of the raid, but never gave us the promised fifteen-minute warning, and the media showed their true colors by keeping what they knew to themselves. Minutes later my friends witnessed an overwhelming swarm of police. "Ummm, cops," one of them hissed into the walkie-talkie, "a lot of them." It was June 13th. It was his first night at the farm and he was witnessing the raid we had prepared for a month to resist.

"Get up! Get Up! This is it! This is it! I've never seen so many cops in all of my life! Wake up! This is it!" The treesit look-

been equipped in advance, I would not have had time to strap on shoes or chains. In the predawn light, through showers of sparks and clouds of chainsaw exhaust, I could see the fuckers storming in. I actually had to sneak past some of them to get to my barrel. I was overjoyed to see one of my partners at that position clipping into her barrel too. Click. Click. We were in. They ripped down the fence and flooded the farm.

Three hundred officers marched onto the farm in battle formation. We cringed as some passed with what looked like gallon-sized pepper spray canisters. Scores of them were dressed in full riot gear, guns drawn. A few cops immediately stopped to inform us that we were not in the way so we might as well just unclip. They went on to tell us how they would just leave us

It was still dark when the air horn woke me again. This time, there was a different feeling in the air: there were shouts around me and ominous noises nearby. Stumbling to my feet, I made out the silhouettes of armored police fanning out ahead. They had already bypassed the defensive positions we had planned. *Those fucking liars!* I swore to myself. *Fuck them, and everyone who thought we could negotiate with them, and us for believing what they told us!*

There was nothing to do now but follow the others to the escape route before we were all arrested pointlessly. We ran down the narrow path that led to the secret exit, only to find a crowd backed up there ahead of us. Panic—we were locked in and surrounded.

A harrowing second later, someone ran up and shouted to follow him. The forty of us backtracked, then turned right and made our way out the back gate in single file. The police didn't interfere with us; in retrospect, I'm sure they were glad to see us leave of our own volition.

Once we were on the sidewalk, they pushed us across the street onto the adjacent street corner. A small crowd coalesced there, clutching belongings and signs and shouting to passing traffic about the eviction. Someone's hand was badly sliced; he had been standing watch alone on one corner when the police attacked, and had to scale the fence and clamber over loops of razor wire to escape and warn others.

In the chaos, we'd been split into several groups and lost track of each other. Were members of our crew trapped inside, or arrested? We produced the phone lists and began running through them, struggling to find each other and get our bearings in this unfamiliar territory before our cell phones' batteries died. Most everyone had ended up on one of the corners around the farm; only one of us was cut off from the others—the one who had slept in a vehicle to ensure he would not be arrested. That vehicle was surrounded and blocked in by the police; he was hiding under one of the seats, afraid to remain on the phone for fear of giving himself away¹.

Should we retreat to gather with the others, or remain apart? If we left that corner, the police would almost certainly not let us return; but we couldn't afford to remain scattered, either, and while the police were not yet harassing us we were also not in a good position to act. We opted to back up and regroup. Eventually, our group converged on the other side of the farm, along with perhaps a hundred infuriated locals. A parked train stood on the tracks between us and the farm, from which it was rumored screams of pain had been heard. Several helicopters roared overhead now, drowning out everything but our angry chants.

Most of the demonstrators were older Latinos and Latinas, and there was some concern that the police were preparing to target them. After hastily consulting an organizer who had been involved in the occupation for weeks, the dozen of us set out down the road running parallel with

the farm, hoping to draw police attention away from our compatriots. As we ran, some of us dragged sticks against the railing along the train tracks to make a racket; another tooted a riot whistle. On cue, a helicopter broke ranks and followed us.

A couple blocks away, we passed a queen-size mattress that had been left out on the curb. Without thinking, I grabbed the handle on its side with my free hand—we were all still carrying our belongings—and my friend took the other side. A moment later we arrived at a major intersection where the railing opened up to allow vehicles to cross the train tracks. A transport truck was about to cross, and we dragged the mattress in front of it and threw it down. In a surreal moment, we all found ourselves leaping up and down on the mattress, sleep-deprived and giddy, cheering as the blocked truck stopped up traffic on all sides and the helicopter hovered low above us.

We left the mattress there and hastened on, leaving more obstacles in our wake. Now that we'd regained our initiative, morale was high and we felt capable of turning our rage into action. We pulled a series of dumpsters into the road, upending them when we could. The helicopter followed, but no police appeared. Were they too busy dealing with the farm, or did they fear that intervening might set off unrest throughout this famously turbulent neighborhood?

Looking back as an admitted outsider, I feel the primary aspect missing from the South Central Farm defense strategy was a role for those outside the farm. Supporters who could not stay at the farm could have coordinated citywide to prepare blockades throughout South Central. On the morning of the eviction, each group could have moved to its chosen intersection and set up a barricade out of materials hidden there in advance. This would have given the crowds who showed up to protest the eviction a concrete role to play and a way of exerting leverage upon the city. Nothing dismays city officials like the obstruction of business and traffic. The police concentrated all their forces on the farm, hoping a show of force there would overwhelm resistance before the neighborhood rose up; if they'd immediately had to scatter their forces to respond to blockades, they might not have been able to establish control of the farm that day, and there would have been a much greater likelihood of the powder keg of South Central LA catching fire. This might not have pleased all the farmers, but it could have been framed as a completely autonomous effort, and it would have put them in a stronger position: "Heaven knows what those maniacs will do if you don't reopen negotiations!"

The dozen of us were not enough to carry out this strategy, unfortunately. Eventually, we decided to quit while we were ahead and make our way out of the area. As soon as the action was over, exhaustion caught up with us, and we looked for a place to recover. This made the singular importance of South Central Farm clearer than ever. No matter how far we walked, there was no public space anywhere: no benches, no parks, no toilets, no grass. It was a system shock to be torn from such a healthy, welcoming environment and thrust into the asphalt nightmare of downtown Los Angeles.



Those of us who needed to piss had to do so in busy parking lots in front of several lanes of traffic. At length, we found a quieter street and crashed out across the sidewalk, one of us remaining awake as lookout. The helicopter lingered overhead for a while, then disappeared from view.

Later that day, we finally caught up with our friend, just before the last of our cell phones died. After hours in hiding, he had talked his way through the police lines, citing California legal code—which they, of course, did not know—when the police refused to let him drive the vehicle out. By this time, a great mass of people had gathered to protest the eviction; but the police presence seemed unassailable, no one had a concrete strategy, and all opposition remained symbolic. We decided to continue our travels and see what was possible elsewhere in the way of solidarity actions.

A couple days later, Santa Cruz pirate radio was broadcasting an interview with defenders of the farm on constant rotation. A major intersection in downtown Santa Cruz was shut down by masked demonstrators equipped with furniture, dumpsters, and signs reading "Avenge South Central Farm." Meanwhile, an immense banner reading "REMEMBER SOUTH CENTRAL FARM—FUCK RALPH HOROWITZ + LAPD" was suspended from an overpass a few blocks away.

My blood still boils thinking about the farm and the mercenaries who destroyed it. The lines could not be more clear cut: on the one hand, an impoverished community that had built its own support structure against all odds; on the other, the murderous greed of a land speculator, the brute force of the police, and the hypocrisy of every law-abiding citizen who believes in property rights and due process at any price, yet turns a blind eye when the ones bending the rules are wealthy and white. According to an editorial that ran in the *Los Angeles Times* on March 11, the farmers of South Central Farm had created a "special, almost magical, place," but "no magic is so strong that it erases a landowner's right to either his property or its fair value." This nonsense about "fair value" is doubly absurd in that the city sold the land to Horowitz for a third of its value in a shady closed-door deal—never mind the question of whether a Wal-Mart warehouse is actually more "valuable" than a community space!

The scanty media coverage we saw centered on Darryl Hannah, the actress who occupied one of the Walnut trees. The thousands of poor people who ate from the farm were less significant to the news networks than that one celebrity—just as, when California was colonized centuries ago, the lives of two thousand indigenous people were reckoned less valuable than the life of one white invader.

I hope Ralph Horowitz is tormented by protests at his homes and offices and regrets this investment for the remainder of his heartless, ruinous life. I hope whatever monstrosity they try to build on that beautiful land goes up in flames. I hope one day Los Angeles catches fire again like it did in 1992; it was only in the wake of those riots that people were permitted to start planting on the farm in the first place, and it will take another round of riots to win back the right to use land for the public good rather than private gain.

Next time some hack bewails the lack of "community" in cities like Los Angeles—or someone doubts that the entire legal system exists only to protect the property of the rich at the expense of the poor—or you strike a blow for the dispossessed in revenge for all that's been taken from us, raise your fist high and shout,

"Remember South Central Farm!"

¹ This confirms the theory set forth in "What I Do for a Living" in the first issue of *Rolling Thunder*: often it is safer to be on the front lines of the fray, with all the mobility and perspective that can offer, than to hide in hopes of avoiding danger.

The Really Free

Market

Instituting the Gift Economy

DISAMBIGUATION

According to the capitalist lexicon, the “Free Market” is the economic system in which prices are determined by unrestricted competition between privately owned businesses. Any sensible person can recognize immediately that neither human beings nor resources are free in such a system; hence, a “Really Really Free Market” is a market that operates according to gift economics, in which nothing is for sale and the only rule is share and share alike. In the interest of not taxing the reader’s patience, a single apostrophe stands in for the two “Really”s throughout this text.

Once a month two hundred or more people from all walks of life gather at the commons in the center of our town. They bring everything from jewelry to firewood to give away, and take whatever they want. There are booths offering bicycle repair, hairstyling, even tarot readings. People leave with full-size bed frames and old computers; if they don’t have a vehicle to transport them, volunteer drivers are available. No money changes hands, no one haggles over the comparative worth of items or services, nobody is ashamed about being in need. Contrary to government ordinances, no fee is paid for the use of this public space, nor is anyone “in charge.” Sometimes a marching band appears; sometimes a puppetry troupe performs, or people line up to take a swing at a piñata. Games and conversations take place around the periphery, and everyone has a plate of warm food and a bag of free groceries. Banners hang from branches and rafters proclaiming “FOR THE COMMONS, NOT LANDLORDS OR BUREAUCRACY” and “NI JEFES, NI FRONTERAS” and a king-size blanket is spread with radical reading material, but these aren’t essential to the event—this is a social institution, not a demonstration.

Thanks to our monthly ‘Free Markets, everyone in our town has a working reference point for anarchist economics. Life is a little easier for those of us with low or no income, and relationships develop in a space in which social class and financial means are at least temporarily irrelevant.

Why the ‘Free Market Works

The ‘Free Market model has several virtues to recommend it for anarchists hoping to build local infrastructures and momentum. First, like Critical Mass or Food Not Bombs, it lends itself to a decentralized approach: so long as the idea is well-distributed, neither hierarchy nor central coordination is necessary to organize a ‘Free Market. This makes the ‘Free Market model helpful for those hoping to cultivate personal responsibility and autonomous initiative in their communities; it also means that, should the ‘Free Market in your town run into trouble with the authorities, they won’t be able to shut it down by simply targeting the leaders.

As a means of bringing people together, Food Not Bombs seems to have built-in limits: in much of North America, the stigma around eating free food is strong enough that often only dropouts, radicals, and

There’s no such thing as a free lunch *under capitalism*— For anarchists, there’s no other kind

desperately poor people are comfortable doing so in public. The ‘Free Market model, conversely, can be comfortable for almost anyone. In a consumer society in which shopping is the common denominator of all social activity, everyone feels entitled to pick through items at a yard sale—and the fact that they’re free just sweetens the deal. Middle class people, of course, need more than anything else to get rid of things: their houses are all so overfilled with unused commodities that the opportunity to do something with them is a godsend. This works out nicely for the rest of us! And thanks to wasteful mass-production, even the poorest of the poor usually have access to a surplus of some kind. Being able to give something to someone who needs it is even more fulfilling than getting things for free: centuries of capitalist conditioning have not succeeded in grinding out our instinctive propensity for mutual aid.

Bottom-feeding dropouts such as comprise part of this magazine’s readership are well-equipped to organize ‘Free Markets. Dumpstering and scavenging frequently yield more than any one household can make use of; regular ‘Free Markets give urban foragers the chance to put all that bounty at the disposal of other communities. Creative access to photocopying and

spare time are both valuable for advertising ‘Free Markets. Travelers can bring in fresh energy and take on temporary roles to decrease the pressure on locals who risk accruing too much attention for their efforts. Starting from the minimal resources available to the excluded, impoverished fringe groups can build up counter-structures that eventually provide tremendous abundance, visibility, and social leverage.

The ‘Free Market is not just a means of getting stuff without paying. Long-term participation in ‘Free Markets dispels the materialist programming that makes people covet useless items by denying access to them, and demonstrates just how possible and fulfilling the anarchist alternative is. It also presents a point of departure for further struggles: if this is what we can do with the scanty resources we’re able to get our hands on now, what could we do with the entire wealth of this society?

Pitfalls

As with any tactic, the ‘Free Market model can fail when applied incorrectly. The most common mistake is to organize a ‘Market the way you would organize a demonstration: issue a press release heavy with rhetoric, put up fliers featuring circle-As or words like “social justice,” tie the event to

some ideology or coalition. This is senselessly limiting. The ‘Free Market model works because its content is inherently radical; emphasizing form over content can only distract and alienate. You don’t have to hide your personal commitments or affiliations—just make sure the center of gravity is that everyone is invited to come share things, pure and simple.

Another reason some ‘Free Markets fail is that they come across as the territory of one particular demographic or subculture. If almost all the attendees come from a certain background, those who don’t will feel like outsiders; there need to be enough people involved from various walks of life that anyone who happens by feels comfortable. When organizing a town’s first ‘Free Market, be careful to invite as broad a range of people as possible. Likewise, visitors can be a liability rather than an asset if their numbers approach those of local participants. The past two CrimethInc. convergences have both included ‘Free Markets, each of which was the first such event to take place in the host town. Both were failures: an event that depends on local involvement to succeed cannot be initiated by outsiders.

Finally, don’t expect to draw thousands if your ‘Markets happen randomly every

The Really Really Free Market model is well-suited to an age of overproduction, stratification of wealth, and isolation, when so much goes unused yet few have access to the material resources they need and fewer still are connected to the social networks they desire.

year or so. Consistency is one of the most important elements of a successful 'Free Market. A sporadic schedule inevitably means that attendance will be limited to those immediately connected to the networks through which promotion takes place; a regular event can eventually attract quite a lot of people, as word spreads outside the circles from which the idea originated. On the other hand, your 'Markets should not occur more frequently than you can replenish energy and resources. Each one should be a unique event, with enough effort invested in it to make it something unprecedented. That way people will always show up to see what happens, and will take them seriously enough to contribute energy themselves.

Throw Your Own 'Free Market!

It's easy to organize a Really Really Free Market. Every town should have one; big cities should have one for every district. It is the authors' opinion that successful, consistent 'Free Markets should be established around the United States, following in the footsteps of the proliferation of Food Not Bombs groups over a decade ago, and that this would significantly increase the visibility and scope of anarchist activity in North America.

Once you get a regular 'Free Market off the ground, it should basically run itself. The challenge is to start things off with enough energy that everyone can see the project's potential, while making sure everyone who gets involved feels an equal sense of ownership and investment.

The first essential element of a good 'Free Market is location. Your 'Free Market

should take place on neutral ground—that is, in an area everyone feels an equal claim to or ownership of—so no one will feel more or less comfortable than anyone else. For similar reasons, your location should be a central, visible area. If you can use a space where major public events happen or where a wide range of people are already accustomed to gathering, it will dramatically increase your chances of success.

Many of the best spaces must be rented. It doesn't make sense to pay to hold a free event, but it probably won't do to hold your 'Free Market in somebody's back yard, either. If you do have to pay a permit fee, be clever about raising the funds for it. It compromises the integrity of the event to have to put out a donation jar to cover expenses, and those donations will inevitably fall short; it's better to find a location that is free or cheap enough to cover privately, or else raise funds through independent benefit events. Reservation procedures are also problematic in that they position one person as responsible for the entire event, the exact opposite of the horizontal structure you're trying to promote. The militant solution we've tested is to start out paying permits for a space, then stop once the event has gained enough support to weather a conflict with the powers that be. This will be much more difficult in some contexts than others, of course; shoot for the stars, but appraise your situation realistically.

The next step is to advertise. Sure, you should post fliers and send out emails to every listserv you can possibly think of, but that's only the beginning. You can take handbills around and give them out at bus stops, public events, in neighborhoods and

apartment complexes; you should also see if local radio stations will run Public Service Announcements for you, or if local papers can run a listing or even a story on your event. If you come into conflict with city officials or anyone else, treat it as another opportunity to solicit media coverage. In our town people have taken the yard signs produced by politicians and real estate agencies and painted over them, then redistributed them throughout town; we also hang banners by major intersections a week in advance. We used to do the latter on town property, until we got in a spat with a petty official over it; now we put the same banners a few feet away, on private property owned by sympathetic locals or in places town employees are too lazy to reach.

Don't stop at approaching the official representatives of a group—talk to the rank and file so your outreach efforts don't depend on authority figures but extend directly to the people you want to invite. Forget about government officials—they're too tied up in red tape to think about your event as anything but a headache—but do contact the workers at homeless shelters, interfaith councils, and other social support institutions: they're probably so overwhelmed and under-equipped that they'll be thrilled to direct people to your 'Free Market for additional resources.

Make all your fliers, signs, and announcements bilingual, or else produce them in different languages for different contexts. At every 'Free Market, put out a sign-up list so people who want to receive news of the next one or coordinate with other organizers can leave their contact information.

Next, brainstorm all the possible sources of things to give away. The more you bring to the 'Free Market yourself, the more excited others will be about the event, and the more they will expect from themselves as participants. Go through your closets, and encourage everyone you know to do the same. Of course you can dumpster bread and vegetables—but is it possible employees might slip you a little on the side, too? Visit colleges at the end of each semester, corporations that are going out of business, and wealthy neighborhoods where they leave perfectly good items sitting out on the curb. Get all your friends together the night before to cook a nutritious meal and a few hundred delicious cookies.

Make sure it's not easy to tell who is contributing what, both to avoid any implications of charity and to forestall speculation as to whence certain items came. If a team wants to raid the basement of a racist, sexist fraternity and redistribute their unused VCRs to the people, that's their own business, right?

Don't stop at gathering objects—a good 'Free Market is about people interacting with each other, not just taking and leaving things. Organize games, musical improvisations, and other participatory activities that can incorporate chance passers-by. Set up displays and dioramas for the shy but inquisitive.

Solicit participants person by person. As a rule of thumb, one personal invitation is worth a hundred fliers. Invite an accomplished storyteller, a hairstylist, a popular folk musician, a collective of spoken word artists, a specialist in therapeutic massage, a portrait painter, a bicycle mechanic, an automobile mechanic, and everyone else you can think of or run into. Offer to help provide whatever resources they need.

Consider what services others at the 'Market may need, as well. You could have someone with a truck available to make deliveries, or someone organizing children's activities in case a lot of overburdened parents show up. In some situations, you should have a team designated in advance to deal with police, media, or other troublemakers.

Coordinate with other groups to broaden the scope of your 'Free Market. A dance troupe is coming to your town for the weekend; can they put in an appearance? How about a barbershop quartet, a team

of champion skateboarders, a holistic health care provider, a symphony orchestra? You're not just keeping old clothes and stale bagels in circulation, you're introducing an entirely different economic system that can provide as much diversity as capitalism, if not more! Make sure that comes across at every 'Free Market.

Finally, make sure you have a plan for what to do with the leftovers! The local thrift shop or goodwill may be thrilled to get a big shipment in from you, or it may not be what they want at all, in which

case you'll have to either have a place to store it all for the next 'Free Market or a means of disposing of it. Clean up the site of your 'Free Market meticulously; you'll benefit from having a reputation for being responsible in this regard.

Once your 'Free Markets have taken off, you can move on to other Really Really Free programs: free movie showings and other entertainment events, free education projects, free housing occupations! The sky's the limit once people have a taste of real freedom.

Because there's enough for everyone
Because sharing is more fulfilling than owning
Because corporations would rather the landfills overflow than anyone get anything without paying
Because scarcity is a myth that keeps us at the mercy of the economy
Because a sunny day outside is better than anything money could buy
Because "free trade" is a contradiction in terms
Because no one should have to do without food, shelter, entertainment, and community
Because life should be a picnic, but it only will be if we call for it ourselves
Because there is too such thing as a free lunch

The Fight for the 'Free Market An Epic Tale Culminating in Triumphant Victory

Our story takes place in a small town like many others in the US. This town is known for its pedestrian-friendly layout and liberal population. There's no college, but a state university is located in the larger town a bicycle ride away, and three medium-size cities are within an hour's drive. Some people have lived here their whole lives, but many others have moved here over the past decade or two; property costs have increased accordingly, increasing the pressure on poorer residents. Class conflict appears to be at a low level, however; at first glance, a visitor might assume everyone is as affluent as the customers at the expensive co-op downtown. In fact, there is a disenfranchised class—consisting of the remainder of the area's longtime black population, the Latino laborers who have followed employment opportunities here more recently, poor white workers, and *déclassés*—but it is invisible, as most of the town's facilities cater to the young and hip or the wealthy and bourgeois.

And there are anarchists. Alongside the scene of people involved in cooperative housing and organic farming, a small but vigorous anarchist community has developed over the past decade. Unlike many towns where anarchists have established a presence, there's virtually no punk scene: no bands, no shows, no music-oriented subculture. There's also very little drinking. In place of these things, anarchists mingle with the rest of the population and hold excellent dinner parties—and organize social programs.

As of this writing, this town of less than 20,000 hosts a community bicycle repair and distribution program, a radical literature distribution, a free breakfast program for day laborers, a free grocery distribution program for low-income neighborhoods, and a books to prisoners program, among other projects. Most of these are explicitly anarchist, yet serve hundreds of people of widely varying political identification.



But we're getting ahead of ourselves here. Several of those projects grew up in the momentum generated by the local Really Really Free Markets, which are the subject of this story.

Late in 2003, several people from this area attended a Really Really Free Market at the protests against the Free Trade Area of the Americas ministerial in Miami. The following summer, activists organized the state's first Really Really Free Market in a nearby city; it was a one-time event, coinciding with summit protests elsewhere in the region. The next fall, a few friends paid the permit fee to reserve the town commons for the first local 'Free Market. It, too, was conceived as a one-time event; but it was such a success that in early 2005 others joined them in organizing a sequel.

Even at these first couple 'Free Markets, the crowds were fairly diverse, owing to fliers having been distributed in multiple languages and neighborhoods. There were also hints of the controversies that were to come: rumors circulated that town officials worried the 'Market would take business away from local corporations, and it turned out that town regulations forbid a group from reserving the town commons for the same event more than twice a year. Despite this prohibition, it was decided that additional 'Free Markets should take place, and a new face went to reserve the space in hopes that this would suffice to circumvent the two-use rule.

Regulations or no, it was fortuitous that we started rotating organizational roles early on. This proved invaluable both for resisting concentrations of power within our own circles and weathering our later struggles with the town bureaucracy. We had our first real scandal the following

autumn, a year after our initial 'Free Market. By this time, the organization core had drifted to a social circle characterized by more confrontational politics. It was election time, and every major intersection in town was decorated with yard signs proclaiming the virtues of various candidates for office. Many of these yard signs reappeared painted over and stenciled with advertisements of the upcoming 'Market. The local political milieu erupted in a huff; this took some time to pass and was draining for those who took it upon themselves to smooth things over. The scandal drew more media coverage to the 'Free Markets, albeit negative, and contributed to their contentious reputation.

Meanwhile, the 'Markets themselves were doing just fine. The hundreds of people who attended them, who came increasingly from low-income backgrounds, apparently weren't concerned about the private property of local bigwigs.

The watershed juncture arrived spring of 2006. Over the preceding year and a half, organizers had paid hundreds of dollars to reserve the space for the 'Markets, often out of their own pockets. There had long been debates as to what would happen if we stopped paying the reservation fees. Would the government dare set the police on a multigenerational, multiethnic crowd in the center of town? Some felt that they would not, and that it was absurd to pay town officials for the right to provide a public service to the people they purported to serve. Others felt that, while the fees were undesirable, the 'Free Markets just didn't have the support necessary to win a conflict with the town government.

In the end, the former camp carried the day out of necessity: there was a great deal of interest in the next 'Free Market, but no one had money to put up for it. The town

Parks and Recreation Department was informed of the planned date, but no one ever showed up to pay the permit fee. Contrary to all fears, the 'Free Market went off without a hitch—it was the most successful one to date.

Another 'Free Market was called for the following month. This time, however, another group had already reserved the space for that day. A town official contacted the person who had most recently signed up to reserve the town commons for a 'Free Market and informed him of this, but refused to facilitate communication with the group. 'Free Market supporters tracked down members of this group themselves, and worked everything out with them; in the end, both events took place, and participants in the 'Free Market assisted the other group in setting up. Town officials later disingenuously referred to this double-booking as one of the problems caused by the refusal to pay the reservation fee, but in fact it was a non-issue at the time.

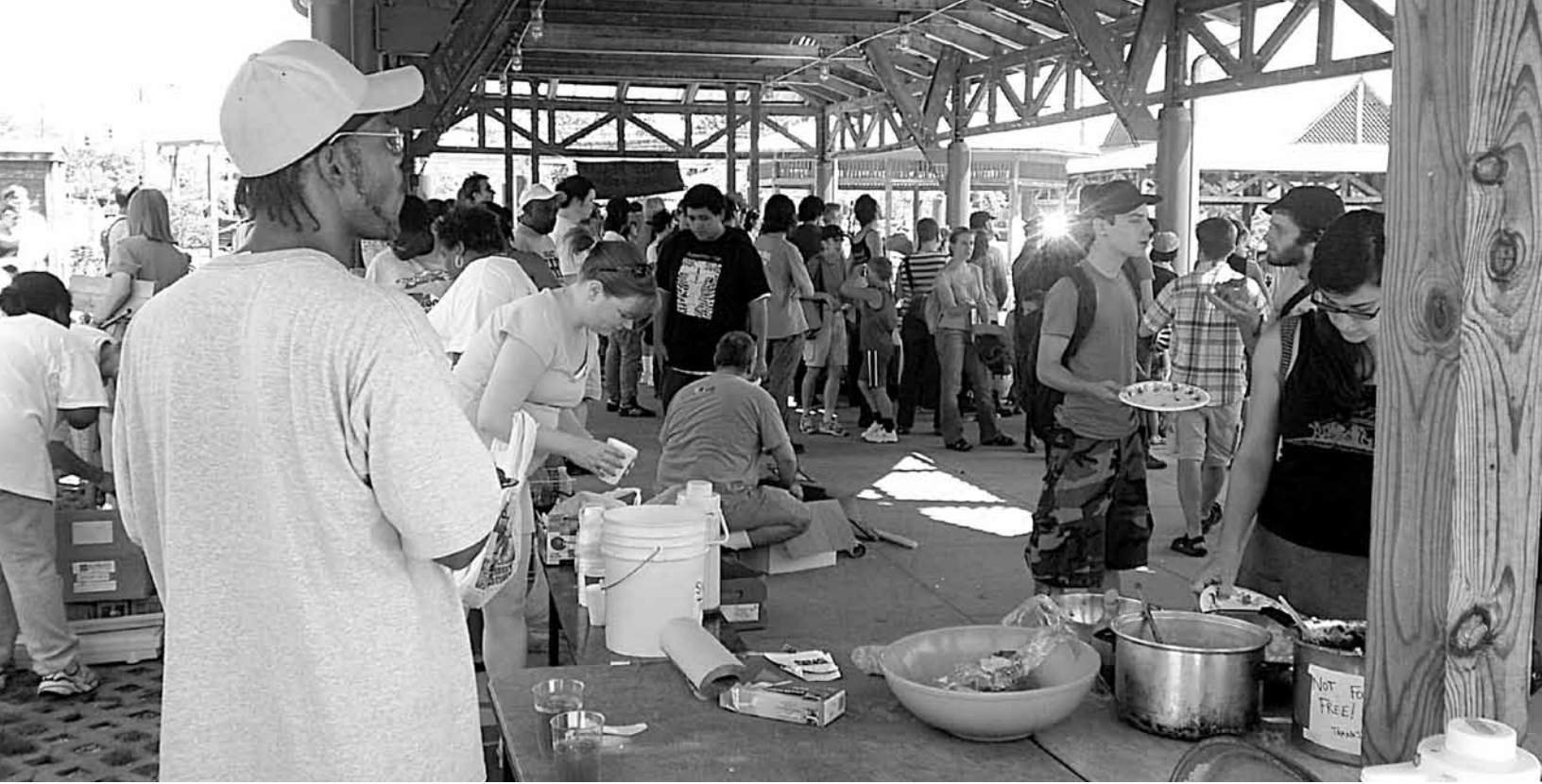
Still fearing that the authorities might try out intimidation tactics at one of the 'Free Markets to discourage unpermitted use of public space, we invited comrades from other towns who were experienced in "public order" situations to attend. Had we been thinking more clearly, we would have realized in advance that town officials would not act publicly, but rather target individuals underhandedly. That summer, a person who had signed up for an earlier 'Free Market received a letter from a local law firm acting on behalf of the Parks and Recreation Department, threatening civil penalties for the unpermitted use of public space.

This intimidation had the effect of making people even more hesitant to have their legal names associated with 'Free Market organizing, but it did not dampen the mo-

mentum of the 'Markets. A handbill circulated at the next one listing the phone numbers of prominent town officials, inviting people to call and express their displeasure at the targeting of individuals associated with the 'Markets; it subsequently appeared posted all around town. Officials later complained of having received numerous calls, and the individual who had received the threatening letter never heard from the law firm or the government again.

Despite this, it seemed clear that some sort of showdown with the town bureaucracy was brewing. Heated discussions took place behind the scenes about the best way to handle this. Public support had to be mobilized—but how could this occur without centralizing control or representation of the 'Markets? Should public meetings be held, or would that simply offer a clear target for government repression and reformist infiltration? There were still some who felt that a confrontation with the government was neither feasible nor desirable.

Three decisions were made that greatly influenced the ensuing course of events. First, an even more conscious effort was made to rotate roles: the individuals who had received a lot of attention up to that point were put on the bench, as it were, and from then on it was generally agreed that a person should only fill a given role once—whether that be speaking to the media, publicly defending the 'Free Markets, or coordinating advertising and preparation—before passing it along to another. At the same time, all 'Free Market organizing remained on an informal basis; the idea was that you could do anything you wanted to support the 'Free Markets, as long as in doing so you weren't making decisions for others. This meant that no one could negotiate with the government on behalf of the 'Free Markets, and the



'Markets had no decision-making body other than the entire number of people who participated in them. Throughout this process, organizers benefited from the small size of the town and the lines of communication extending through different social circles.

Second, the 'Free Markets would take place once a month, on a regular day. This solved the problem of someone having to call for each one to take place, and with it some of the remaining problems with power distribution. If the date of each 'Free Market was common knowledge according to a monthly system, there would be no organizers to blame for calling them. Fliers went out listing the next eight months of upcoming 'Free Markets.

Finally, 'Free Market supporters reached out to their friends in a local puppetry troupe to plan a 'Free Market that would surpass all that had come before. These puppeteers had maintained a popular series of local shows for over half a decade, and were considering hosting a puppetry convergence that would draw troupes from around the country. Someone suggested that the convergence be timed to intersect with a 'Free Market, and it was agreed. The puppeteers, not wishing to take the same risks, reserved the town commons, and a joint 'Market-cum-puppetry-festival

Overheard in conversations at our 'Free Markets:

[One elderly African-American woman to another:] "Oh, you live there? That's right down the street from me! Why don't you come by tomorrow, and I'll give you the flower pots you need."

[High school student, to friends:] "See? A marching band! This is the best thing ever!"

[Ostensibly bourgeois woman holding a 'zine, to her partner:] "Look, honey, this was printed by our friendly neighborhood anarchists!"

[Someone in a denim jacket, to companion:] "OK, now how can we get rid of money?"

was announced across the state. In a town known for support of the arts, this was a real coup.

As the date of the festival approached, a struggle over public space issues broke out elsewhere in town when the co-op mentioned earlier for its affluent customers attempted to ban public expression on its front lawn. Protests were held, posters appeared wheatpasted across public walls, newspapers printed debating viewpoints on the issue, and town officials were drawn into the matter. Venomous columnists even accused politicians who took positions in favor of public use of space of being closet anarchists—thanks in part to the 'Free Markets, anarchism was becoming a point of reference for everyone. In the end, the landlord backed down, ceding victory to those who championed freedom and community over private property.

The week before the festival, in this edgy atmosphere, a town official contacted the puppeteer who had signed up for the space and informed him that if people were going to share food at the event, he would have to pay several hundred dollars for insurance. In two years of 'Free Markets, each of which had featured a tremendous smorgasbord of free food, there had never been any talk of insurance; in fact, a later examination of the wording of town policy revealed that it did not require insurance for events at which food was given away. At the time, however, this phone call provoked some consternation.

The day of the 'Free Market, food was delivered to the site by visiting supporters from out of town¹; this was part of the policy of rotating high-visibility tasks, so town officials

¹ Although some of us have expressed frustration with the transient lifestyle common among younger anarchists, holding that it prevents people from building up the long-term bonds and commitments necessary for major social transformation, we've also relied on visitors to bolster energy right before each 'Free Market, bring in scarce resources from out of town, take one-time-only high-profile roles, and convey stories about our 'Free Markets to other communities as an inspiration and challenge.

would not have an easy target for repressive measures. A town official stopped one person bearing a pot of beans, informing her that she was not permitted to serve food; she responded that she didn't intend to serve it, and placed it on the table with the rest of the food. He had to content himself with taking photographs of the food to present later on as evidence against the 'Free Market. Meanwhile, another town employee, a hulking fellow in intimidating dress, went around asking for suspected 'Free Market organizers by name; no one answered his queries, of course.

Despite these efforts, the event was a smashing success. Dozens of puppetry troupes came and performed, and hundreds of local families showed up with children in tow. The intersection of the puppetry convergence and the 'Free Market offered the former a marvelous public venue and cemented the reputation of the latter as a valuable community resource.

At this event, a town official who supported the 'Free Markets mentioned that at the meeting of the town government a couple days later there would be a resolution on the table proposing harsher penalties for those who promoted unpermitted events on public property. In retrospect, this was an important turn of events. Had he not passed on this advance warning, everything that followed might have played out differently. Phone trees were activated and a call went out for people to gather at the meeting in opposition to the measure. This was to be the first time 'Free Market supporters had acknowledged the town government in over half a year, and it had to be a show of force.

The night of the meeting, almost thirty 'Free Market supporters arrived at the town hall. They ranged from leather-jacketed teenagers to grey-haired women with long histories of local volunteer work. On his way into the building, the mayor stopped to ask what brought them there; he disingenuously claimed the proposed penalties were not directed at 'Free Market organizers, though he admitted they might affect them. The town lawyer publicly corrected him when he repeated this in the meeting, bluntly stating that the proposal was intended to solve the problems posed by unpermitted use of the town commons.

A couple people spoke in favor of the 'Free Markets; everyone else remained silent but expectant, an unknown quantity for town officials to figure into their calculations. The politicians assured everyone that the 'Free Markets were not under attack, that there would be no arrests made in relation to them, then took advantage of the opportunity to hold forth at length about how there have to be rules and regulations and so on or else everything will just be "anarchy." A reporter subtly poked fun at one town official in corporate newspaper coverage of the meeting, noting that he delivered this threat obliviously to a room full of anarchists. In the end, the mayor announced that an "anonymous donor" had offered to pay the reservation fee for the 'Free Market, so long as someone signed up for it. This struck some as a fabrication designed to preserve appearances—a tacit admission that the 'Free Markets could not be stopped.

Hours before the next 'Free Market, someone whose

Just a few of the things shared at our 'Free Markets:

- televisions, stereos, and computers
- furniture, futons, beds, and exercise machines
- CDs, DVDs, videotapes, and cassettes
- clothing from lingerie to ski boots
- suitcases, bookshelves, and ironing boards
- homemade bird houses
- firewood
- seeds and vegetable starts
- shampoo, conditioner, moisturizer, and other toiletries
- children's toys, baby clothes, and diapers
- toilet paper, cleaning supplies, and homemade soap
- hot soup, tostadas, salad, popcorn, cornbread, sweet tea, coffee, and other lunch items
- banana bread, a myriad of cakes and pies, and vegan chocolate chip cookies by the thousand
- massive quantities of groceries
- thousands upon thousands of pamphlets, 'zines, and papers
- books and magazines
- tarot card reading and fortune telling
- acupuncture, reiki, and massage
- haircuts
- bicycles
- a bicycle repair station operated by skilled bicycle mechanics
- automobile repair advice from a professional automechanic
- screenprinted shirts and patches, including some celebrating our 'Free Market
- screenprinting, poi spinning, and self-defense workshops
- cello, theremin, and mouth harp lessons
- performances from drummers, folk singers, classical musicians, a marching band, a drum corps, and dozens of puppet troupes
- piñatas full of vegan candy
- games from chess to ultimate frisbee
- an official from the free public transit system came to give out bus schedules and coin pouches with the transit system logo on them
- the local Peace & Justice coalition brought sheets and paint to make banners for an upcoming protest
- After being fired from her job at a corporate banner-making factory (no joke!), one enthusiastic participant hand-quilted a banner proclaiming "REALLY REALLY FREE MARKET," which now hangs at every one.

name had been on a reservation form years earlier received an email from a town official again demanding hundreds of dollars of insurance if food was to be shared. The phone trees were activated again, and several dozen people showed up with cookies, cakes, pies, soups, and other delicious foodstuffs to give away in defiance. This time the government did not send anyone to harass participants; they simply posted signs reading "The town has no control over and does not warrant the quality of any food distributed at this event." 'Free Market organizers brought their own signs, one of which was a full yard high and proclaimed "The town government does not sanction the distribution of food at this event; do not sue them or expect them to share food with you. Eat at your own risk—BE GOVERNED AT YOUR OWN RISK." The wording of the town policy regarding insurance at events appeared at the base of the sign, to show how their demand for insurance contradicted their own guidelines. At a later 'Free Market, the same official who had given the heads-up about the meeting expressed



approval of this sign, implying that town employees had their hands bound by red tape.

The 'Free Markets continue here to this day, each one a resounding success. Rumor has it that the town government may change the reservation system so a fee is not required for non-profit events in public spaces; in this way, our project has contributed to the general struggle for free access to space in our community. As of this writing, several other cities in this state have regular 'Free Markets following the model we've developed. We have long-term plans to continue building an anarchist infrastructure in our town, running parallel with the hierarchical structures imposed by the government and corporations, with the goal of eventually supplanting them. In the meantime, our 'Free Markets are an excellent way to support the needy and nourish our culture of resistance.

In the end, the conflict with the town government gave us opportunities we would never otherwise have had. We were able to bring up questions about the distribution of wealth and power that otherwise go unasked in this society; likewise, we were able to differentiate our approach to social support programs from those of liberals and religious groups. Had the town not raised such a fuss, people might have mistaken the 'Free Markets as another state-sponsored charity event.

Our experience demonstrates the tremendous advantage amorphous, informal networks have when they enter into conflict with formal, hierarchical groups. All of the power the government had to bring to bear against us depended on there being specific representatives for them to target, and to a lesser extent on public disinterest. In maintaining horizontal structures and public anonymity while mobilizing massive grassroots support, we were able to outmaneuver them in every instance.



We also showed that direct action gets the goods. Even from a reformist perspective, our approach was more effective in producing concrete results than any other strategy could have been. Had we simply petitioned government officials or attempted to get a sympathetic politician into office, we would never have gotten anywhere. By presenting our regular use of the town commons as a done deal, we made the authorities an offer they couldn't refuse. Every low-income family that leaves each 'Free Market with a bag of groceries benefits from this.

Our efforts have borne fruit in other ways, too. Last Mayday, when there were massive marches in support of immigrants' rights around the country, many of the ones in our state were organized in conjunction with liberal or communist front groups and bore a correspondingly authoritarian character. Here, thanks to the work we had done on the 'Free Markets, we were fortunate enough to be involved in the organizing along with immigrants and immigrants' rights advocates. Consequently, the march that occurred here was distinctly more radical in form and content: it took place without any permits, occupying the town's main thoroughfare for several hours and culminating in a free dinner, dancing, and movie at the town commons. The connections that developed at this event later enabled people to coordinate solidarity actions during the assault on Oaxaca.

We shouldn't underestimate the importance of small, concrete victories such as this one. In an era when radicals are used to losing every struggle they enter, it is important to set realistic goals and achieve them, and thus get used to doing what it takes to win. Perhaps the lessons we've learned here can't be applied in every town across the United States, but there must be countless other towns like our own. It's up to you to discover whether our successes can be repeated where you live.

The Art of Staying in Limbo: Stealing Houses in the Rust Belt

by Chimney Swift and Raven of the Birdhouse Propaganda Ministry; painstakingly dismembered and reconstructed by your beleaguered editors, who bear the responsibility if anything is screwy

Get out of my courtroom.” We looked at each other: all four of us were wearing mismatched sports coats and slacks and looks of confusion. This was the big day, the conclusion, the showdown, the verdict.

“But what about the house? Are we going to get it?” I asked, “ahem, your honor.”

The verdict came down from on high: “You’re done here. Get out of my courtroom. That’s it.” That was the much-feared verdict from the judge, the most powerful manifestation of the state our group had encountered so far: the feeble pronouncement of a figurehead who only wanted to get on with the day’s business.

Almost a year earlier, in August, we’d gone to the 13th district court wearing the same mismatched suits to attend the housing court date of the deceased owner of the estate. The judge looked at us with suspicion. “Why are you here and where is Richard Starr?”

We exchanged glances and lied: “We have permission to live there and we are interested in fixing up the house.” He said he needed more information and called us to return three months later.

When November rolled around we were nervous but wouldn’t show it, not even to each other. The judge began by listing housing court violations. Then he asked if we wanted the house. He knew the owner was dead; whether or not we really had permission to live there was irrelevant: they were *working on a strategy to give us the house*, to expedite our progress through the legal system. By moving in, we’d cut the red tape—we’d even brought ourselves to court.

It turned out the violations were cosmetic: lead paint chips on the exterior, five-foot weeds in the yard, broken fencing, broken and boarded up windows, gutters and drains. He even said that if anyone from the Starr family were to step forward for the house he would prosecute them—but not us. He was giving us a chance—six months to fix these violations—and then we would meet again.

Six months later, we left the courtroom in confusion. What did it all mean? We asked our court liaison. “Well,” he answered, “you fulfilled your end of the bargain. Now we’re trying to get you out of this court and into surrogate court so you can get the deed.”

Get the deed! He knew we were squatters, but the city prosecutors here have bigger fish to fry. In fact, the success of our case has inspired some city officials to try to rewrite housing court law. There is talk that they may use our house, among others, as a model. The beginnings of industrial collapse in Buffalo have put us at an advantage. The city’s financial woes, the overworked housing courts, and the crumbling housing market have forced the state to conclude that we, enemies of property that we are, are their

best bet for this building and this neighborhood. For diametrically opposing reasons, we wholeheartedly agree.

Entering Limbo

The ideal situation is a property that is in limbo. These are everywhere. Dead owners, deadbeat landlords, absentee owners with too many properties. Many people are actually trying to get rid of houses that are falling apart. It costs a lot of money to demolish a house, and some cities pursue violators with serious fines and threats of jail time. After you find a house that seems to be in limbo, the next step is moving in.

Successful long-term squatting demands the appearance of legitimacy. Some may say the fun in squatting is in the risk. I disagree—the fun in squatting is in dumpstering a king size bed, building musical instruments and cabinets and lofts all day, and NOT PAYING RENT TO A LANDLORD. Sneaking around might seem safer and easier, but in the end it’s neither. Borrow a van and park it in front. Pry off the boards in broad daylight at noon on Sunday. Knock on the neighbors’ doors; make sure you’re seen. Move the fuck in.

Adverse possession, the statute by which an occupant claims the right to property after a period of occupation, is the battle cry of squatters everywhere. Rumor has it that if you move into an empty house here in New York and establish proof of residence there, in ten years the city has to give you the house. Ten years! In fact, this is possible, so long as you get out of housing court and no one looks up your address on the city website and gets an inspector to demand a certificate of occupancy, deed, or lease agreement. Adverse possession is the method most commonly used in squatter victories, including the famous established squats in New York City—Serenity, Casa del Sol, C Squat, ABC No Rio, and Dos Blocos.

This isn’t our situation exactly, at least not yet. We have become owner-occupants and are actually trapped in limbo. In the eyes of the court, once we fixed the majority of our housing code violations, we weren’t doing anything wrong. The owner died and his son, the overseer of the estate, wants nothing to do with the house because of a \$40,000 mortgage and back taxes. The bank wrote the house off as a loss. The house is a hazard and an eyesore to the neighborhood and the government, and this is where we come in.

We forged the lease agreement to get the house inspected and they never set foot inside due to our construction efforts. After we took care of the cosmetic housing court violations, the city practically left us alone. They only contacted us periodically to invite us to court to dialogue with the judge and his liaisons about how much we want the house and how much they want to give it to us. The city knows about us, but they don’t have enough money to evict or demolish us; in fact, they need us—that is, they need people to move into the thousands of vacant houses in the city.

This is the opposite of the situation in New York City, the American standard for squatter legitimacy. New York City has a very unique housing situation and a long history of rent strikes, tenant battles, deadbeat landlords, and gentrification, not to mention overpopulation. It also has

Squatting means looking at land without boundaries, without any concept of ownership. Animals, insects, and plants are all squatters—indeed, in the eyes of developers they are pests to be removed or exterminated.

a sizeable radical community and quite a few politicized lawyers and legal advisers. All of the squats mentioned above came out of a certain time and place in history and relied on a fairly similar strategy. Our project must take a different approach. Although we have neither the community of support nor the inspiring history of victories that characterize squatting in New York, the situation here in Buffalo and throughout the cities of the Rust Belt is ripe for our purposes. A once-mighty economic machine is rapidly decaying into overlooked ruins.

Inhabiting Industrial Collapse

Buffalo was once among the biggest cities in the US. In the 1920s, with the steel industry at its peak and the Erie Canal opening up the Great Lakes to trade, Buffalo was bursting at the seams. In terms of infrastructure and industry, Buffalo really grew during this era and began to rely heavily on the canal and waterways as a means of local economic growth. Then the steel industry took a dive and the Great Depression set in. Buffalo was doomed. After opening the canal and setting the stage for the economic growth of other Great Lakes cities such as Cleveland, Chicago, and Milwaukee, Buffalo’s economy slowed and slowed until NAFTA stopped it cold. The population has been in steady decline since the 1950s. For a city the size of Detroit, Buffalo has the population of Des Moines. Everything is abandoned, everything is falling apart—and we are dancing in the ruins.

There is a serious housing crisis here. There are 20,000 houses awaiting demolition and 100,000 abandoned. Many of them are in limbo due to utilities, loans, and mortgages, and tens of thousands are held for use as assets by private creditors like our very own New York governor. We have an MBBA list with 6000 houses owned and used as assets by a company for taking out huge loans. These houses are unmoderated and unmaintained; in parts of our neighborhood, there are two or three every block.

We have weak enemies. The city and county are broke. The economy is sluggish and sinking. People are leaving town in droves; according to some of my moving company friends, the ratio of people leaving to coming in is as bad as seven to one. I believe the population is around 250,000. The state spends all its money on New York City and most politicians in the state live there.

It’s turned out we had less to fear than we thought. For example, there used to be a block club in this neighbor-

hood—a group of “concerned neighbors” who got together to discuss houses they considered problems, gossip about people, complain about dogs, and snitch about housing code violations. Block clubs, by and large, are the bane of squatters and underclass occupants in general. We feared the block club, at least until our first meeting with them. We realized then that they were falling apart and needed a new volunteer moderator to schedule meetings. So we invited them to have a meeting at our house and naturally volunteered one of us to become the new block club president. We forgot to organize the next meeting in time and decided against organizing any more, and in a few weeks the block club was dissolved. Eureka, coup d’état.

We have strong friends. The judge on our case comes from a Democratic dynasty family and “deeply cares about the housing crisis”—that is, he’s interested in developing the slums, moving people into abandoned houses and businesses into shop fronts. One housing court liaison actually lives on our street and knew the family that once lived in our house; she remembers when the house was a nursing home. She drives a police cruiser and hates our decorations but is no longer a threat to us. Another housing court liaison is among our more powerful friends. He helped us out a lot in the beginning. He understands that we are not only squatters but anarchists as well—before I realized what I was doing, I rambled to him about my view of the courts, the landlords, and the state. He is working on a strategy for us to acquire the deed through “receivership.” Finally, we befriended a group called PUSH, People United for Sustainable Housing, that works in the lower West Side on urban gardens and the housing crisis; they also just started a cooperative apartment building. Our friends from PUSH have supported us with legal advice and connections since the beginning.

The First Days

Rumors of an abandoned mansion rippled throughout the punk community in Buffalo. A few kids from a punk house scoped it out. Word got around to one of us—R. He pulled up in his mother’s van and began mowing the lawn. He talked to a few skeptical neighbors and informed them that he was the new owner of the house, then broke in through the basement window, kicked the boards off the back kitchen door, installed locks there, and began using it as the main door. Soon after, the police came, presumably

having been called by a neighbor R. hadn't talked to yet. They took his keys and gave him a trespassing violation. Later that week R. called the officer whose number was on the ticket and told him he was going back to the house. The officer asked him not to, and that was that—the birth of the *Fuck'em* mentality. The court hadn't issued a vacancy order yet and the case was still pending. The house was trapped in limbo with no overseer; without a legitimate complaint from the landlord or the block club, they had to wait. Almost mysteriously, we've had no more trouble with the police.

R. finally realized that he needed help, and began asking around in the punk and radical communities. Everybody seemed really interested in the possibilities, but also skeptical and afraid. It's a lot to ask of people that they drop everything and dedicate all their time to something they will almost certainly lose, especially in a privileged community such as the college-age, North Buffalo punk community. Luckily, around this time a punk house down the street was getting evicted and someone had the idea to rent a moving truck, load it full of all of the furniture from the closing house, and bring it to this new mansion in order to appear legitimate. Besides, the former residents needed a new place to live.

The truck pulled up in broad daylight. "Yeah, we own this house." People began prying boards off of the window. The same police officer from before drove by and waved—we were terrified, but nothing happened so we started working. Soon, on July 1st, everyone began actually living in the house. Thus began an endless series of house projects, an explosion in all of our lives and the lives of everyone around us. It was shocking—suddenly we lived in the house of our dreams. We'd opened up a frightening infinity of possibilities, of hopes and desires and disasters.

The House

The house is located in Buffalo's West Side, just across the tracks from the river that separates Fort Erie, Ontario from Buffalo, New York. Our house was built in the mid-1800s and has gone through many changes—structure is built upon structure from the dining room up. There are rumors in the neighborhood that the mayor grew up in our house, but I'm not sure I believe them. The house definitely belonged to a well-off family at one point: we have a butler staircase next to the main staircase—wouldn't want to see those servants incessantly going up and down the stairs,

pish posh—and servants' quarters. After passing through many hands, the house became a nursing home; at that point, an intercom system was installed, a kitchen was added to the third floor, and the swimming pool was filled with dirt. We tried to dig out some of the dirt for skateboarding, but regardless of our plans at that time the pool is a garden now. Our neighbor says that after the nursing home went under the house became a tenant-run nursing home. After they went bankrupt, the house was abandoned, then became a crackhouse, and now it is a palace—the beginning of our journey.

As for us, we're mostly men—women have never outnumbered men, but have come close a few times—and mostly white: we're all eurotrash and Hispanic, at the border of a Hungarian/Polish ghetto and a Puerto Rican/Latino ghetto. We're also all dropouts: most of us never finished high school, none of us spent more than a month in college, and there's hardly any work among us.

Squatting versus Homesteading: Class, Privilege, and Gentrification

The house can be viewed from a variety of perspectives. On one hand, obviously, it's a squat: we have no landlord, no certificate of occupancy, no lease agreement, no deed. We are squatters and this is occupied territory.

Culturally, the word squat has a lot of baggage. It generally implies a temporary living situation. Since property is owned by banks and landlords and protected by judges and police, it would seem that the logical end to squatting is getting discovered and kicked out. Isn't the eviction the glorious climax of every squatting war story? And what's the point of fixing up a place you're doomed to lose in the end?

So squatting also implies inhospitable conditions: a dilapidated old house, a decaying industrial center, an abandoned cereal plant, a camp under a bridge. Squatting means laying in broken glass, pissing in the corner, smoking cigarette butts in piles of liquor bottles and garbage. Squatting is for those with no money, no ingenuity, very low standards, and very high tolerance.

In light of these assumptions, I often get dirty looks when I mention that I'm a squatter; at the same time, I often find I have little in common with other squatters. In many ways, our squat has little in common with other squats: it's only as temporary as we let it be—and it's not an inhospitable hovel, it's a fucking mansion.

Essentially, we are a clique of friends, but a clique numerous and crazy enough to flip a car and run out of stores with our arms full as an unstoppable mob.

Admittedly, until the first winter, we trashed the porch all the time and the front of the house looked like it was abandoned. That changed when we got into the court process. Now we see the porch as a facade that should be kept orderly; although we have dogs, we do the yard work and the neighbors all love us. In fact, one year later we have been here longer than most of them. We still occasionally take out interpersonal problems on the walls and appliances, but unlike most squats we've become a sort of family. Our relationships are the foundation this house is built on. I like to think that we are held together by love for each other and our work as a group as much as hatred for the outside world.

So from another perspective, this isn't a squat, it's a home. In that regard, you could say we're homesteading. Piss on the floor or break bottles out of disrespect and you are likely to get tackled. This is the most beautiful thing any of us have ever had—it's the only thing some of us have—and we love it. We are always scheming up new ways to compromise less while simultaneously making our lives more comfortable. This is our experiment in self-sufficiency in the midst of collapse, in living out our dreams in the midst of the nightmare of modern life. In the past, I've referred to the house as a militant homestead—squatting without the transience, no-compromise homesteading. In fact, this house is a spider web of compromises; like many aspiring insurgents, we dream of a world free of compromise but are doing our best with what we've got.

Squatting and homesteading have different class associations. Visualize a group of settlers marching to the top of a hill, establishing camp, and settling down. That's homesteading, the most long-standing method of obtaining ownership in American history, or at least the history of those settlers' descendents. Centuries later, imagine a squatter breaking into the abandoned hotel now atop the very same hill. From this perspective it appears that the difference between homesteading and squatting is first a matter of era, and then of class. But if you pan back and take an even broader perspective, it becomes clear that squatting has existed far longer than homesteading, indeed much longer than the idea of property itself. Squatting, in its most basic sense, means looking at land without boundaries, without any concept of ownership. In this view, animals, insects, and plants are all squatters—indeed, in the eyes of developers they are pests to be removed or exterminated. Squatting feels natural: right of occupation by virtue of use.



Homesteading is the American tradition in which one moves into "unoccupied" territory to fix it up, i.e., kill anything that moves. The homesteading era was characterized by brutal violence and destruction; these were essential to the capitalist reworking of the physical and mental landscape of North America. The literal occupation of the West was the front line of the conquest of the wild by civilization and the acre-by-acre establishment of the closed system of modern ownership.

This seems to illustrate the class difference between homesteaders and squatters—but it's not that simple. Many homesteaders were lower class. As the cities got bigger and bigger, more and more people left them, pushed out by poverty, wanderlust, or persecution, and headed West. Their contemporary counterparts are more likely to squat than to seize property with the backing of the authorities. Our dominant culture comes from the history of homesteading that preceded this era, but we trace our heritage to the much older and broader squatting community.

We do take advantage of the privilege we have to protect ourselves from the court system and the prying eyes of the upper class, yes. It helps that the neighbors assumed we acquired the house legally. We acknowledge this privilege, but we don't want to perpetuate it. We don't want to be gentrifiers. Fuck development. Just because some of the



punks, artists, or college students. The values of many of our neighbors mesh well with our own goals. I've raided abandoned buildings with our next-door neighbor. Unlike many of our punk and college student friends, he is not shocked by this kind of activity—on the contrary, he respects us for it. Our young white friends do not visit us and nowadays we are rarely accepted in their homes and neighborhoods. We are clearly recognized as a lower class than them.

I feel like a squatter when I notice that a quarter of all the houses in my neighborhood are abandoned, when I remember I have no job and I spend all day stealing and scamming or loitering, when people point out to me that I am dirty and smell like wood smoke or musk. I feel like we are homesteading when we willingly turn off the gas for good, when we're

eating wild green salads and potato bug patties while waiting for the tomatoes in the garden to ripen, when the brew room is full of the music of fermentation, when we all eat breakfast together in the morning and scheme for the whole day. We are exceedingly ambitious; that's the most concrete manifestation of our privilege.

Decadent Poverty and Squatter Economics

The class dynamic interests me because of the twofold nature of our situation. The giant mansion might give some the appearance of luxury—yet we arrived here with nothing. Others might see the house as a ruin, a crackhouse, a money pit—but I look at all the space, the hardwood floors and hardwood molding, the library and dining room, and I see magnificent decadence. We are pauper kings and queens living the high life.

Together we generated the concept of decadent poverty. Initially, it was an inside joke that arose out of dumpster extravaganzas and home-cooked feasts. Decadent poverty evolved into a way for us to brag to our friends and house-guests, to heckle people who are invested in their jobs and the work ethic. Back when there was still freon in it, we would point to our double fridge full of a beautiful dumpster smorgasbord and say, "This is free, help yourself, never ask again if you can eat here, look at this—decadent poverty." We would point people to our cellar, shelf after shelf of canned goods and ageing homebrew next to a stocked refrigerator and freezer: "This is wealth at no cost, all trash-picked, homemade, or stolen." We have a ten-burner double convection oven Vulcan gas stove, and when we were cooking three meals at once and making beer and tea we would proclaim, "Fuck work, fuck money, fuck the economy,

fuck'em—decadent poverty. This is a fucking mansion."

In the beginning we were a completely unemployed house. Perhaps it was ridiculous that we did a work-trade with a framer and gallery owner, moving her entire shop from one location to another in return for coffee, a big pizza, and cut picture frame glass to refit all of our windows, when we could have just spent \$20 on each window and been done—but that was more money than we had at the time, even collectively. Besides, it was a fun group project and it gave us more connections. Only one of us ever had a stable job, which she used to get a loan and a house account from her workplace, the local cooperative credit union. This proved to be a secret weapon. The collective house account is essential: it enables us to all dump money into an abstraction and argue for larger scale purchases without having to pass the hat around.

We took out a \$5000 two-year loan with the intention of paying it off in one year. This was a big investment, since we didn't know whether we'd still be in the house in a year. In the back of all of our minds, we figured the house was temporary. After long deliberation—our sixteen-person meetings lasted hours and hours, and as drinking was banned from them they usually concluded with us slamming beer and whooping each others' asses—we agreed to pay \$60 a month plus utilities. The loan payment was \$400 a month; ten people paying \$60 each added up to \$600, so we would have \$200 spending money. It rarely happened like that in practice. The nature of our house account allowed a cushion for those with little to no money. Almost half of us could be late on bills and we wouldn't be in trouble financially. In theory, we could take turns "taking care of each other," or "taking breaks from working," and it would only affect our project money; on the other hand, the more money we did get the more ambitious our projects could be.

We needed the house account for collectively purchasing necessities we couldn't routinely steal such as trash bags, toilet paper, light bulbs, condiments and spices, and materials for home repair. We had to redo every water line, almost every electrical line, the entire phone line from the basement to the third floor, every sink and every toilet. We had to redefine "work ethic." At first, we made the house our top priority.

Each utility was a crisis of its own. We had to build it all from scratch: first electricity, then water, gas, phone, and finally internet. Once they were in place, we also had to learn about using them. At first we turned the heat all the way up and used the utilities all hours of the day—we had the fastest DSL and unlimited long distance. It all sounded good, and with so many people it didn't seem like it would be too expensive—but during that period, when our decadent

poverty was the most decadent, it was the least sustainable. We spent the entire next year cleaning up after the mistakes we made that first winter with utilities companies.

Inside the House

I want to say all of us knew what we were doing. I want to say we knew we were going to keep the house and that they couldn't touch us. I want to say that we knew that one year later, we would have such luxurious, leisurely lifestyles, making music and art all day and dancing and exploring and bonding every night, that we would have three computers and DSL and hot water and so on. But we didn't. We told ourselves that we were invincible, but individually we were afraid: When are the cops going to knock on the door? When are we going to get that letter? As a group, we constantly reassured each other that we had it all figured out. We not only reaffirmed it but shouted it at the top of our lungs: "Fuck'em, let them try to stop us." Together, as a large group of sketchy, wild eccentrics, we cultivated a camaraderie that I have come to view as a gang mentality. Not because of the way a gang controls territory or deals drugs, or because of the violent and misogynistic tendencies associated with gangs, but because of the way we looked out for each other, the way we promoted crime and mischief, and the way we saw cops and the courts.

When we moved in, this neighborhood was Crip territory; then there were a bunch of murders and this year the Bloods are in control. They are aware of us, as are the Puerto Rican drug dealers on our street, but we've never had any problems with them. They see two dozen kids swarming around the house at all times, screaming and singing and building and destroying, and they leave us alone.

We have conflicts with plenty of other people, though. Every time we bike somewhere as a group it seems we get in a confrontation. Although Buffalo is the birthplace of the bicycle and many of the roads were originally designed for bikes only (seriously—look it up), this is not a bike-friendly place. A bike mob of ten kids going dumpstering, or to a party or even to the corner store, is liable to run into trouble. We bike in V formation and CAW at the top of our lungs. I could recognize that CAW for blocks away, and here I come, sharpened railroad spike in hand and blood lust at the ready. We're banned from many houses in the college area, many of us are banned from stores in the vicinity, and everyone recognizes us as those bike kids, the crazy kids in the ugly house on the corner. That's us, the Birdhouse gang—caw caw.

Essentially, we are a clique of friends, but a clique

Everything is abandoned, everything is falling apart— and we are dancing in the ruins.



up and stretch. Look ahead at the great crowd and flap your wings together. Caw caw caw.”

The shifting makeup of the house also means we occasionally fall into vanguardism. This has been a recurring phenomenon; it’s hard to avoid with such a large group in such a complicated situation. There was a time when we had a really high turnover rate, and whenever we get new roommates we have to fill them in on everything. It takes a certain kind of person to live here and many don’t last until they get the full story. It can be difficult to find people to bottomline some tasks, as they must be competent, motivated, and possess a complete grasp of the situation. Sometimes it seems easier to do something yourself than to show a new person how to do it, especially when you doubt they’ll be around in a few months; but that’s how power gets distributed unevenly. Some of us at the house are ex-communists, and I feel that initially our playful vanguardism went to far. Today, looking at the house’s “inner circle,” I think there is less of a dividing line between new and old residents, and the newer comrades fit in really well.

It can be hard to live with your friends, but a lot of amazing relationships have come out of this. I’ve spent over a year with these people—sometimes weeks straight, especially in winter. Honestly, I can’t say collective living is for everyone. You really have to ask yourself: can I handle living with all of these people, in each of their cycles of energy and isolation, with all their messes and idiosyncrasies? Our house is a social experiment. We are all bipolar and have each snapped a few times, but we act as a support group for each other. The dominant culture is deranged and traumatizing; the house is meant to be our hideout away from this death machine—but this is a big project.

Our strategy of staying in limbo creates very powerful extremes—our highs are very high and our lows are very low. All these issues are serious and not completely resolved. However, we have begun something that we all see as beautiful and relevant to the larger community of radicals and squatters. Our model can and will work for others, and we invite you to descend upon our city and others like it in a screaming, scheming horde. Squatting, especially the way we have done it, is not for everyone. It is, however, an inspiring and effective strategy for growing together and distancing ourselves from capital and the state. When you see us fly past in V formation overhead, railroad spikes in hand, feel free to join the flock. To paraphrase a famous Haymarket martyr, we are indeed the birds of the coming storm.

numerous and crazy enough to flip a car and run out of stores with our arms full as an unstoppable mob. This gang mentality has sustained us through countless uncertainties and difficulties, though it can also negatively influence the way people treat us. Many people have come to the house once and only once. They formulate judgments of us based on tall tales; I’d say the majority of our peers have the wrong impression of us. While this has alienated the in-crowd, for the most part I think people in our neighborhood are impressed with what we’ve done. Which is more important?

The gang mentality has begun to die out as the makeup of our group has changed. In the beginning we were all angry, penniless criminals with an urge to have fun at any cost. Now things have slowed down a lot. I’d say we have become more like a family, taking care of each other when we are sick or sad and always meddling in each other’s business. But the way we are branching off into new houses—we’ve started two new houses since this one’s inception—I feel like a tribe, like we are creating a culture here with our own stories and myths. So from gang, to family, to tribe—and now the logical conclusion, the cult: “Everybody wake



Not Fighting for an Occupation: Inside the CPE Protests

ONE. I wasn’t present when the occupations began. Early in February 2006, taking drinks outside at Montpellier’s preeminent maudlin locale, a dwindling clutch of acquaintances mentioned in passing their intention to end the night bedding down in the Faculty buildings north of town. Preoccupied by the dull prospects of morning, work, weariness, and my own nearby sleeping quarters, I missed this hint of what was coming.

Rather, it was in my habitual corner in the Café du Jeunese Perdu that I first learned of the developments that were to keep us roaming the streets day and night for many weeks to come. Sarah had walked in looking sad. She took an espresso and sat staring at a bye copy of Dostoevsky in another corner. We had met some months before; I had been fascinated by her large tangle of red hair and long thin fingers, which had first formed around a trapeze bar. She’d spent her youth in the mountains of the Lozere, France’s most rustic and least populated municipality, where many had attempted to regroup in the wake of the repression and confusion that followed the Occupations Movement of May 1968. Her parents were of that number, having taken an active role in the Paris of those days. Squatting together, stacking up the ruins of collapsed mountain homes, they built a circus and

maintained a fragile autonomy there. They named the circus Arcaos. Her mother did the lighting and her father juggled chainsaws. Sarah began acrobatics while still a toddler and had joined the Cirque du Soleil as a trapezist by sixteen. Her first performance in Montreal ended in disaster: she fell on the first jump, and the net below gave upon impact. She recovered the use of her legs, but her wider aspirations were dashed by the fall. At the same time, her mother’s health began to decline: liver failure, the consequence of the repugnant ’70s, shared needles, the Grenelle Accords. Sarah said little about all that. Crossing the café to meet her, I inquired as to ho she was doing. “Oh, still suffering communism’s delay,” she replied without smiling.

As I later discovered, a good bit of madness had already been loosed; on the 7th of February a group of students and supporters at the University of Rennes II decided for occupation, partially in response to a law known as the CPE, a labor reform giving bosses the right to sack workers during their first two years without cause or compensation. In the following weeks several dozen more campuses followed, including the majority of those in Montpellier.

There, as early as October, a smallish band of students had argued for the convening of a student-wide General



Assembly (AG) to take up the question of the government's proposed reforms. The first AG occurred in late January; it was a small convention of students overwhelmingly sympathetic to the idea of blockades or partial occupation. The bulk of students, however, having not participated in the AG, were subsequently astonished to find themselves denied access to their classes; the truly indignant, like all the rest, were advised to attend the next Assembly. The organized pro-occupation groups easily set the perimeters of debate. By contrast, the voices opposed to occupation tended to be isolated, bringing a small speech and perhaps a friend or two along for applause. It didn't do them any good. Eventually, as more students were drawn into its orbit, the AG established itself as a legitimate body in the eyes of students and faculty alike.

So it was that Sarah had begun setting out every morning before dawn to picket and otherwise clog the entrances at Montpellier III. This put her at odds with her social and domestic cohorts, who were abstractly sympathetic but did not share her enthusiasm—and that, she explained, accounted for her sullenness.

"This café is for jerks. Let's get out of here." I followed her. I must confess that since leaving the 'States for Montpellier six months earlier I'd never felt the slightest inclination to leave the three or four square miles that composed its medieval core. A decade or so earlier, the city's megalomaniac socialist mayor had decreed that the town's center would henceforth be automobile-free, had a tramway built, and financed the creation of a hellish series of underground tunnels for the displaced traffic. Such a policy, which cannot be recommended highly enough, had returned the surface of the town to the nineteenth century—but without all the horses. As a result, one could observe a veritable zoology of pedestrianisms: the stroller, the idler, the drifter, the rubbernecker. I even found myself regarding the occasional bicyclist with suspicion. For a still-young man living in the Old World, the city was a labyrinth of passageways, all closing in upon themselves—crowds, clearings, cathedrals, and fountains; it was a narrow lattice-work balcony in front of a thousand windows. That's where we were when our little walk was proposed.

Months before, French Police had chased two teenagers to their death, touching off the nationwide unrest known as the Autumn Riots. I had cranked out a large number of colorful posters in support of said activities because, unlike Sarah, I lacked the know-how to be of more immediate use and had to content myself with cheering on the protagonists and frightening our local bourgeoisie from the sidelines. A good number of those prints were still left, and we agreed that they might look nice in one corner or another of the university. That was the pretext of my first trip outside the city proper.

Leaving it, posters in hand, we walked through the giant Place du Ciel, dominated from the west by the Chateau d'Eau, terminus of a 3rd Century Roman aqueduct, and from the east by a statue of Louis XIV on horseback still positioned on its marble block despite having been uprooted in protest three times over the preceding centuries. Looking

out into the distance, one could see the Mediterranean to one side and tightly packed high-rises housing North African immigrants to the other; we were now on the periphery, nearly beyond the city's walls, surveying an environment that offered fewer illusions. Outside the artificial refuge of the city center, commodification had dug in its slimy fingers, creating motor-routes, parking-lots, neo-dwellings, bric-a-brac, and nothingness'. "It's all presented as something enormously positive, but what of all that will be left in a hundred years?" Sarah wondered aloud.

However, urban sprawl seemed to be simultaneously opening up an ever-expanding front for potential resistance. That had been the lesson, so to speak, of the Autumn Riots. Those who had joined in setting cars on fire and attacking schools, reporters, police, and corporate targets were offering their own provisional answers to Sarah's question. In previous eras, one threw oneself at the Bastille. It had an address; one could travel there. Now the Bastille seemed to be everywhere—consider the speed with which the conflict in Clichy-sous-Bois, a small suburb north of Paris, had spread across the entire country. The rioters there had offered a model that could be applied by virtually anyone.

"Virtually anyone?" she laughed. "The Bastille is a giant traffic round-about sitting on a mass grave. All that, all that..." she gestured outward, then stopped short. "No," she said, "it really isn't a question of where to start, but of where *not* to start!" The conversation ended: we'd arrived at the university.

TWO. The main entrance to the faculty was sealed off by an imposing eight-foot fence, without any footholds to speak of. How strange it was to see a dozen or so student-types burdened with backpacks and laptops scaling the fence with impeccable nonchalance! Sarah demonstrated the technique by which one could push oneself over, a motion I never totally mastered. Once inside we made our way to a cluster of amphitheatres, the largest of which served as the official AG, passing various slogans inscribed on the sidewalks, walls, and windows: "to the death of Death," "the Republic is a whore," "Life—no argument!" De Maistre, Plato, and Pascal—eccentric alliances, but taken in tandem they started to add up to something.

At any rate, the communication campaign was shifting quickly. The stated opposition to the CPE, the cause célèbre by which media, unions, and politicians were explaining the disruptions in the academic calendar, was beginning to outlive its usefulness. As more and more campuses were occupied and waves of high schools began to follow suit, the stakes increased, at least rhetorically. In more than one university, so as not to confuse a perfectly clear state of affairs, students voted that mention of the law in assemblies or on banners was expressly forbidden. Where we were headed remained very much up in the air; any number of common

1 All this is familiar enough to the inhabitant of any North American city, but in the US there are no temples against which to judge the extent of our distress.

2005

September 27—SNCM* sailors hijack their own ferry, steering it into the Mediterranean in response to the government's plan to privatize the state-owned ferry transport sector.

October 4—"Black Tuesday": Over one million people in 150 cities strike against the government's stated intention to "modernize" the French labor code.

October 27—Two teenagers are killed while trying to escape from the police. This incident, along with the government's incendiary response to initial protests, touches off weeks of explosive rioting in poor and working class suburbs. The Autumn Riots begin.

November 7—The Autumn Riots reach their peak. During the night there are major disturbances in 274 cities and towns. 1408 cars are set ablaze across the country. Similar actions take place on a smaller scale in six other Western European countries.

November 8—The French President declares a "state of emergency," implementing curfews and curtailing public assembly. Emergency powers are invoked for the first time since the Second World War.

2006

January 16—The government unveils its labor reform pack: the "laws for equality of opportunity," among which is the CPE.

February 7—The first national mobilization against the laws. Students at the University Rennes II decide to occupy their campus.

February 21—Occupation begins at Montpellier III.

March 7—Over one million demonstrate across the country. 38 of France's 84 universities are on strike or occupied. Demonstrations of one to three million participants occur two or three times a week henceforth.

March 10—The occupation at the Sorbonne, the University of Paris, is violently evicted by riot police.

March 23—67 of 84 universities are occupied. Hundreds of high schools are also on strike and occupied. Violent clashes with the police.

March 25—The government asks to meet with student groups in Paris; they are refused.

March 28—"General Strike": Upwards of one thousand high schools are shut down. 90% of all universities are blockaded or occupied.

April 4—The second "General Strike" is called.

April 9—The government withdraws the CPE. Occupations continue in as many as 14 universities.

April 12—General Assemblies vote to continue the occupation in several regions. Nonetheless, by the week's end all the occupied universities have demobilized.

* Société Nationale Maritime Corse Méditerranée is a ferries company operating in the Mediterranean Sea.



incompetence of governing classes—timeless foundation of Revolution, last true hope of the People!” There are some people who are not types.

By this time Sarah had decided to rejoin us; she couldn’t be bothered to endure Clement’s attempted ironies, but correctly deduced that the addition of the Basque classicist had essentially neutralized him. She brought with her a half dozen members of the Communication Committee, who inquired if I would allow one of my posters to serve as masthead for the next issue of the ad hoc journal they were producing on the school’s occupied printing press. The occupation was only in its third week, but the committee members were obviously exhausted. Nevertheless, in spite of the late hour, they patiently answered whatever questions we put to them. As we finished emptying our bottles, one of them suggested we get a bit of rest, offering us an improvised tatami mat and some loose fabrics.

We slipped into the adjacent auditorium that served as group sleeping quarters, and tip-toed in the direction of a vacant patch of linoleum. No sooner had we laid out our donated bedstuffs than peels of laughter erupted from one corner of the enormous room. This was followed by several “Sshhhh”s amid light snoring. Gasps from a nearby coupling provoked an even louder chorus of hushings, followed by more hysterics from the aforementioned side. As the auditory situation began to settle, someone in the room began blowing out a tune on a pan-flute. This of course

could not go uncensored and another more pointed round of hushings, laughter, hushings, and laughter got underway. Then there came some truly astonishing sounds from the direction of the projection room, followed by another rustic tune, a snore louder than the rest, and “Ssssssssh!” Stifled chuckles gave way to a momentary truce, until the next group of stumbling occupiers entered the hall, ostensibly in search of rest, giggling and tripping over one another.

All this went on for quite a while. At some point I closed my eyes. It seemed like only a couple moments later that I heard a loud snap overhead followed by the illumination of a hundred fluorescent light bulbs, two loud claps, and a woman’s voice: “This is happening!”

THREE. Everyone fell to. Back in the AG several coffee pots and a heap of baguettes were ready. It wasn’t yet six a.m., but we were taking breakfast quickly. During the previous night, the government had announced its intention to de-blockade the country’s high schools, so we were fanning out across the city in support of our teen-aged confrères. My group set out for Lycée Joffre, the town’s largest such institution. The school itself was housed inside a refurbished 16th century citadel. The Pope had requisitioned its construction during religious wars to provide better oversight for a laity that tended

enemies could be agreed upon, that was simply a question of taste, but what it might mean to get beyond that was a matter of marked disagreement.

Upon entering the AG I beheld for the first time our rough coalition: stone-agers, futurists, unrepentant Marxists, negationists, Lacanian confusionists, utopian socialists, provocateurs for this or that reform, cynical sociologists, dogmatic mystics, aspiring bureaucrats, doe-eyed nihilists, steadfast contrarians. In this last number, of which France is most generous, must be counted my friend Clement, whose presence there in the hall I had not expected. Clem was an art student from a small manufacturing town along the German frontier; at the semester’s end he would return there to look for work in the factories. He threw up his chin and met me with an expansive handshake.

Clement’s brand of contrarianism was particularly refined. Surrounded by a circle of students opposed to the occupation, he would marshal all his rhetorical resources in its defense: anecdotes, statistics, sweeping gesticulations, a tear in the eye. However, when that same circle was comprised of active participants in the occupation, as it was here, he spared them no abuse.

He offered himself as my guide: “Ah, comrade! Allow me to introduce you to the youth of the schools!” Clement led me through the poorly lit amphitheater, where a crowd had gathered to conspire, flirt, smoke, drink, and mill about. “What’ll it be,” he whispered, “the immaculate conception, or workers’ lunches?”

We eventually arrived at the foot of the stage and gazed out into the auditorium. Clem procured a bottle of wine from his sack and began casting about for a corkscrew. While he was so doing we were accosted by a young woman who offered a sip from her own bottle. Introductions took place. Following mine, she inquired as to my nativity; Clement answered at some length, presenting me as “a little professor, come to visit from the final holdout of the middle ages.”

“Ah yes... the United States... I see...” she responded in English, looking me over once more. “Ah, a terrible place, of course you know, but... well, the problem with that country, yes, the problem... Americans, they... they have no appreciation for the Classics... why, they don’t even know what the word means...”

Clement struggled to make a joke in Latin. Another party later informed me that this young lady, who was so concerned about the American reception of Ovid and Thucydides, was the unofficial leader of a band of frumpy libertines and small-time terrorists, organized loosely as the “Movement for the Apocalypse.” I was familiar with their various propaganda campaigns: one poster portrayed a gallery of headshots ranging from Subcomandante Marcos and José Bové to Sam Walton and Don Rumsfeld, all with targets on their foreheads, with the slogan: “the Revolution—it’s in the head!”; their latest read “Students! Kill yourselves, you’re already dead (but after the semester exams, of course).” At the time, I only understood her as an oddly militant classicist. She proposed the toast: “To the





to her a pure product of mercantile capital, without the benefit of all the social idiosyncrasies of the feudal traditions. The revolt against the latter, in France, had been an internal affair spanning centuries, constituting its own traditions as it went. (In the opening salvo, the French had dropped the seven-day week, turned the cathedrals into temples of reason, cut off the king's head, and tossed the priests into the river. It didn't do them any good.)

Whereas the official spectrum of American political discourse, spanning from Jesse Jackson to Jesse Helms, consists of so many different types of liberalism, that of the French is more heavily anti-liberal, extending from monarchism to anarchism, Gaullism to communism, eco-reformism to neo-fascism. This hybrid anti-liberalism gives radical ideas a better hearing; more than 60% of the French consider them essential for any meaningful political debate. The emphasis on philosophy is also singular. The BAC, the exam upon which one's admission into the university system hinges, is built around it. Anais recalled the philosophy question on her exam: "Epictetus said to a disciple: *'Vis Caché'* (Latin in the original): Comment."

This shouldn't give the impression that today's university students compose any sort of mandarin elite. If the Situationists could argue in '68, at a time when only 12% of high school graduates passed the BAC, that the students were in fact workers in disguise, how much more true must that be in '06, when more than 70% of graduates pass the same exam? Still, being and knowing are not the same thing, and

in spite of all the evidence to the contrary a good number of Anais' class-mates still imagined themselves as soon-to-be higher-ups with bright futures waiting at the conclusion of their studies.

Anais was doing the dirty work of the occupations: copying out and distributing class notes to distraught psychology students. She hated the work, hated the lines, hated the bunched-up faces of the students who just wanted the movement to be over. The latter had no respect for the university, per se; they saw in it neither a privileged repository of culture and knowledge nor a potential staging ground for revolutionary endeavors. Their attitude was purely cynical: for them, it was merely a transient series of tasks to be endured, a simple means towards a more or less stable position within the social hierarchy.

Between Assemblies, I went to visit her, occasionally seeing old friends from the days before the occupations. It felt odd; the oppressive subcultures and functional alcoholisms that had held us together in those days no longer did so. The exchanges were kept brief. Others had unexpectedly thrown themselves into the movement and seemed to turn up everywhere: at the common meals, the meetings, the nocturnal marches. They'd be seen dancing to an Italian busker outside an occupied shopping mall, dashing away from a busted up McDonald's, blocking the entrance to a courthouse, roaming door-to-door passing out literature and talking up the next big thing. You'd see them in the street demos, clogging up in front of the police department, wondering what to do next.

toward the heterodox. Approaching the building, with its four-story walls, parapets, moat, polished bell tower, and indoor swimming pool, one regretted the comparatively drab '70s-era trailers that housed the school of language and literature known as Montpellier III. The proud youth of the high schools were out in force. Greeting us with fraternal hoorahs, they insisted that their school would not be subject to any attempted de-blockage and recommended that we return to look after our own faculties—and perhaps take another coffee. Nothing can adequately convey the impression made upon your author by the sight of three hundred wide-eyed sixteen-year-olds holding their own assemblies on the lawn of a papal citadel.

We took their advice. As we returned to campus, the AG was starting to fill up. "What's going on?" I asked. "Nobody knows for sure yet," answered the young man to my right.

Some people I recognized from the communications set breezed in; one picked up a microphone and hurried off a couple of sentences that I didn't catch. Just as quickly the large room emptied out. Other communications people stood at the exits, passing out bundles of white paper. As I made my way toward them I was charmed to see that my little turn on Goya's "Maja" had made the cover. As I stopped to receive my own bundle, I was informed that we were headed to one of the nearby tollbooths along the interstate to disseminate the tracts as we allowed the morning's motorists to pass through the gates toll free. This was to be

my first experience of a "give-away strike," and by all indications it was a resounding success. In the half hour before the police chased us off, we distributed over a thousand issues of the occupation journal and raked in twice as many euros from the passing motorists, the vast majority of whom seemed happy to toss their toll into our coffers rather than those of the department of roads and bridges.

By then it was mid-morning and my head was aswim. Passing through the streets, we heard loud cheers off in the distance. A dark ribbon of occupiers was moving quickly in the opposite direction; another formed, heading out somewhere else. These sights were punctuated by the occasional siren call from the center of town. The streets filled and emptied again. The weather was not at all bad—bright grass, plum trees in first bloom, everything touched by the special quality of light thrown off by the sea. "Something is happening here," I said to myself, surprised by the sound of my own voice. Time seemed to stand still.

It was my good fortune to be roused from my reveries by Anais. Born in the foothills of the Pyrenees, from a village so small it did without street names, she spoke softly, looking up occasionally with her Cheshire smile to see if I followed. France had been in some manner of crisis for as long as she could remember. Her sister had blockaded the high schools in '95 just as she had in '03. She'd read Tocqueville and understood the history of domestic slavery in the USA and the myriad Protestantisms there. The country seemed



This went on for months. As the days wore on, all but a handful of universities, art schools, and law departments had joined up. Over eight hundred high schools were shut down across the country before the interior ministry stopped releasing figures. Riots were breaking out, students and kids from the North African suburbs were mingling, the public sector rank and file were striking, the movement was spreading through every city and village, transforming France into an enormous tactical laboratory.

This is from an email I wrote about an AG in Montpellier on March 21st:

The Assembly: eight hours of debates, intrigues, propositions, ballots, loose hounds. I slipped in a tad late, took a seat on the floor between the Gulag and the Apocalypse in the room of a thousand plus souls. As usual, appearances deceived: an eloquent girl of fourteen brought the room to its feet, an impassioned man from Portugal harangued the audience for a quarter hour in his native tongue to our collective bewilderment, and proposals to terminate winter², occupy all commercial centers and all enterprises private and public, abolish boredom, and institute a reign of universal happiness were passed with little opposition, even from the syndicalists.

Other voices spoke. One student proposed that we vote with our student ID cards. "Why not just use our bank cards?" The room laughed. A young man driven to the point of madness by the prospect of missing his year-end finals intoned the virtues of the CPE, envisioning a more "dynamic, competitive France. This speech was punctuated by storms of protest, barnyard calls, and a rain of squirt gun fire. As it became clear that order would not be restored, the presiding moderator entreated the damp young man to find his seat: "Evidently, the room is sufficiently conversant with the political ideology of the bourgeoisie. Please step down." A thin, ruddy-faced student, rather taller than the rest of us, spoke of the incarceration he had recently undergone courtesy of our local riot squads. It was touching when the Assembly broke into song, performing a traditional ode which had been altered to accommodate current happenings and in which this tight-jacketed red-faced young man figured as the hero: "Marcel, Marcel, Marcel, we look to you!"

This was followed by the final vote: for or against a continued occupation. As those in favor were solicited to raise their hands, an idiot saboteur cut the electricity, throwing the room into total darkness and those in favor to their feet, lighters in the air: refrains of the Internationale, and the chant: "2006, 2006!" Even in the half-light it was clear that those in favor composed the immense majority; those against filed out quickly amidst the uproar, grumbling.

I recall how one of the AG's painted mottos "All those who ask deserve to be helped" had been turned about; the final infinitive marked through in favor of the more trenchant call: "All those who ask deserve to be beaten." This was in keeping with the growing strength of the movement and the accompanying combativeness of the AGs. The latter developed in response to two very real dangers the move-

ment faced: on the one hand, the risk of being co-opted and assimilated; on the other, the pitfalls inherent in the very format we had adopted.

The union leadership was taking a keen interest in these events: they were along for the ride, seeing in the movement a sure winner, a bargaining tool for the serious business of negotiating workers' docility in return for higher wages. At that moment, no one would've wanted to be caught wearing the prime minister's necktie, but unlike the larger student organizations the various union representatives were only too happy to enter into talks with the floundering government, fobbing themselves off as the presentable face of the movement.

Then there were the psychology students, the true hysterics, the barbarians at the proverbial gate. Everything the AG was able to consent upon was predicated on the their passivity. This precarious situation hinted at the formal contradiction into which we had been forced by events. In taking issue with the CPE, we had set ourselves against a law passed with a majority vote by an elected parliament. The very existence of our movement called into question the democratic principle of majority rule, proving that the mythical sovereignty held by that body could be undermined and usurped. Yet in practice, we were in some senses bound to the same contested principle, and possessed some of the same vulnerabilities. As the year-end exams approached and the government began to teeter, hysteria was getting organized, making every AG a hair-raising debate on the movement's immediate future.

The system of note-sharing and study groups maintained their complicity for a time, keeping the education mill running and giving the movement some breathing room. Our occupation wasn't total; we had yet to appropriate all the resources of the school—the statues in the museums, the stoves in the cafeteria—but for all that we might still be evacuated by the cops and the CRS³ as the occupiers at the Sorbonne had been the week before. The movement had begun in the student milieu, but it was becoming increasingly evident that for it to continue we needed to move beyond it, past the union stewards and the bickering over finals. We needed to set out towards the high-rises, where our potential allies waited—to quit being tossed about by events and start creating them. We couldn't do it alone.

"Nous n'aurons que ce que nous saurons prendre: We will only have what we will know how to take," read the slogan.

As it turned out, I missed the end like I'd missed the beginning. I was back in Tennessee, fresh off the plane, breakfasting with my parents when Anais phoned. We'd expected it: after two months of occupation, the government had withdrawn the CPE. The psychology students were blocking all discussion and things were unclear. Rallies were called for the following day, but few attended. The same thing was happening all over France. We'd explained ourselves poorly, as I had myself: my parents congratulated me on our victory.

Report from the Press Box: MSM* Confidential

by an Agent of the CrimethInc.
Full-Court Press Infiltration Unit

* According to the author, who is better-versed in twenty-first-century lingo than your editors, "MSM is an internet term for 'Mainstream Media.' It started as a derogation on the right—a sneering acronym that was meant to be read as shorthand for 'clueless liberal press.' Since then it's taken a life of its own, and people on the left use it as well now."



Mr. Salter saw he was not making his point clear. "Take a single example," he said. "Supposing you want to have dinner. Well you go to a restaurant and do yourself proud, best of everything. Bill perhaps may be two pounds. Well you put down five pounds for entertainment on your expenses. You've had a slap-up dinner, you're three pounds to the good, and everyone is satisfied."

—Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop*

Nearly everything you, my anarchist friend, need to know about the mechanics of the journalists you will interact with—and I mean journalists, the people themselves, not the apparatus you call the Media—can be found in this short passage from Waugh. Written in the 1930s, Salter's instruction to his young, wealthy charge concerns how, essentially, to cheat: how to succeed at the so-called "honest graft" that keeps professional journalism a potentially lucrative enterprise, despite there being little money in it compared to other professions. In other words, it's about how a journalist can tell the story while hustling for her (very lovely) supper. For generations, the more romantic and better-educated journalist-aspirants have read Waugh. Our journalist here considers herself somewhat rakish. She is unwilling to engage in either the more visceral work of a life of adventure or the soul-crushing labor of a life of solitary *écriture*. And she desires, above all, to strike a balanced between offering intellectual contributions and being able to eat at the finest restaurants. Many a young man or woman has read Waugh's fictionalized account of the old Fleet Street newspapers of interwar London and thought, in the words of Christopher Hitchens, that only journalism will do.

I am one of them.

For years, I have reported from war zones and offices. My work has taken me from Guantanamo Bay to Iraq. I have worked for television, print, and internet news organizations, from opinion journalism to newspaper book review sections, academic journals, and blogs. On more than one occasion I have locked horns with Bill O'Reilly and sounded sensible on NPR. Your liberal friends have read my work and approved. If you have conservative friends, they may have run my name through the mud. I've given them reason.

I love what I do. Many describe journalism as a vicarious enterprise—you write, but you do not act. Don't believe this. There are few experiences that get the blood circulating faster than the simple act of interviewing an obscure official in some benighted region of the earth as he explains to you why what you have heard in Washington about his country bears little resemblance to events as he understands them. To be smuggled into a shooting war in the back of a car is not a vicarious experience. The danger is that you will end up taking, as someone once said, a cheap holiday in other people's misery; and the responsibility is to never, ever do this. Far better war correspondents than myself have fallen prey to the temptation.

But I don't do what I do just to quicken my heartbeat. I do it because I feel I have a mission: to find the hidden aspects of power, secreted away in the labyrinth of the national-security bureaucracy, and explain them to you—the one in whose name all these things have been done, mostly without your knowledge or consent.

And there is a dark side. It's one thing, as with Waugh, to seek to turn the lovely things of this world to one's advantage. But it's something much different to consider the pursuit of pleasure to be the endeavor of journalism, as if telling the story is a reservation at Elaine's. (You, my anarchist friend, will never eat at Elaine's.) To put it one way,

2 See the introduction to this issue of *Rolling Thunder* for the editors' commentary on this.

3 Republican Securities Companies—the riot control forces and general reserve of the French National Police.

to do that is to sacrifice the mission on the altar of its perks. To put it another way, it is not to get the joke—and I find that many, if not most, of my colleagues do not get the joke. And, as another wise man once put it, it makes me want to cry.

I write this to explain to you the people you will deal with in the pursuit of your revolution. If you subscribe to the view that the world outside of your circle must be radicalized, it may become desirable to you to tell your story to them through my colleagues—those who do not get the joke. My purpose here is not to give you media theory—you have that already, from far more qualified sources than myself—but a working set of guidelines for how to approach specimens of *Homo Journalisticus*. They are a strange breed. To give away the ending, they are best understood as the highest form of the Bourgeois: they are interested in discovery but suspicious of commitment, honor, and, above all, passion. Trust them, without illusions, to do their job—but, to quote Ronald Reagan, always verify.

There is a man who edits a magazine in Washington, DC. He considers himself a great man, destined by his heightened intellect to do great things. By virtue of his rigor at uncovering the truth, he can explain to you the world as it is. It is not his business to show you the world as it ought to be, as that would constitute an act of hubris. Instead, he gives you what you need to make your own judgments: his opinions, yes, but clearly and transparently informed by the facts he has marshaled. If you reject his analysis, you can still trace, step by step, the path that led him to it. He instructs his employees to follow his own sterling example.

A few weeks ago, this man fired me. I was not fit to work for him. I proved too brash, too unyielding, too obnoxious, too unreasonable. My task was to write about the Iraq war. What I wrote—work I'm proud of—supported the conclusion that the war is a calamity in every sense: in a moral sense, above all, for those who planned it, those who fight it, those who have died and those who suffer because of it, and even those who advocated it. In every particular, I followed his example of how to reach my journalistic goal—except that I was not convinced that I should back away in my writing from the conclusion that I had very obviously reached. To do so, I felt, would be dishonest, and the enemy of journalism is dishonesty.

It was not for that abstract reason that he fired me. Instead—and this is my telling; remember my instruction to trust but verify—it was for the baser fact of my opposition to the war. As he took certain positions of qualified, hedged discomfort with the war, it became clear that his mission was not as value-neutral as he had portrayed. Indeed, it was not even in a strict sense my opposition to the war that doomed our working relationship. He is a good liberal; he is uncomfortable with the war himself. Rather, our troubles stemmed from cultural, one might even say class-based, differences, and these I consider instructive for understanding the sort of person who practices journalism.

Indeed, he is uncomfortable with the war. But what makes him even more uncomfortable is *opposition* to the

war. Opposition confers upon one an obligation, and that obligation is stridency: if I am against the war, my obligation is to seek to end it by whatever means are at my disposal. I am interested in understanding the circumstances that led to the war, and I'm not interested in demonizing those who started it or those who did not stand in its way. But after a certain point of inquiry, I have satisfied myself with the context, the backstory, and the cast of characters. After this work is done, what remains is the disaster itself—and the obligation to stop it.

This obligation is unfathomable to my former editor. He is suspicious of the war, yes, but what strikes him as a more immediate danger is to fall prey to the siren song of passion. He views passion as the enemy of reason: where a person fails to seek the discipline of reason, the dangers of passion present themselves. For him, those dangers are an inflexibility that hinders understanding. It is better to be flexible, to concede a point, not to take one's own side in an argument, to be gracious to those with whom one disagrees than it is to exhibit an ugly certainty about events—even if that means people in faraway parts of the world will die. Those people will never eat at Elaine's either.

My former boss is the enemy of journalism. He is capable of seeing the problems of the world in vivid, if abstract, relief. But to pass from description to judgment to obligation is too great a leap for him. This, I submit, is not a failure of journalism, but a failure of integrity. His position, justified by the exercise of reason, is not reasonable. Instead, it is a self-satisfied strain of intellectual apoplexy and abdication. It is the journalist who exists in a republic to hold those who govern accountable. You may not believe this, but I do. For a journalist to restrict himself or herself from fulfilling that role is, in my view, a betrayal of an honorable mission. Better to be fired for a refusal to betray an honorable mission than to prosper in disgrace.

What this means for you should be clear as well. You are an architect of passion; it is your brick and your mortar. Commitment is what will sustain you through the bleakest days. When you speak to the person with the tape recorder, you will have almost nothing in common.

To her, you are comical, juvenile, and pitiful. This isn't anything to do with your clothes or your tattoos or your haircut, although you shouldn't be surprised if she dwells on those as well. It has everything to do with your sense of mission and her sense of propriety. Once upon a time, she thinks, she was like you: a creative type, an idealist, a rebel. But she found a constructive outlet for personal growth and intellectual achievement, and so she was able to jettison the detritus of her adolescence. Haven't you had the same opportunities she's had? More to the point, don't you see that she's *so much better than you are*?

It will be all the more excruciating when you seek to inform her readership of your upcoming activity—be it a Really Really Free Market, anti-globalization demonstration, treesit, copwatch program, or what have you. Perhaps you have read some of the advice in *Recipes for Disaster* on dealing with the press. It's not bad advice, but it's written

from your perspective, not hers. If you seek publicity that won't be presented in a patronizing or sneering tone, here are some suggestions:

- *Be direct at all times.* The person with the tape recorder considers you suspect. He believes you have fallen victim to an intellectual trap of your own making: an inability to appreciate nuance and identify with your enemy. Your stridency casts you out of the category of prospective Elaine's tablemates, so his job on this unfortunate assignment is to present your information without getting suckered into mainlining lefty propaganda into the information bloodstream, which would be laughed at by his Elaine's tablemates. He will ask you many, many questions (*Who is funding this organization? Isn't it true that you are all college graduates? Did you ever consider taking your grievances to the Community Police Board? Can I see your membership lists?*) and you should answer them in full, where appropriate. It's more important to be upfront if your enterprise is loosely coordinated than to present yourself as a stable coalition or single entity when that's not the case. No one likes to be interrogated, but it's better for you if he feels that you've held nothing back from him.

- *If you challenge her, don't back her into a corner.* Journalists don't like to be reminded that we don't know everything in the world. (You might think that the beginning of journalism is a recognition of that basic fact, but there you have it.) As a result, spewing jargon or citing obscure texts will make her feel ignorant, exposed, and angry. She will portray you as aloof elitists playacting at something important. If she draws an improper conclusion during your conversation, it's far better to clarify what you've said rather than jump down her throat. If she continues to misrepresent you, call her office after the story is published, and warn her editor that there's a fabulist on staff. (Remember that word—"fabulist," that is to say, liar. Those three syllables make editors break out in a cold sweat.)

- *Don't insult his intelligence.* It's not that this reporter isn't intelligent. Rare is the reporter who doesn't exhibit at least basic intelligence, since his job depends on either inquiry or diligence. Flattery will get you nowhere, since he doesn't like to be bullshitted. But politeness and attentiveness are appreciated in what is very often an exhausting job for little pay. If you treat him with respect and openness, he may even reconsider his condescension. Don't bet on it, but stranger things have happened.

- *Be extremely concrete.* She wants facts. You want things to change. During your interview, explain in detail what you intend to do, how, and why. If this involves illegal activity, describe the motivations for your actions very clearly. Don't expect all this raw information to make it into the story. But the more you give her, the more she will have to fill up her column inches or her word count or her airtime—and all of that will come from your side. Remember, you are giving

her access. The IMF or the local police precinct will not. That is an advantage to you.

- *Remain accessible.* I have never written a story for which I had no further questions to ask when I sat down in front of my keyboard. The reporter you're dealing with will probably want to ask some follow-up questions. If you're not around to answer them, he is going to make inferences and assumptions about what you're about. If you complain to his editors, he'll be able to argue, credibly, that you weren't answering your phone or your e-mail, and he had a deadline to meet, so what else could he do. He will win that argument. Don't let him.

- *Have extremely low expectations.* Remember, you are a carnival freak for *Homo Journalisticus*. Her inclination is to print only as much of your story as is necessary for her to get back to the office and put in for a more interesting assignment. This is as true—if not more so—for young reporters than older ones: the young reporter is clocking time until a better job or a better bureau opens up, and your penny-ante revolutionary antics are the tick of her clock. Following the above instructions will get your message out inasmuch as that is possible through this medium. You may, of course, choose to supplement your efforts in the mainstream press with your own account on a website or elsewhere, but that's your domain and not mine.

- *Find out who his editor is.* This is cunning, and it pays off. Ask him what desk he's on (Metro? General assignment? National?), who he works for, how long he's been there, and how he finds it. Take notes. He'll interpret this as a sign of your diligence as a press liaison, and, at best, a polite recognition of his importance. In reality, this is a tool to use for your advantage. If you are dissatisfied with his coverage, contact his editor and itemize your grievances. Some caveats: do not rant, and be prepared to be specific about errors of fact or sloppiness. It is in this area that the editor on the other end of the phone or e-mail will be prepared to act—either by running corrections, assigning another reporter to cover you and putting him on a leash, or by actively punishing your malicious interlocutor. If you try to correct interpretation, the editor will consider you a crank and stick up for the reporter.

It's not within my power to police my colleagues. Their path is their own, and not all of them have chosen missions that diverge from the one I've chosen. In fact, there are more like me than I've let on, although I'm confident that I'm the only reporter with lyrics from hardcore songs tattooed on my body.

Hopefully, you've gained some understanding of the journalists you'll come across in the course of your mission. They are objects for pity and, occasionally, scorn. But it is you who appreciate the true virtues: commitment, honor, and passion. Let them have Elaine's. Our dinner will taste better, and it will be far more nourishing.

ENTARTETE KUNST

The Exhibition and Suppression of Degenerate Art in Nazi Germany

Between 1900 and the mid-1930s, Germany was one of the epicenters of the first cultural flowering of the 20th century. German artists, musicians, and writers experimented with new ideas, technologies, and forms, creating works of freshness and beauty. Expressionism and other styles of abstract art allowed artists an unprecedented degree of creative and emotional license, while composers and musicians were doing things with sound that had never been heard before. Much of this art was radical or subversive: some through criticism of the government and other power structures, some in its glorification of the desires and emotions of the individual, some simply because it violated conventional notions of beauty or propriety.

This lasted until the early 1930s, when the Nazis started to consolidate their power. Art, music, and literature were seen by the Nazis as essential elements in their plan for cultural and racial ascendancy; rival cultural production was perceived as a serious threat. The Nazis used the word “Entartete”—“degenerate”—to designate forms and styles of art or music they considered threatening or undesirable.

This expression was first used by the Italian doctor Cesare Lombroso in the mid-19th century as a medical term for

physical and moral deterioration. Lombroso believed that some people are “born criminals” whose crime-prone natures correlate with “abnormal” physical characteristics. He argued that “born criminals” have identifiable physical characteristics by which they can be detected and preemptively weeded out.

The term was expanded by Max Nordau who, though Jewish, was a fierce nationalist and believed in the superiority of German culture. He developed Lombroso’s pseu-

**“Entartete Kunst . . . intends to expose the common roots of political and cultural anarchy.”
—from the exhibition guide**

doscientific ideas into a critique of modern art. In his 1892 book *Entartung*, he argued that contemporary artists were victims of modern life who suffered from decayed brain centers. Because their brains were corrupted, they were incapable of producing coherent works. Nordau suggested that all forms of modern art showed symptoms of pathology.

The Nazis developed the concept of degeneracy further. They used the term as a blanket condemnation of any aspect of modern culture that manifested symptoms of what they considered cultural decline. Dur-

ing the Third Reich, reactionary critics used the term to describe a wide range of styles and movements from modernist avant-garde painting and art music to the operettas and songs performed in cabarets.

This included most of the innovations and explorations of the preceding thirty years. Among the styles and movements that were condemned as “degenerate” by the Nazis were Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism, Cubism, Atonality, Serialism, Jazz, and Primitivism, not to mention anything made or owned by people of Jewish descent, Leftists, and homosexuals or other “sexual deviants.” The Nazis addressed the “problem” of degeneracy first by ridiculing modern art and music, then by suppressing it, and finally by destroying it and the artists who made it.

In 1937 the German government began purging “degenerate” artwork from museums and seizing it from individuals. Over 16,000 works of art that had been considered modern masterpieces were removed from museums. About 650 paintings and sculptures were selected from the confiscated works for a massive exhibition entitled “Entartete Kunst”—“Degenerate Art”—to be mounted in Munich.

This exhibition was designed to ridicule and denigrate “degenerate” works and to

promote the idea that modernism was a conspiracy by people who hated German decency. The artists were frequently identified as “Jewish-Bolshevist” even though only six of the 112 artists represented in the exhibition were Jewish.

The exhibition was held in cramped, badly-lit rooms separated by temporary partitions. It was deliberately chaotic and overfilled: paintings were crowded onto the walls, hung badly, and identified by handwritten signs. Graffiti such as “Insult to German Womanhood” and “Mockery of God” was scrawled on the walls. Minors were banned from the exhibition on the grounds that it would corrupt them. Actors were hired to behave like madmen and incite the onlookers with insulting remarks about the works of art.

Despite all this, “Entartete Kunst” was the most widely viewed modern art exhibition of all time. Over two million people attended it in Munich and it toured Germany and Austria for three years after its premiere, during which another million saw it. Interestingly, an exhibit of “Great German Art”—art which exemplified the “Heroic” realist style favored by the Nazis—that opened in Munich the day before “Entartete Kunst” only attracted 420,000 viewers, even though it was located just around the corner.

A similar event, “Entartete Musik,” was mounted in 1938 to showcase the alleged decadence of composers such as Stravinsky and Schoenberg. “Entartete Musik” included portraits of these composers, musical scores, theoretical works, listening booths in which visitors could hear recordings of “degenerate” music, and performances of seminal modern music. These performances were listless, sarcastic, and calculated to portray the music in the worst possible light, as no attempt was made by the performers to understand the ideas behind the music.

After the exhibition, much of the artwork was destroyed. 5000 paintings were burned by the Berlin Fire Department in 1939. Many others were auctioned to foreign buyers, the profits going to the Nazi regime. The artists whose work had been included in the exhibition were blacklisted as enemies of the state; they were forbidden to make artwork and subjected to surprise Gestapo raids to ensure that they complied. Many escaped into exile, yet were

*Some artists continued to make art, in secret or from within the concentration camps. One such artist was the composer Viktor Ullman, who was deported to Terezin (Theresienstadt), a “model Jewish settlement,” in 1942. Terezin was an anomaly among the Nazi camps: it was presented to the rest of the world as a kind of utopian ghetto protecting its inhabitants from the horrors of the war raging outside, in order to camouflage the actual reality of the Holocaust. Ostensibly, Jews at Terezin had complete autonomy and control of their lives. However, they were there against their will, and Terezin was a transit camp to which Jews were taken before being transported to death camps like Auschwitz and Dachau.

Since Terezin was a “model Jewish settlement,” many of its inhabitants were artists, musicians, and scholars. In this company, Victor Ullman was prolific. He organized concerts and a lecture series and continued to write music. Very little of his work has survived, with the exception of his final composition—the opera *Der Kaiser von Atlantis* (“The Emperor of Atlantis”), an allegory of the Third Reich.

In this opera, Death goes on strike because the emperor has been overworking him. No one can die. At first, the emperor presents this as a triumph, but soon it becomes clear that there are things much worse than death—being mortally wounded and unable to die, for example. Eventually, the emperor makes a deal with Death: Death will go back to work, but first the emperor himself must die. In the final scene, all the characters reappear onstage, out of costume and back in their concentration camp uniforms, wearing the familiar yellow Stars of David on their chests and singing a last chorus welcoming Death.

Der Kaiser von Atlantis didn’t premiere until 1975, several decades after it was written. Viktor Ullman never got to see his last work performed. The production of the opera at Terezin was shut down by the Nazis just before it was to take place and Ullman and others involved with the opera were transferred to Auschwitz, where they died two weeks later. The script was saved by one of Ullman’s fellow inmates.

unable to continue producing art in the countries to which they fled. Some were unable to buy painting supplies and other materials, while others committed suicide or found that they no longer had the desire or motivation to create. Countless other artists and musicians were imprisoned or killed in concentration camps in Germany and Eastern Europe.* One bitter joke of the time declared that “half the Berlin Symphony is in Auschwitz.”

In every charge that art is incomprehensible and elitist, there is an echo, however faint, of the Nazi accusations of decadence and degeneracy. Foes of hierarchy rightly reject the valorization of art that is opaque to the uninitiated over the creative activity of common people—but any implication that all art should be accessible and amenable to all people is borderline fascism, even when it is framed as class-conscious populism¹. A variant of this is the shock

¹ “The artist does not work for the artist, but like everyone else he works for the people! And we shall take good care that from now on the people will be the judges of his art.” —Adolph Hitler, as quoted in the *Entartete Kunst* exhibition guide. Hitler was himself a failed painter who took a personal interest in the repression of other artists.

self-professed philistines express upon learning the price of a canvas they regard as a glorified cleaning rag. (An anti-capitalist might counter that all prices on all commodities, from the cheapest can of beans to the most expensive portrait by Van Gogh, are equally absurd.) In fact, the Nazis set the precedent for this criticism, too: paintings in the Entartete Kunst exhibition were labeled with the prices for which they had previously sold, although many of these prices had been set in the period of post-war inflation when the Deutschmark was worth a fraction of its value in 1937.

The legacy of “degenerate art” and the fate of the artists who made it pose weighty questions to us today. First, why did so many people attend the Munich exhibition? Entartete Kunst was simultaneously the most popular and most despised art exhibition of all time. Is it really so much more fulfilling to be outraged than to be moved? Do gallery-goers and theater patrons today also crave reassurance that they are superior to the eccentrics who entertain them? Perhaps many who attended the exhibition also came to say goodbye to the artwork they loved and

the era that was passing with it. Whatever their motives, they failed to save the art or the artists who created it—an important lesson about the solidarity between creators and audiences.

And why did the Nazis focus so much energy on art and music? This question is of interest for contemporary artists and radicals alike. It is telling that the Nazis went to such lengths to suppress experimental composers as well as avowed political dissidents: this indicates that they recognized self-expression itself as a

grave threat to their program of domination. Indeed, art, music, and poetry were used by those in ghettos, in concentration camps, in hiding, and in exile as weapons for survival and revenge.

Finally, why did the Nazi attempt to do away with “degenerate art” fail? Most of the art movements the Nazis opposed are more widely acclaimed today than they ever were in their era, while the Third Reich—which many looked on favorably in the 1930s—is remembered as the absolute nadir of human history. Is this only because

the Nazis were bested in the contest of arms that followed their repression of defenseless artists and musicians? Or is art itself possessed of offensive capabilities beyond simply ruffling the feathers of the bourgeoisie? We leave this to you, dear readers, to puzzle over—on one condition: that you test your hypotheses.

Contact the author at
xburningrosesx@riseup.net



Lucy Parsons

Forerunner of 21st Century Anarchy

Today, Lucy Parsons is almost invisible to history. A hero and inspiration to three generations of radicals in her lifetime, she was once known throughout the country as a notorious anarchist, a fierce and fiery speaker, a defender of terrorists, an eloquent and wildly original propagandist and publisher, an organizer of militant grassroots unions, and a troublemaker par-excellence. She was famously described by the Chicago police department as “more dangerous than a thousand rioters.”

Lucy Parsons defied the constraints of her time so completely that it should not be surprising she appears so rarely in records of that period. What else can be expected of a person whose full name is unknown (she signed it differently almost every time), whose birth date and place are a mystery, whose race continues to be a subject of speculation, whose ideas seem extreme even to contemporary radicals, and who died in near anonymity, leaving virtually nothing behind?

In standing apart from her era, Parsons was able to contribute much to the anarchist legacy that is relevant in our own. She prefigured current anarchist trains of thought in both tactical and organizational matters; she participated in revolutionary upheavals as well as outreach; in wedding militant direct action, diversity of tactics, labor organizing, women’s liberation, and immigrants’ struggles, she was a precursor of the anarchists who read and write for *Rolling Thunder* today.

It is unknown exactly where and when Lucy Parsons was born; the best guess is that she entered the world in 1853 near Waco, Texas as a slave of the Gathings family. What little is known of her early life comes to us through her husband Albert: according to him, when they met—some time between 1869 and 1871—she was a

teenage girl living with an African-American man named Oliver Gathings in northwestern Texas. Albert, a former Confederate scout who had joined the army at the age of fifteen in search of adventure, became politicized after the war while working for various Radical Republican causes and newspapers. He probably met Lucy during a campaign or newspaper assignment, both of which took him into heavily African-American counties in Texas. The couple married—perhaps legally, perhaps not—in 1871 or 1872 near Austin, Texas.

Throughout her life, Lucy Parsons claimed that she was of Mexican and Native American ancestry. Newspaper accounts from the time, however, consistently referred to her as “colored,” “black,” or various derogatory terms implying African ancestry. Some accounts written by people who knew her later in life suggest the same thing, even claiming that photographs prove her African ancestry. It is speculated that Parsons invented her Mexican and Native American ancestry as a way of avoiding legal obstacles such as the “miscegenation” laws, which made interracial relationships illegal. Regardless of her true ancestry, it is certain that she was perceived as Black or “colored” by most observers in her era. While a Mexican and Native American identity would not have shielded her from racial stigmatization, it might have seemed sufficiently exotic to mitigate the worst effects of nineteenth century racism¹.

¹ Editor’s Note: Regardless of appearance, it is important to respect any individual’s unique understanding of their own identity. Speculation and assumptions about why people choose to identify the way they do often prove to be useless—and hurtful. Race, gender and other similar constructions are never as straightforward to define as they are supposed to be. The oversimplified classifications we use do not articulate the actual complex histories we each embody.

If she did in fact come of age near Waco after the Civil War, she must have witnessed sweeping racist violence. The Ku Klux Klan was especially active in Texas shortly after the war; Lucy herself would have been under constant threat. Between 1867 and 1873, Lucy and Albert witnessed or heard about hundreds of murders, rapes, beatings, mutilations, and other acts of violence committed against African Americans by the Klan. Albert himself was targeted repeatedly by the Klan for his political activities, especially those on behalf of African Americans; a bullet from an encounter with the Klan remained lodged in his body for the remainder of his life. Given these circumstances, it is not difficult to understand why Lucy might have wanted to avoid being identified as a Black woman.

Sometime in 1873 or 1874, Lucy and Albert Parsons moved to Chicago. Although they left the violence of the Klan’s South behind them, they entered an unstable industrial metropolis in the midst of the worst depression the country had ever seen: the Panic of 1873. Chicago’s factory owners fired workers by the thousands and slashed wages across the board. Everywhere they looked, this newly arrived odd couple saw homelessness, poverty, and desperation. Starvation and disease ran rampant throughout the city while the ruling class waited out the depression in the comfort of their lakefront mansions. Against this backdrop, Lucy established herself as a dressmaker while Albert began working as a typesetter at the *Chicago Times*.

The couple immediately became active in local politics. They both joined the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and Albert became active in his union. But after the city’s economy picked up and established



politicians grew wise to the SLP’s game, Albert and Lucy learned some life-long lessons about politics and elections. At first, the SLP had promising results at the polls, but as jobs returned to the city the workers that had flocked to the party returned to voting Democratic and Republican. After the two parties brazenly colluded to stuff the ballot boxes in the election of 1880, the SLP was, for all intents and purposes, dead. After some typical socialist factionalizing, the party disintegrated.

In 1883, radicals disillusioned by electoral politics and inclined to anti-authoritarianism gathered in Pittsburgh to form the International Working People’s Association (IWPA), a decentralized network to provide an anarchist alternative to the various Marxist parties dotting the country. In Chicago, the IWPA was an amazing success. Within a few years, the collectives affiliated with the IWPA had as many as four thousand members, regular newspapers were being published in seven different languages, and four armed militias had formed along with countless singing and theatrical groups, picnicking clubs, free-thinking leagues, and mutual aid societies. The IWPA found its greatest support in the large immigrant communities that comprised the majority of Chicago’s population at that time. Mostly young, blue-collar, and non-English speaking, Chicago’s anarchists were a motley crew.

It was among these rabble-rousers that Lucy Parsons cut her teeth as a prominent

anarchist. She became well known for delivering fiery, uncompromising speeches and penning strong, sometimes shocking articles. Her first article for the IWPA’s English-language organ, *The Alarm*, was to be her most famous work. Entitled “To Tramps” and addressed as “a word to the 30,000 now tramping the streets of this great city,” the article sounded themes that were to become common in her writing:

Send forth your petition [to the capitalist class] and let them read it by the red glare of destruction . . . You can be assured that you have spoken to these robbers in the only language which they have ever been able to understand . . . You need no organization when you make your mind to present this kind of petition. In fact an organization would be a detriment to you; but each of you hungry tramps who read these lines, avail yourself of those methods of warfare which Science has placed in the hands of the poor man, and you will become a power in this or any other land. Learn the use of explosives!

Anarchist print shop workers stayed after their shifts to print 100,000 pamphlet copies of “To Tramps” for the IWPA, which distributed them throughout the country. The article made Lucy a hero amongst the dispossessed and a target for the quickly mobilizing capitalist class. Emphasizing direct action, individual autonomy, and

a non-ideological, pluralistic approach to organizing, Lucy’s writings helped carry anarchist thinking in an entirely new direction.

In May of 1886, when the IWPA was at its peak, someone threw a bomb into a crowd of police officers firing upon a peaceful demonstration in Chicago’s Haymarket Square. Seven police officers were killed and many were injured, mostly by the wild firing of the police into their own ranks. The previous day, police officers had murdered a number of workers striking for an eight-hour day at the McCormick Reaper Works, and the Haymarket demonstration had been called to protest the slaughter. In the aftermath of the so-called Haymarket Riot, the state declared war on Chicago’s anarchists; hundreds were arrested, and seven men including Albert Parsons were put to death. The bomb thrower was never identified.

Of the seven martyrs of the Haymarket tragedy, only Louis Lingg, recently immigrated to Chicago and largely unknown in the city’s anarchist movement, was accused of actually taking part in the bombing. The others were found guilty of making the bombing possible by promoting anarchism and class war. The witch trial that ended in their executions was watched with rapt attention across the nation and the world.

Lucy Parsons went on a countrywide speaking tour and gained tremendous notoriety as a despised oddity in the mainstream press and a fire-breathing hero to



the labor movement. Just as her husband refused to renounce his beliefs and beg for leniency, Lucy did not limit herself to decrying the injustice being done to him. For Lucy and Albert, the trial represented a tremendous opportunity to expand the anarchist movement. Everywhere she went, Lucy was met by enthusiastic crowds and aggressive repression. Almost every city she visited attempted to block her from speaking, creating dramatic showdowns with local authorities. Although she was arrested several times, she forged ahead relentlessly with the help of friends and supporters around the country.

After years traveling the country and the world, Lucy was involved in the amalgamation of the country's most radical grassroots unions into a network called the Industrial Workers of the World. On June 28th, 1905, she spoke at the founding convention of the IWW and proved once again to be a radical voice even within the radical movements of her time. Lucy urged the delegates to form a truly democratic organization free of the bureaucracy and elitism of the business unions. She emphasized the central role of women in exploitative labor and all organizing against it—either as under-compensated workers in the factory, as unpaid workers in the home, or as sex workers in the street—a shocking proposition in her day. She fervently denounced electoralism, craft unionism, and authoritarian leadership within workers' struggles. In their place, she advocated the sit-down strike: "The strike of the future is not to strike and go

out and starve, but to strike and remain in and take possession of the necessary property of production. If anyone is to starve—I do not say it is necessary—let it be the capitalist class." She also spoke of the general strike, which she had witnessed in the Great Upheaval of 1877, one of the few true general strikes in American history, an event to which she later attributed her radicalization. She also did not fail to emphasize that the goal of the workers' movement should not be to create proletarian dictators or reform capitalism but to establish anarchy.

Around the same time, Lucy edited two different newspapers, *Freedom* and *The Liberator*, which ran some of her most powerful writing. Articulating her pluralistic perspective on ideology, she wrote, "The best thought of today may become the useless vagary of tomorrow, and to crystallize it into a creed is to make it unwieldy." She described her own radicalization in developing an analysis of hierarchy: "I came to understand that concentrated power can always be wielded in the interest of the few at the expense of the many. Government in its last analysis is this power reduced to a science." She spoke out against class society, which she argued enabled "a few to riot in luxury and ease" protected by "guns and armouries to make saints of us all." She urged African Americans in the South, then suffering from a pandemic of lynching, to use all available means, but especially "the incendiary," to defend themselves.

For the following twenty years, Lucy Parsons was one of the most prolific and

popular speakers in Chicago. She regularly addressed the various radical forums of her day, including the bohemian Dil Pickle, the anarchist Free Society Forum, the IWW Forum, and the Hobo College, as well as countless May Day Parades, Paris Commune celebrations, and picket lines. She was also a regular voice in the emerging feminist movement of that era, characteristically uncompromising in her radicalism and sense of humor. While denouncing women's suffrage as a dangerous accommodation to the state, she also addressed the radical Women's Forum on the theme that "the majority of men are low-grade morons." She also drew the ire of some anarchists with her cynicism about the "free love" philosophy promoted by Emma Goldman. In a time when few had easy access to birth control, she argued that "free love" was the provenance of middle class white women for whom the likelihood of pregnancy was not a serious concern. In this and her unremitting opposition to women's enfranchisement, she was one of the first feminists to maintain the importance of class in the women's struggle.

Lucy remained a tireless propagandist. She published a number of her own articles as pamphlets—no, punk rockers didn't invent the 'zine—and edited and distributed a volume of speeches by the martyrs of the Haymarket affair. Lucy spent the last two decades of her life writing, speaking, and working on behalf of the International Labor Defense, at that time a broad-based group committed to supporting political prisoners. The ILD was in some ways a Communist Party front group, which has led some to claim—erroneously—that Lucy actually joined the CP. Not even the dead are safe from rumors and sectarianism.

On the morning of March 7, 1942, the wood stove in Lucy's home caught fire. At age 89, nearly blind and only partially mobile, she died alongside her longtime partner George Markstall. After the fire was extinguished, the Chicago police seized her entire library, all of her written correspondence, and her records, which have never been seen since. Hundreds of people attended her funeral at Waldheim Cemetery in suburban Chicago and watched as she was laid to rest a few feet from the Haymarket Monument under which her husband Albert was buried.

I like to explore. The popular term for what I do is "Urban Exploration." Some people call it "Reality Hacking" or "Vadding".¹ Other people call it dangerous and irresponsible. Police call it illegal.

What is urban exploration? The answer is subject to interpretation. Some consider it art, others a means of obtaining an adrenaline rush. Some describe it as civil disobedience. I describe it as, "Gaining access to and exploring man-made areas that have been abandoned or otherwise lost to society."

The life of an explorer is risky indeed. Those who do not wish to risk life and limb or defy authority need not read further. Those in power would prefer that you stick to the norm—and for good reason! Everything you ever need to be satisfied exists in your job or at home on your television set. Why risk bodily harm? This curiosity about what ruins lie beneath the urban facade is juvenile. Normal people would never risk their well-being and freedom to see what is behind the curtain. The world you are permitted to see is good enough! You do not need to learn about the sordid past of our society by poking around its forgotten remains. Be normal. Be complacent. Be what they want you to be.

Stop Reading.

Fine, don't heed my warning. The experiences you will have in this wayward hobby can be disturbing. They may alter your perception of institutions. They may give you pause. Worst of all, they might be fun.

This article covers above-ground exploration sites such as grain mills, factories, old war bunkers, and warehouses; there are also below-ground areas such as drains, sewers, utility tunnels, and caves to explore.

Some of the most beautiful explorations happen spontaneously. But after you've been doing this for a while, you'll start running out of easily found buildings. On the other hand, you may have no clue where to start in the first place. Let's say your friends call up and say they are coming over in twenty minutes, and want to go exploring. Wow! That's a great idea, but you have no idea what to explore. Fire up the computer².

One thing I like to do is look at aerial photographs and satellite images. These can yield quick results when it comes to finding an abandoned building. There are several programs and websites that offer access to these for free. Dig around and you might find them. When looking at aerial/satellite photos of your city, it is easy to pick out areas that may contain abandoned buildings. Cities are "zoned." This means that the municipal government has set aside certain areas for different types of construction: industrial, commercial, and residential. As a general rule, though you shouldn't take my word for it, there's usually nothing worthwhile to explore in residential areas—just small occupied houses³.

The areas to pay attention to are industrial and sometimes commercial areas; these are distinctive, as they are usually clusters of large buildings with massive parking lots. Industrial areas are normally found near federal transportation corridors such as train tracks, freeways, and large rivers. Because the companies that own these buildings usually need to ship large quantities of goods back and forth, they need easy access to interstate transportation routes. Commercial areas, on the other hand, thrive on customers. They are usually adjacent to residential areas and border popular commuter highways. For the most part, commercial areas suck. The buildings are boring and uninspired. It also seems to me that there are more abandoned

¹ The origin of the word "Vadding" comes from MIT where, for a time in the late 1970s, some of the student population were helplessly addicted to a computer game called ADVENT. In an attempt to hide the game executable from system administrators who would delete it, the file was initially renamed ADV. When the system administrators became aware of this, the filename was changed again, this time to the permutation VAD. The verb "vad" appeared, meaning to play the game. Likewise, vadders were people who spent a lot of time playing the game. In a bizarre segue, vadding and vadders began to refer to people who undertook actions in real life similar to those in the game. Since ADVENT was all about exploring underground tunnels, the popular MIT geek sport of roof and tunnel hacking became known as vadding.

Research Quick & Hasty

² If you have one, that is. If you don't, it's time to hit the books!

³ Editor's note: The exciting thing about residential areas for this particular explorer is that not all houses are actually occupied!



industrial buildings than commercial ones. Although you never know, you might find a diamond in the rough!

If you agree that industrial areas are the tofu and potatoes of abandonments, you can concentrate your search there. Aerial/satellite photos are usually several years old, so it can be difficult to use them to determine whether a building is abandoned. It often happens that a picture will show a building with its parking lot full of cars and semi-trucks, but in the five years since the photo was taken, the company has gone under. Mark areas with a high concentration of promising buildings, and drive to those areas to scout them out.

Some other hasty search methods include checking the phone book for buildings that belong to companies that have gone under, asking friends, driving around and hoping to get lucky, and random internet searches. Use your imagination.

Learning More

When you've learned all you can from satellite photos and driving around, both the library and your town's Historical Society are great places to go for more information. However, the librarian will look at you funny when you ask for the section on breaking into old buildings. You're going to have to use your noggin. Fear not, fellow deviant! Dust the cobwebs out, oil up the gears, and try out these pointers.

There's no section labeled "buildings to explore," so try searching for things that are linked to what you are looking for. Sift through city council minutes, newspaper articles, police reports, engineering reports, historical texts, and so on.

For example, imagine there are a series of old grain mills in your city that offer amazing rooftop views. You've found a couple and know there must be more. Start with what you already know. You know the name of the company that owned the ones you've been in. You know who installed the "man-lift" (or "belt-o-vator," an open lift system that transports one person between floors of a mill) in those mills—they put their company name right on the equipment.

First, do a search for the owners. Search city council minutes for requests for building permits over the years. Search newspaper articles that mention the company. Perhaps this doesn't give you any new locations, just ones you've already explored. However, the city council minutes mention the name of the architect responsible for the building plans. Do a search on him.

Luck has it! You find a list of buildings he made plans for between 1926 and 1953. He has credit for sixty-seven buildings. The list does not say what kind of buildings they are, just street addresses. This sort of helps, but it is not exactly what you are looking for.

Next, work from your second piece of information, the company that installed the man-lifts. It turns out it's an old company that's been in business since 1935. They've installed 257 man-lifts since then. A majority of these are still active and continue to receive regular maintenance. You find a list of all the locations where they've installed lifts. This doesn't help very much. You're not looking to explore active mills.

Now you cross-reference the lists. Take the addresses from the architect and see if any match those serviced by the lift company. If you find any, you know they are mills designed by this architect. Since this architect worked for the out-of-business owners, any mills you do find will more than likely be abandoned.

Bingo! You find six matches. Two of these you've already explored. A quick aerial/satellite photo search reveals that three of the remaining four still exist. One has been purchased by another company and remains active. Two seem to be abandoned.

Congratulations. You have two new buildings to explore.



This is just one example of how you might find what you are looking for. Use your imagination and be creative. There are many ways to find information.

You need to know some basic things about a location before you can get in. You'll want to figure out whether and where there are security guards, how you can get in, what kind of gear you'll need, and where you can park.

When you go out to explore, you don't want to spend a lot of time poking around outside the building in ninja gear. A clean, quick entry will keep you safe and out of jail. It is wise to plan two or three entry strategies ahead of time so if one doesn't work you can immediately try another. When looking for entry points, use your imagination. Ground-level entrances are locked most of the time. Are there any windows open? Maybe roof access? How about cellars or manhole access?

Scouting will help you determine the gear you'll need for your exploration. Certain locations require special gear. If you have to go through a storm drain, you'll need waders. If you need to get to a second story window, you might need a ladder. Perhaps you need to go over a razor wire fence? Bring a section of old carpet to throw over the top.

Shrewd parking is more important than you think⁴. Often the best places to park are away from the site and in a busy area. Try to blend in with other cars and crowds of people who have a legitimate reason to be there. Parking far away may hinder a speedy escape, but sometimes it's better to spend the night killing time in a thicket or dumpster than to be chased to your car and let someone get your license plate number. Worst case scenario, you have to spend the night in the dumpster anyway while the security guards or police write down every distinguishing feature of the only car parked in the lot—yours. Look for good parking in the course of your scouting.

Scouting can save you from all sorts of misfortunes, as well enabling you to get into buildings more successfully. Don't underestimate its importance.

In my experience, there are two different schools of thought when it comes to equipment: minimalist and loaded for bear. Myself, I'm in the minimalist camp. I don't like the hassle of a backpack full of gear, and the risk of getting caught with breaking and entering tools is not appealing.

I only take a few things with me, all of which fit in my pockets: climbing gloves, small LED flashlight, headlamp, Swiss army knife, and cell phone. This is almost always enough. I never bring more gear unless I determine in the course of scouting that I'll need it.

This is my favorite part. I will sometimes do horribly bland little buildings just for the experience of finding a way in. In a world in which technology has put everything on autopilot, it is nice to exercise your brain every once in a while. Infiltration can take a little bit of thinking and creativity.

Things rarely go as expected during infiltration. You can find yourself in all sorts of unexpected crazy situations that require quick thinking.

Speed and competence are very important. Know what it is you want to do and how to do it. Again, the less time you spend milling around outside a building the better. This doesn't mean you need to run around like a suspicious goof doing back flips—just move with a purpose. In infiltration, there is usually only one suspicious moment—the moment you actually go in. Before you go in, you've done nothing wrong. Once you are inside, no one can see you. Keep this moment short.

Scouting



⁴ For those of you who do not have a car, good for you. Share this information with explorers who do.

Equipment

Infiltration

Speed

Lights Nocturnal explorations often require flashlights. If you don't need them, don't use them. Humans can see fairly well at night. If you keep your eyes away from light, your pupils will enlarge to let more in—natural night-vision. Here are two very important tips about your vision:

1. Humans see movement very well.
2. Thanks to television and computers, your peripheral vision will work better in darkness.

When you're trying to see in the dark, keep your eyes still. Don't stare at what you are trying to see. Focus your eyes elsewhere and use your peripheral vision. If you're trying to see a person, keep your eyes and head still. Open your perception up to everything. You're not trying to look at anything, you're using your eyes to detect movement. It will feel like you are looking at nothing, but you are really looking at everything. Once you detect movement, you can focus on that area. If you can't see what you just detected, try again with your peripheral vision. You may be able to see things with your peripheral vision that you can't see by looking straight at them.

If you combine this with careful listening, you should be able to do reasonably well in the dark. Another way to work in the dark is by feel. Sometimes when you're trying to accomplish a task like popping hinges or unscrewing boards from a window, you can get away with using your tactile senses alone. If you can help it, keep those lights off. You will be less visible that way—and safer, so long as you don't fall through a hole in the floor.

Your Crew It's important to know your capabilities and handicaps—not only as an individual, but as a group. Just because you can do something doesn't mean everyone else can. Make sure you know the limitations of the people in your group. Some people are afraid of heights, some won't fit through a tight squeeze. Some people are willing to run from police, other people may not be. You need to know these things about your crew in advance.

It can be frustrating to feel limited by others, but often a group is more flexible and capable than any lone individual could be. It can be useful to have a small person who can fit anywhere, or a person skilled at lock picking, or someone who knows how you should conduct yourselves in the neighborhood.

Do not take idiots with you. They suck and will get you killed.

Entry Methods
Picking Locks This can be very useful, but I think it's overrated. Just being able to pick a lock does not guarantee access. Often the locks on abandoned buildings are in such bad enough condition that they're impossible to pick. Some doors are barred or nailed shut. Lock picks are irrelevant in those instances. There have been times where lock picking has gotten us in, but more often than not it doesn't yield results.

Lock-picking guides can be obtained on the internet.

Roof On large buildings, there is often roof access. These entrances are left open more frequently than others. No one expects you to climb to the roof to get in. Sadly, newer buildings are harder to climb, because the architecture is so plain and boring. Older buildings usually have all sorts of interesting features to climb around on.

Another good thing about roof access is that once you're up, you're fairly safe. No one can see you. Most rent-a-pigs don't patrol roofs—they just drive around the perimeter. Even if the hatch or door on the roof is locked or sealed, you can take your sweet time working on it.

This may be surprising, but I've gotten into many buildings through underground entrances. This is usually difficult, but you shouldn't rule it out. Drains, sewers, and utility tunnels run under buildings and sometimes offer access to them.

Every building has a weak point—a broken window, a boarded-up door you can unfasten, maybe a second-story window accessible with a little climbing. If a door has its hinges on the outside, you can pop them. Be creative. Use your imagination. There is no right way to open a door or window—though breaking them is bad form.

Sometimes one gifted person is able to get in where the rest cannot. That person may be able to open a door from the inside. The only drawback is that this can be dangerous—sending someone into a dark building alone is always a little dicey. It's best if the door in question is close to your friend's point of entry. You can use radios or cell phones to communicate (see *Communications Technology for Direct Actions* in the second issue of *Rolling Thunder*). If your friend can't find a way to let you in quickly, it might be wise for him or her to come out.

Tools are a double edged sword. They are useful for popping hinges or unfastening a ventilation grate, but they are a pain in the ass to carry around—and if you get caught trespassing with gear for breaking and entering on you, you can be charged with serious crimes even if you're not using them.

If your scouting indicates that you need them, your best bet is to carry light disposable tools. That way if you run into trouble you can ditch them in the river or in the bushes.

Sometimes the door is just open. Make sure you check every door before you embark on some demanding project to gain entry. I've done some pretty crafty work to get into a place only to have another explorer just open a door twenty feet down and waltz in. Embarrassing.

It's 4:33 a.m. You've just had the best exploration of your life. You and your crew are dog tired; it's time to head home. You've proved your mettle by defying the darkness and danger. You've done things no normal person would have the guts to do. You are invincible! No one is going to mess with you!

You'd feel really stupid if you got caught now. The danger of getting busted or hurt is just as great now as when you entered the building. Put as much thought and caution into your exit as your entrance.

One of the best moments in exploring a building is when you climb out onto the roof. The cool night air feels great, the view of downtown is spectacular, and you feel like you're on top of the world! Aside from being a great place to chill, a rooftop can give you a bird's eye view of everything going on outside the building. You can check for security or any other surprises that might be waiting for you upon your exit. Take advantage of this.

It can be really handy to leave a lookout outside the building to keep an eye on things. If you have no lookout and you anticipate trouble, you could call up other explorers to see if they can come help out. One could double as a getaway driver if your car is parked too far away.

The best thing about locked doors is that you can often open them from the inside. You'll probably have more exits to choose from going out than you did getting in. If getting in required feats of acrobatic skill that would shame

Underground

Doors and Windows

Friends on the Inside

Tools

Luck

Exfiltration

Check the Perimeter

Friends on the Outside

Exit the Building



Prisoner Support

an Olympic gymnast, consider picking a different way out. It may be a good idea to go out a different way than you came in, anyway—someone who saw you go in might be waiting for you to come out.

Cover Your Tracks

I know you are a kind-hearted individual. You don't want to rob some other explorer of the great experience you just had. Right? So make sure to lock up any entrance you unlocked. If you could get in, so can another explorer. Why deprive them of that challenge? Replace boards you took off windows, lock the door behind you, replace the bricks from the crawl hole you found. If it's clear people are entering a building, security may tighten up, or others may start using the building in a way that attracts security.

Fuck the Reaper

FATALITIES

Hit by a train, Fell into a grain silo, Drowned

INJURIES

Fell off a radio tower, Washed out of a drain, Assaulted, Fell through floor, Falling debris, Dog/animal bites, Hypothermia, Fell off bridge, Fell through ice, Meth lab booby traps, Electric shock, Exposure to hazardous chemicals, Oxygen deprivation, Fingers crushed by manhole cover, Cave in, Damaged genitals on razor wire fence, Head Injury (happens all the time)

Conduct

Most explorers abide by some basic ethics. Some do so because they consider this morally right, others in order to stay out of trouble. It's your choice what you do while exploring, but I hope you take these suggestions to heart. Our adopted motto is "Take only pictures, leave only footprints."

Don't Break Things!

There are so many reasons not to break things gratuitously. Not only will you mess up the building for the next explorers who want to check it out, you'll also draw unwanted attention from owners or police. Many of us revere the beauty of these buildings. They are sacred to us. It is a shame to see them wrecked by senseless violence, or locked up and guarded as a result of it.

Don't Steal

Everything that goes for vandalism goes double for stealing. A trespassing violation becomes something much more serious if it's coupled with theft.

However, this is a gray area. Some of us will take historical artifacts from a building that is about to be demolished. Use your best judgment—just don't screw things up for the rest of us.

Don't get Intoxicated

This is another gray area. Many of us will have a beer while chilling on a rooftop. But getting wasted while exploring is a good way to fuck yourself up and die. It's already dangerous enough. You don't need to stack the deck against yourself.

Tagging

This is an area of much dispute among explorers. Some believe tagging is a beautiful art form. Some do not. If you insist on tagging, try to do something worthwhile.

It has been said that the revolutionary potential of a movement can be measured by how well prisoners are supported. Who would take action if they knew they wouldn't be supported in the event of arrest and imprisonment? In light of the past year's escalation of state repression against environmental and social justice activists, it is essential that we step up our organizing in support of prisoners.

The prison apparatus is intended to cut prisoners off from the outside: from family, from community, from the continuing struggle. Prisoners are locked in cages; many that are identified as "political" are targeted for abuse and kept in control units where they spend most of their time in isolation. Increased communication between activists both inside and outside prison inspires resistance on both sides of the prison walls. Prisoner support work is a way to connect with our friends, those we admire, and those who have lost their personal support networks as they struggle through difficult periods of incarceration.

Prisoner support work can be daunting. Supporting prisoners who have been locked up can be emotionally taxing. Prison is physically, mentally, and emotionally abusive—but although it can be frightening and difficult, we can provide prisoners with support, stimulation, and an outlet for emotional release to improve their mental health. It can also be challenging to navigate the complex mazes of prison bureaucracy. We hope this recipe can provide some ideas of where to start and how to avoid common obstacles.

There is a lot of work to be done! Fortunately, there are many different ways to go about it. Before deciding which ones to try, take some time to evaluate your energy, commitment, support base, and interests. Think about how much time you want to dedicate to prisoner support. Is there interest in your community? Do support projects already exist? Can you collaborate with other reliable folks, or will you have to go it alone? If you want to be a resource for prisoners or develop trusting relationships, consistency is essential. If you have less to give now, think about writing a letter or organizing an event and then building up from there. Also, consider your interests. Are you most interested in supporting imprisoned mothers, corresponding with trans prisoners¹, or supporting political prisoners incarcerated near you? Or do you want to do more general support work?

You can support prisoners alone, with an informal group, by organizing public events, or through an organization. This recipe covers a range of approaches to assisting those held captive by the state.

Letters help to bridge the gap between the "inside" and "outside" worlds, keeping prisoners connected to what is going on in their movements, their communities, and the world at large. The penal system exerts a great deal of pressure on prisoners to break ties with the outside world; communicating with prisoners helps to counteract this.

People who haven't corresponded with prisoners before often worry about what they should write. However, it's simple. Share something about your life with them. Ask about what life is like on the inside—you can learn a lot from them—and what they plan to do when they get out. Offer some assistance. An unexpected letter from a supporter can be a welcome break from the daily monotony of prison life. Don't feel intimidated about writing well-known political prisoners—they are not superheroes, just people who had the courage to act for what they believe in.

Consistency is paramount for communicating with prisoners. That said, don't decide against writing just because you can't commit to writing them

What Is Prison Abolition?

Prison abolitionists acknowledge the devastating effects prison, policing, and surveillance have on poor communities, communities of color, and other targeted groups, and aim to create sustainable alternatives to punishment and imprisonment.

Abolitionists recognize that "crime" as we know it is not "human nature," but something determined by the societies we live in. Abolitionists do not believe that people will never hurt each other or cross the boundaries set by their communities. However, abolitionists argue that these things will happen less often if we live in a society that combines flexibility and care to acknowledge and provide for people's needs. To do that, we must create alternatives for dealing with the injuries people inflict upon each other, in ways that sustain communities and families. You cannot keep a community whole and healthy while routinely removing people from it.

The abolitionist vision asks that we build models that prefigure the world we want to live in. This means developing practical strategies for taking small steps toward our dreams, thus enabling people to believe that things really can be different.

¹ *If you are interested in corresponding with trans prisoners, contact:*

Tranzmission
PO Box 1874
Asheville, NC 28802
tranzmission_asheville@yahoo.com

Corresponding with Prisoners

Bear in mind that everything you write to a prisoner can be read by prison guards, wardens, federal agents, and other despicable busybodies, not to mention other prisoners.

What you write can be used against the prisoner, yourself, and your community—so be careful and use discretion.

Commit to writing to one prisoner and do it well. This is worth a lot more than several prisoners receiving one-time hastily-written letters. The examples of people attempting valiantly to keep up with writing to ten prisoners and then having to scale down to one or two are innumerable.

When Writing a Prisoner:

throughout the length of their sentence. Prisoners generally appreciate any letter with kind thoughts; they may not even have time to keep up a steady correspondence with everyone who writes them.

It's extremely important to learn the guidelines concerning prisoner mail. First, ask the prisoner what he or she may and may not receive. Usually, prisoners have a fairly good idea of what will not make it past the censors. Prisons generally have strict regulations for what prisoners can receive—for example, new books only, or first-class mail only. Every prison has different restrictions. If you follow the prisoner's advice and your packages still don't get through, write to the warden of the prison requesting a list of regulations. Prison officials can reject mail for any reason they want—including smudges or stains on an envelope, the presence of a circled "A" on a 'zine, or the use of the word "anarchy" in a letter. Don't be discouraged if your mail doesn't get through. You can file an appeal (generally a long shot), modify the package to appease them (a more reliable option), or send it again, hoping a different mail censor sees it. Don't give up and allow them to further isolate the person inside.

Use common sense. Send neat, legible letters on plain paper. Use a full name and return address, but consider using a "neutral" address such as a Post Office Box. Do not divulge sensitive information—your home address, phone number, credit card and bank details, or people's full names. This is for your security and that of the prisoner.

Think ahead. Research local prison regulations, and ask folks when you write them specifically what the rules are for writing letters. Date all your letters and write in each one everything you're enclosing—like stamps², photographs, or photocopies—so that prisoners can make sure they are receiving everything. If a prisoner tells you that something was not received, write a letter appealing the confiscation, usually to the warden.

Be forward and clear in your letter as to your intentions. Say who you are and whether you are with an organization. Be upfront about your politics and say where you heard about the prisoner's case. Be explicit if you are interested in starting a pen-pal relationship; ask if the prisoner would like to correspond and whether there are topics he or she would like to discuss or not to discuss. Keep your first letter reasonably short and to the point.

Be patient. Prisoners may not write back, or may take a while to respond. They may occasionally come across as cynical, angry, or disinterested. Keep in mind that people who have written before may have stopped writing or failed to come through on promises to them, and that writing to you may be their only safe outlet for venting their frustrations. Try not to take it personally.

Deal with the right channels. If a prisoner wants you to send a book, ask what his or her institution requires or refer the prisoner to a books to prisoners program nearby. If a prisoner is getting out in the next few weeks, do not offer your place to stay unless you have corresponded for a significant amount of time and are in contact with both a parole officer and a prison intermediary such as a prison chaplain. Instead, try to help the prisoner secure employment and develop a support base, whether through family, friends, or a church or mosque. Use your head; don't land yourself in a bad situation or create one that will send the prisoner back to jail.

Don't make empty promises. Many well-meaning people write letters offering support or assistance to prisoners out of good will, then fail to follow through. Don't make promises you cannot keep. Don't offer to do a support campaign if you can't make the time; don't offer to send items you can't afford. Be honest. It's best to extend support slowly as your relationship grows.

Don't romanticize prisons or prisoners. While it's helpful to have political clarity about incarceration and the nature of the criminal justice system, it is problematic to romanticize prisoners or anything for which they might

be locked up. Like anyone else, prisoners have unique strengths and weaknesses. It's important to remember that prisoners can develop manipulative behaviors as a coping mechanism to deal with the intense stress they are under in prison. Some are estranged from their families as a direct result of their own actions. Don't make assumptions about what a prisoner needs or how a prisoner will handle things.

Do not discuss anything illegal with prisoners. Again, this is for your security and theirs. Prisoners can be implicated for outside actions that violate the law. If authorities find information about this in the hands of prisoners, they can face added time and harsh treatment.

Do not make political judgments on prisoners' experiences. Some prisoners, out of desperation, write publications for pen pals whether or not they agree completely with the views advanced in them. Some prisoners have been converted to Christianity or Islam in prison. Rather than attack a prisoner, it's best to be polite, but firm, if there is something you find objectionable. Do not attack or insult prisoners because of their religion, preferences, or experiences. If a prisoner declares herself or himself a white supremacist, explain your disagreement, encourage the person to reconsider these views, and discontinue the relationship. White supremacist gangs often have ties to the outside; it's smart to avoid feuds with such prisoners.

Public events provide a forum for raising awareness about the prison system, individual defendants and prisoners and their legal struggles, and prisoner support organizations; they also present an opportunity to raise funds. Benefit shows, art auctions, film screenings, secret cafés, poetry events, workshops, speakers, and letter-writing parties are all great options for supporting prisoners. You can ask for a suggested donation at the door or collect donations inside.

To organize an event, you must book an attraction such as a band or film³, arrange a date and venue, and discuss things with the individual or group the event will highlight. Make sure all these things are accomplished far enough in advance for your event to be the best it can be.

The promotion of the event is itself an opportunity to educate people about the case. In explaining the event you have an opening to introduce others to the issue. Even if they don't attend, simply hearing about it will raise awareness.

Don't assume those who attend know all they need to know about the situation; always include speakers to give information about the topic of the benefit. Offer a literature table where people can pick up handouts with more information on how to lend support, and make sure someone is available to answer questions directly. Visual aids such as photographs and videos of prisoners can help make it clear that they are real people; big banners don't hurt, either. Additionally, you can screen short films such as those produced by Free Speech TV between segments of your event to fill out the program.

If you are going to charge a fixed price for admission, have someone positioned to take money at the door. For most events, this can be a sliding scale of \$5-25. This encourages everyone to give something, and offers those with more money the option to give more. It may make sense to let everyone in regardless of whether they can pay—but you don't need to advertise this. You can also sell things in the venue to raise additional funds: t-shirts, food, and drinks. Raffles and silent auctions have both been successful fundraising formats.

In Washington, DC alone, multiple benefits have been held for Operation Backfire defendant Daniel McGowan, raising roughly \$1000 for his support campaign. Other benefit events have raised funds for Eric McDavid, Brianna Waters, Nathan Block and Joyanna Zacher. Unfortunately, it sometimes happens that defendants ask for support from prisoner support communities, then it turns out they have become snitches. On one occasion we held a benefit event for a defendant just before word came out he

Organizing Public Events

If you don't have time to organize your own event, you can table at other events with literature about prison abolition and smashing the state—just don't forget your donation jar!

³ *Some film ideas include:* All Power to the People, Passin' It On, speeches by Mumia Abu-Jamal, The FBI's War on Black America, Slam!, and Down By Law. Also check out Critical Resistance's resource page for more ideas.



was cooperating with the authorities against other activists. Fortunately, we had not yet mailed the funds to his support group; we withheld the money until we knew the facts, then donated the funds to the support campaigns of people we could be sure were not cooperating.

Workshops and Letter-Writing Parties

In response to the green scare, groups across the US have been holding events to educate the public, support those targeted, and build group solidarity. One such group is ours here in Washington, DC. Along with benefit shows, we have been hosting workshops and regular letter-writing nights.

Under the theme of resisting state repression and creating strategies for safety in communities of resistance, we have held grand jury trainings for radicals—as grand juries have played a critical role in the state’s most recent campaign of repression—and workshops on security culture—as the recent arrests and heavy charges in the green scare are calculated to promote paranoia and distrust in activist circles. It is important to educate activists about what grand juries are, how they operate, and how to resist them, as well as how grand juries, confidential informants, and paranoia disrupt political movements and destroy communities.

In February 2006, coinciding with Valentine’s Day we held an event entitled “Send a Valentine to a Political Prisoner”—the first of what has become a monthly night of writing letters to political prisoners. Our letter-writing nights are an informal setting open to anyone who is interested in writing prisoners and discussing issues related to prisoner support and state repression. Usually these events are potlucks, as food creates a relaxed and inviting atmosphere.

The letter-writing nights have created a forum for discussion on the various green scare cases as they unfold and a place to share information and updates. Writing letters in a group setting can help people set aside time for an activity they might otherwise intend to do but keep putting aside. Prisoner support often seems to be in the back of most activists’ minds, but it’s hard to make time for it if you don’t know exactly where to start.

Writing in others’ presence can make it a little easier to get those first words on paper: you can ask questions, share ideas about what to write, and learn from the experiences of others who write letters to prisoners. Writing as a group can also help to coordinate support for prisoners: you can keep record of who is writing to whom and just how many letters from your area are going to each prisoner you want to support.

When one person in a group receives notice of certain prison regulations—for instance, when a letter is returned because of a grease stain—word can travel quickly to others in the group. This can help protect future letters from being returned because of the same problem.

Our letter-writing nights are held at and sponsored by our local infoshop. Participants are encouraged to use the store address as a return address in order to meet prison regulations that require return addresses with full names⁴. By using one well-known address for all our prisoner support mail, we avoid providing the home addresses of dozens of activists directly to the authorities.

The most successful prisoner support projects are those that are conceived of and directed by the prisoners themselves. The Victory Gardens Project in Maine is an example of such a project, as is the Anarchist Prisoner Legal Aid Network (APLAN) started by anarchist former prisoner Rob Thaxton. They are successful and enduring because the prisoners themselves are leading them, working in conjunction with outside support to achieve their aims.

One of the most straightforward forms of prisoner-directed support work is publishing prisoners’ writings and artwork. This could include corresponding, typing up material, designing and photocopying, fundraising, and distribution. It’s a big task, but some of the best ’zines of all time have been prisoner-directed. Two excellent examples are *Strong Hearts*, which



⁴ A made-up name will do fine; however, if the person is a friend or someone you hope to visit one day, you may want to use your own name. Bear in mind that prisoners cannot always recognize their friends when they write under false names, even if the letters make references to memories only the two of them share.

Working on Prisoner-Directed Projects

Rod Coronado produced while imprisoned, and the South Chicago ABC group, which has published a number of prisoner ’zines.

In addition to supporting prisoners themselves, you can do a lot of important work supporting their family members and friends. Many prisoners are held hundreds or thousands of miles from their loved ones. When their parents or partners come to visit, they will need housing, food, and emotional care. If you live near a prison at which a prisoner you wish to support is incarcerated, you could make inquiries as to how you can best support his or her visitors. In addition to offering them food and sleeping space, you could also raise funds to pay their travel expenses and accommodations, assist them with living expenses or childcare, or simply provide a listening ear and a supportive space in the midst of their difficult ordeal.

For a more ambitious version of this approach, discretely organize carpools or group transportation to the local prison on a popular visiting day, so prisoners’ friends and family who could not otherwise afford to visit are able to keep up with their loved ones and help them maintain morale.

Most prisoners and defendants desperately need financial assistance. Legal costs are exorbitant and even well-known political activists may not receive a reduction in lawyers’ fees based on their principles. However, never underestimate the generosity and solidarity of our movement and your own community. Small benefit shows and t-shirt sales have raised thousands of dollars for people facing imprisonment. Because prisoners have to buy from incredibly expensive prison commissaries, which are often their only source of envelopes, stamps, and other necessities, a consistent flow of funds can help make prison life bearable. A contribution of as little as \$10 a week can cover a prisoners’ postage fees, allowing them to communicate with supporters and friends.

Aside from benefit shows and other public events that raise money, there are innumerable other creative options for fundraising. If you have an idea for a fundraiser, contact the people you want to support or their support group and check in with them first. They might want to endorse your project, or for legal reasons they might request that you make it clear that the fundraiser is taking place without the knowledge or consent of the defendants or prisoners. Creative benefits for green scare defendants have included the sales of screenprinted t-shirts, donated art, collections of their previous writings⁵, and compilation CDs. The best benefit projects have minimal overhead expenses and generate a lot of returns. Folks have also set up support websites with a pay-pal option so people can make their donations online⁶.

It is not simple to set up a defendant or prisoner support group. Our dearest thanks to all who put their energy into that. In fact, this section is so short simply because there is too much to tell! Every person is different and needs different things, but one common thread is that prisoners need assistance setting up legal defense funds and other infrastructures for consistent support. This might include maintaining a support website or other ways of publicizing the case to potential supporters, media, and the public; it can also mean finding and coordinating with legal council, soliciting character witnesses and support statements, organizing fundraising efforts, managing support funds, and visiting the prisoner.

It is impossible for prisoners to set up bank accounts, but it is essential that people are able to offer prisoners financial assistance. Supporters should establish a bank account maintained by trustworthy individuals, a PO Box to receive letters and support checks, and a person to act as recipient of those checks. Ideally, if you are part of a community that is likely to experience conflict with the law, all these should already exist in case of emergency.

Supporting Supporters

Fundraising

Okay kids, now’s the time to use all those scamming, stealing, and wildcrafting skills you’ve developed for something worthwhile!

⁵ See the review of *Flaming Arrows* a few pages ahead.

⁶ These work primarily as a result of massive publicity efforts to spread awareness about individual defendants’ and prisoners’ cases through websites, radical publications, and informational fliers, pamphlets, and stickers.

Setting up a Defendant or Prisoner Support Group

You can often find sympathetic lawyers who are willing to work cheaply on important cases through the National Lawyers’ Guild, the ACLU, or similar networks. If you are being targeted by the authorities for participation in environmental activism, call 888-NLG-ECOLAW for assistance.

Prisoners should always be fully informed about and in control of the money that is raised on their behalf.

Solidarity Actions

Solidarity actions can be an important part of any prisoner support campaign. These can range from law-abiding public demonstrations to militant direct action. Furthering the goals of political prisoners or offering a deterrent to their persecution without enabling the state to persecute them further is a ticklish business; any solidarity action must be thought out very carefully. For the purposes of this introduction, we can only bring up some basic questions.

First and foremost, what are the prisoner's desires regarding solidarity actions? Some call for them explicitly; others wish for them, but are unable to request them; others wish for actions to continue occurring in the struggle, but that none of them be claimed as solidarity actions; still others wish that no one carry out solidarity actions at all.

Second, what is the goal of your action? To show that people are concerned about the welfare of the prisoner, or the issue for which the prisoner has fought, or the erosion of civil liberties in this country? If so, to show *whom*—other activists, the corporate media, the public at large, other prisoners? Or is the goal to exert leverage more directly on the state, or on the party bringing charges? Or is it to maintain momentum in the struggle to which the prisoner is committed, to show that it cannot be stopped?

Third, what is the risk/benefit ratio of your action? To what extent can the action be blamed upon the prisoner, either as his or her own doing or the result of his or her supposed "leadership"? Will the action make the state attempt to target the prisoner more, and is the state in a position to do so? Seemingly impressive solidarity actions can backfire, as may have occurred in Jeffrey Luers' case when a solidarity action took place at the site of his alleged crime days before his trial. On the other hand, sometimes it takes something on the order of the Rodney King riots to force the state to back down.

Finally, should your solidarity action result in further arrests and court cases, does your community have the resources to support additional defendants, or would this detract from the support the current prisoners need to receive?

Starting an Anarchist Black Cross Group

- Be consistent.
- Learn as much as you can about the prison regulations.
- Remember that prison workers will arbitrarily lie to you.
- Learn from prisoners—they know a lot about the prison bureaucracy.
- Be open and direct with prisoners about any concerns you have.
- Be aware that all interactions you have with a prisoner are monitored by prison officials and that you may attract attention from other state agencies.
- Do not pass on correspondence or packages unless you are fully aware of the contents.
- Know the phone numbers and addresses of the prison administrators so you can harass them about problems—when mail isn't received, when the prisoner is harassed.
- Respond quickly to any situations that arise.
- Discuss with prisoners any actions that you take in regards to them.

Getting Started

Pace yourself and start slowly. It may help to narrow your focus. Will specializing in refugee and immigrant rights, police brutality cases, or women prisoners be most relevant to your community? Do you want to work in



your region, your state, or your county?⁷ Think about which issues mean the most to you. Your energy and enthusiasm about the topics you have the most interest in will come across in your work.

Educate yourself. Learn about the prison system, the experiences of prisoners, and how to be an ally. Writers like Angela Davis, Christian Parenti, Marilyn Buck, Ward Churchill, and many others have written extensively on these subjects. Familiarize yourself with the prisons in your area and the ones who run them. As you compile the rules and regulations and other resource materials, set up a filing system to keep your information organized.

Establish multiple channels for people to contact you. Get a post office box and a voicemail. These will make you accessible without requiring that you divulge personal information. Post office boxes run from \$30 a year up; shop around and be mindful of hours, box accessibility, and cost. Put your ABC group on the contact card of the box. If you want to be available by telephone, www.onebox.com offers free voicemail and covers many cities. An email address is also good; check it regularly!

Some ABC groups prefer to be closed membership groups of one to four members, while others prefer to do public outreach for meetings. Choose what works for you. If you opt for public meetings, don't be discouraged if the gatherings are small. If yours is a closed group, consider teaching others how it works so they can take your place if need be.

Once your group becomes public, requests will start rolling in. Try to learn as much as possible about the prisoners you are considering supporting. Prisoners may not always be able to speak freely about the activities they've been involved in or cases that may still be pending. To find out more, ask them for documents regarding their cases, talk to people who have supported them or worked with them in the past, or ask other prisoners about them.

When planning visits, find out the days and times visiting is allowed. If a prisoner is in segregation or otherwise under "disciplinary" action, you may have to schedule a special visit with the warden's permission. Prisoners should know when and how many visits they are allowed; schedule the date and time with them. Before you go, find a written list of the visitation regulations by calling or writing to the prison or looking on its website. Be especially aware of what you can wear, what you are allowed to take inside, and what kind of identification is considered acceptable. Be punctual.

Find other groups in your area to collaborate with: can your ABC group work with a local grassroots anti-poverty organization or a prisoners' families support group? Contact other existing ABC groups near your area. If you would like to affiliate as an Anarchist Black Cross collective, email abc-net@anarchistblackcross.org; include a little about your group and your current activities, whether you want to be listed online or in printed materials as part of the network, and how other collectives can contact you. The ABC Network is intended to connect ABC groups and other autonomous groups, organizers, and supporters.

A Books to Prisoners (or books through bars, or prison books...) Collective is a group that sends free books to any prisoner that requests them. Simple, right? Books to prisoners groups are unique in that they can draw support from prison abolitionists and reformists alike because sending out educational materials is fairly uncontroversial. This broad appeal can help foster opposition to the prison system in a broad range of social circles. However, reformist involvement in such groups can also complicate attempts to move from a "social work" model toward an overall anarchist/prison abolition strategy. It's ideal for a group to disseminate anti-prison ideas among folks who are new to prisoner support without diluting the radical potential of that support.

Books to prisoners groups are often the first connection a prisoner gets to politicized activists on the outside. In addition to sending books, it is also

⁷ Geography can be a misleading indicator, because where someone is from often doesn't affect where they are imprisoned. One green scare defendant who was transferred to a prison ten hours away from his home ended up within the scope of my local support work, just a county away from me.

Getting To It

As letters from prisoners seeking help pour in, it's easy to get overwhelmed. If you ever need help, you can always ask others in the ABC Network for assistance.

The prison system exploits prisoners and makes it difficult for them to get decent food and other basic necessities. Supporting prisoners can involve providing them with material aid such as food, clothing, and stamps.

When sending items into the prison, make sure to have a written copy of the prison regulations and stick to them strictly. Also, help prisoners find out what resources are available to them for free—for example, many publications are free to all prisoners.

Starting a Books to Prisoners Collective

important to help prisoners get connected to other groups and resources. A prisoner, for example, may want contact information for a prison abolitionist group or ABC chapter, information on how to acquire safer sex supplies, a phone number for a religious group, or a contact for a queer pen pal service. Connecting prisoners with other groups can often serve as an exciting way to help others integrate prisoner support into their existing activism. The Prison Book Program in Asheville, NC, for example, helped galvanize a local transgender activist group into organizing a now three-year-running queer pen pal service simply by sharing some moving letters by trans prisoners in need of help.

There are already as many as twenty-five active books to prisoners projects in the US, many of which send books to every prison in the country. Before starting a new books to prisoners project, check out the National Prisoner Resource List, an annually compiled list of national prisoner resources that lists many books to prisoners collectives. Along with the NPRL are legal, substance abuse, and LGBT resource lists, all of which are available at www.prisonbookprogram.org/nprl.html.

It may be more useful to do fundraising for an existing group than to form a new one. Alternately, you could start a collective that serves just one or two states, taking work off the shoulders of the already over-taxed national prison book programs. This has the advantage of allowing your group to be more accountable to its prison population and making more personal contacts with prisoners, including politically conscious ones. If a books to prisoners collective is only sending to a few specific states, it can compile a resource list that is relevant to its geographic area.

Logistics

Starting a books to prisoners collective is largely a process of trial and error. Fortunately, dozens of groups have undergone this process already and can share their knowledge. For all the information too nitty or gritty to list here, contact the national books to prisoners listserv, which you can find at riseup.net, to communicate with most books to prisoners groups across the country. The Philadelphia group Books Through Bars has published an excellent handbook for starting a free book program, available at www.booksthroughbars.org.

You'll need some kind of publisher or bookstore to work through, because many prisons only allow prisoners to accept books from publishers or "commercial distributors." You can bypass this bureaucratic regulation by arranging with a friendly local bookstore or infoshop to receive prisoners' requests at their address and incorporating their name into the name of your collective. If you can't use space at the bookstore, you'll also need to find a reliable, affordable space to serve as your library and work area—preferably one in which strangers coming in for the first time will feel comfortable.

You'll be sending hundreds if not thousands of books out every month, so obviously you're going to need a library! College and public libraries will often have huge, super-cheap book sales at which you can fill up brown grocery bags for three dollars a bag. You should also set out decorated donation boxes at sympathetic businesses around town⁸. Benefit shows at which the admission price is a couple of Webster's Dictionaries or a copy of Malcolm X's autobiography (two of the most commonly requested books) in addition to a small sum are great ways to acquire titles you will constantly run out of. Your local corporate bookstore may also be happy to donate newer titles that would otherwise be difficult to find, so long as they don't have to know about it.

Unlike many collectives, projects, and campaigns organized by anarchists, books to prisoners programs can be very expensive. Even with a free space and more or less free access to books, a collective can still spend between \$30 and \$100 on postage every week. Lack of funds is almost always

Hardcover books are generally not allowed in prisons, but you can remove the covers and rebind them; likewise, it may be wise to remake the covers of books or 'zines with incendiary covers so they can pass the prison censors.

⁸ We put some out in used book stores staffed by sympathetic employees; customers who go in to sell used books often just leave them our the box instead.

the limiting factor. As you read this, there are hundreds of packages across the country waiting to be sent, not because volunteers, time, or books are wanting, but because they lack the \$2.07 for postage. Next to hosting regular weekly workdays for volunteers to come and fill requests, the most consistent task your collective will need to undertake is raising funds.

It may take a while for word to spread among prisoners. For prisoners who get few letters or visits, news can be slow in coming. The books to prisoners group in New Orleans went door to door in neighborhoods in which many family members are incarcerated; this helped get word into the prisons through family networks and also served as a community outreach tool. Other groups attempt to inform prisoners of their programs by contacting groups that contact prisoners—from advocacy groups to prison pen pal programs and even prison chaplains. Ultimately, the best way to spread word among prisoners is to encourage enthusiastic and thankful prisoners to tell each other about this new opportunity. This is also a way for prisoners to empower themselves rather than simply relying on aid from outside; at times this prisoner-to-prisoner communication has resulted in inmates using free book programs to create their own political and educational study groups.

Before you start wrapping packages, there are a few things to consider. First, each individual prison has different restrictions on what prisoners can receive, in addition to statewide Department of Corrections (DOC) restrictions, the two of which must be cross-referenced against each other⁹. The former you can find in an already compiled restrictions list by getting in touch with the national books to prisoners listserv, but the statewide restrictions you'll need to look up on each state's DOC website. Every time you write to a prisoner, be sure to ask if his or her prisons' restrictions have changed.

A standardized process for writing letters will help meet prison restrictions. Start with a professional-looking letterhead including the name and address of your group, along with instructions and a mission statement on the back. Include in each package the books, a letter written on this letterhead, the National Prisoner Resource List or local equivalent, and any other requested resources or 'zines. Wrap the package neatly—in brown paper from paper bags, for instance, which are freely available at grocery stores—and write or stamp on your return address and the prisoner's address. Sending all packages "media mail" significantly lowers the postage rates for books-only packages.

Regular monthly newsletters that publish prisoners' poetry, essays, and art are an empowering way to connect different prison populations with each other. A computerized database of books you've sent can be an excellent resource when applying for funding. Zines are a fantastic addition to any books to prisoners project, because they can present radical perspectives on more current topics than most used books. A website can also help you attract volunteers and funding.

Like prisoner support in general, books to prisoners programs demand a level of consistency that is sometimes lacking in anarchist endeavors. These programs are also challenging, bringing race issues to the forefront of predominantly white anarchist groups and emphasizing the importance of working with groups led by people of color in dismantling the prison-industrial complex. This kind of organizing can also be intensely rewarding in that the results of your work are immediately felt, and because your activities present a clear, strategic way of empowering those who are victimized by the criminal justice system to become intellectually and physically active in that system's destruction—if they are not already. By exposing an obvious contradiction in the criminal justice system, these programs present a simple but radical message: if the prison-industrial complex was really about "education" and "rehabilitation," why would this work be necessary in the first place?

- Some tried and true approaches for this include:
- Music and drag benefit shows
 - Hefty grants from sympathetic groups like the Resist! Foundation
 - Setting up prison-oriented literature tables at punk and hip-hop shows
 - Selling t-shirts, patches, and buttons
 - Book sales (sell all the donated books that you can't get into the prisons)
 - Secret Cafés—turn a friend's house into a restaurant for a night to sell \$20-a-plate dinners to affluent, do-gooder liberals
 - Art Auctions
 - Selling expensive items on E-Bay (obtained through whatever channels you prefer)
 - Producing benefit CDs

Send Away

⁹ For example, if the prison has no restriction on the number of books, but the state only allows each prisoner to receive two books a month, you will be wasting books and postage if you send more than two books.

Prisoner Support and Prison Abolition Resources

anarchistblackcross.org
criticalresistance.org
earthfirstjournal.org

The journal lists addresses for political prisoners; you can find subscription information online.

ecoprisoners.org
thejerichomovement.com/index.html

This is an amazing organization that features an extensive list of addresses for political prisoners.

prisonbookprogram.org/nprl.html
spiritoffreedom.org.uk
tranzmission.revolt.org

Contact them for information about their queer and trans prisoner pen pal program.
zinelibrary.net

Download and print tons of free zines including *Race Treason Behind Prison Walls*, *Policing on the Global Scale*, and *World Behind Bars*—an amazing 'zine that includes a guide to presenting a nuanced workshop on the prison system. The website also has a political prisoner and POW resource list.

Information excerpted from the Yule 2001 *EF! Journal*, by the NA Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network, and from *Anarchist Black Cross Information and Resources*, by Nightcrawlers ABC. Thanks!



Access All Areas: A User's Guide to the Art of Urban Exploration

Infiltration, PO Box 13, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, M6H 4E1, Canada (www.infiltration.org)

This handbook was delivered to me the day before I set out on an adventurous first trip to Canada. I was so excited about its arrival that I spent the last few hours I had to rest before my trip reading it, completely forgetting to sleep. Twenty hours later, customs officials used it as grounds to deny me entry to the country from which it originated. If that's not proof of its value, I don't know what would be! I finished reading the book on a ferry crossing the straight of Juan de Fuca, returning from my preemptive deportation, and its challenge resonated with me.

I was nine years old when Jeff Chapman began publishing *Infiltration*: a 'Zine about Going Places You're not Supposed to, a project that began with him trespassing into hotels and buildings in his home city Toronto and ended twenty-five issues later with courageous ventures into missile silos and overseas military outposts. *Infiltration*

and its dynamic online counterpart laid the foundation for today's vibrant urban exploration underground, a subculture involving a range of participants from hard-core squatters to inquisitive architectural scholars.

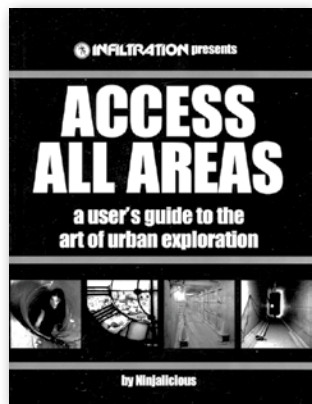
Access All Areas is a 242-page collection of texts from the *Infiltration* project, comprising a step-by-step guide to recreational trespassing. It charges readers to push their limits while simultaneously stressing the importance of taking risks seriously. The introduction hints at the benefits of urban exploration and similar pastimes: "Most people are extremely nervous the first time they climb a fence into a construction site or stroll past an employee into an off-limits area... after you've done these things a dozen times they become second-nature, allowing you to save your stores of nerves for larger challenges."

From there on, it's all gold: training regimens, notes on preparation, discourses on the art of sneakery. The social engineering

section includes more than twenty pages on lying and disguises. Chapman, who is known as Ninjalicious in UE circles, goes over all the essential points about equipment, legalities, research, building plans, aerial photography, and GPS systems.

The second half of the book cleverly alternates between anecdotes and site-specific techniques. Chapman explains the hazards and secrets of infiltrating active sites, exploring construction sites and abandoned buildings, navigating tunnels and drain systems, boarding freighters, and probing old mines. He includes a helpful glossary in the back to familiarize the neophyte with insider terminology such as crater (a verb), darkies (cavernous tunnels deep in the heart of a city that lead out into the middle of the wilderness), and my personal favorite, geocaching: "using GPS units to locate hidden caches of goods based on coordinates and clues."

The book clearly wasn't intended as a tactical manual for direct action—in fact, it takes a strong anti-theft, anti-vandalism, and pro-hobby stance when it comes to trespassing, though it does extend sup-



port to squatters and the homeless. All the same, I am struck by how useful these techniques can be in our community. After only a few months of investigating buildings and "half-truthing" employees, you should be ready to walk calmly through a business convention in a convincing disguise; after a year of slipping unnoticed onto freighters and military bases, think what you'll be prepared to accomplish!

Jeff Chapman completed this book in July of 2005, after publishing *Infiltration* for nine years; only a few weeks later, he succumbed to Cholangiocarcinoma, a rare cancer he had been fighting for years. The book has been passed on to others, who continue to distribute it in his memory.

review by resident sneak and snoop Guy Heckle; motivational support provided by Bobby "fuh-shizzley" Hester

Flaming Arrows

a compilation of works by
Rod Coronado—and a benefit
for his legal fund

<http://flamingarrows.mountainrebel.net/>

Flaming Arrows is an excellent compilation of Rod Coronado's writings from previously released zines, *Strong Hearts* and *Memories of Freedom*, and some of his articles recently published in the *Earth First!* journal. It includes most of *Strong Hearts* issues 1 through 4, with the exception of some articles that are outdated or better articulated elsewhere, and all of *Memories of Freedom* beyond the introductory information about anarchism and the Animal Liberation Front.

Rod Coronado has devoted his life to education and action towards animal and Earth liberation. A loving father, a dedicated warrior, a passionate and kind person, Rod has been a strong and compelling voice in the ecological defense movement, inspiring many young hearts to act fiercely out



of love for the Earth and all things wild. For more than twenty years, Rod has been writing zines and articles, contributing to the *EF!* journal, touring with roadshows, and giving lectures and interviews—even from prison. In 1995 he served a four-year prison sentence, after spending three years underground, for an arson at Michigan State University's mink

research facilities. Currently he is serving an eight-month term for sabotaging a mountain lion hunt outside Tucson in 2004. His release is set for March 28, 2007. However, Rod also faces up to twenty years in prison for a speech that he gave in which he answered a question about how the incendiary devices used in the Michigan arson were made.

In his writings, he details his campaigns of sabotage on sea and land against the whaling industry and fur farms, and chronicles his experiences with native animals and their human relations, retelling the stories of their near-extinction on this continent—as well as the beautiful ways in which they fight for survival. Rod writes riveting tales of adventure and bravery, intertwined with intimate stories of heartbreak and rage. He writes with a powerful spirituality, connecting anarchist and environmentalist ideas to the traditions of indigenous resistance passed down to him by his Pascua Yaqui elders. Rod's writing is not only a cry for all that has been lost, it is a call to all people to act.

Flaming Arrows was lovingly compiled and bound by a compañero without Rod's knowledge. Proceeds from this book go directly to Rod.

Please support Rod. Visit his support website at <http://www.supportrod.org/>

Paper Television

by The Blow

K Records (www.kreco.com)

Have you ever day-dreamed about what would happen if right-on people made a pitch-perfect DIY pop record coming from the punk scene, complete with expert original production and delightfully playful and heady lyrics delivered with beautifully earnest vocals? I have, too. Well, our danceable deliverance has arrived.

With the addition of Jonas Bechtolt, The Blow's newest album, *Paper Television*, delivers on the promise of all Khaela Maricich's earlier solo efforts. Her first releases, some as The Blow, some not, tended more towards forms of performance art and, while enriching, were not always as musical or soulful as they could have been. Now, thanks to the capable musical assistance of Bechtolt, Maricich's playful and clever vocals finally have the musical accompaniment they deserve. The result is not only truly engaging music for the masses, but also some real substance too.

Her lyrics meander effortlessly back and forth from the political to the personal—in fact this is one of the most intellectually honest and complicated albums to come out of Olympia since the Riot Grrrl movement of yesteryear. Third-wave feminists can be proud of the frank discussion of sexuality and sex accompanied by the strong assertion of personal identity and demands to be seen.

"Pile of Gold" starts off the album cleverly using the metaphor of capitalist economic principles to describe the commodification of female sexuality—and you can dance to it! Maricich then effortlessly segues into the modern love song "Parentheses," telling her lover, "If something in the deli aisle / Makes you cry / Of course I'll put my arm around you / And I'll walk you outside / Through the sliding doors / Why would I mind? . . . And when you're holding me / We make a pair of parentheses / There's plenty of space



to encase / Whatever weird way my mind goes / I know I'll be safe in these arms." And that's just the first two songs. Her love and her relationships, with people and the universe, lead her through ten songs of fruitful exploration. Towards the end of the album, in "Fists Up," the personal and the political collide and combine to make the mash-up complete with the most energized song on the album, "My love is a fortress / My love is the Louvre / But it can't ever thrive / If I'm forced to keep proving it."

(ps: You can buy a digital copy of this album at krecs.com for \$5, with no evil DRM.)

Consensus:

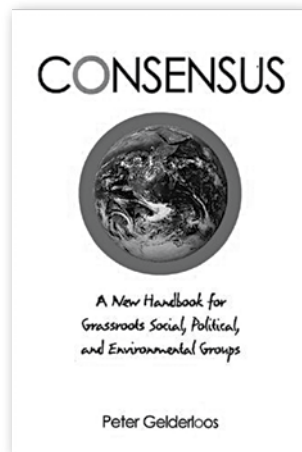
A New Handbook for Grassroots Social, Political, and Environmental Groups by Peter Gelderloos

See Sharp Press (www.seesharppress.com)

Why use consensus? Because it feels great to cooperate with others! Because we all deserve control over our lives and the projects we share. Because consensus is flexible and fun!

Every day, we make decisions on our own and with others. We have meetings or round-table discussions over meals, at home, or at work. We get together with friends to install new flooring, plan events, or make dinner. Much of this decision making—whether formal or informal—happens naturally in a participatory, consensual way. When people are comfortable and information is well-distributed, decision making happens easily. However, a formal consensus process can facilitate difficult decision making in uncomfortable situations; it can also be a great tool for exposing the subtle hierarchies that often develop within groups and compensating for them. Gelderloos' *Consensus* provides a clear instruction manual for learning one kind of formal consensus process. Based on models developed within anarchist, anti-racist, and queer activist communities, the book begins with some thoughts on representation and leadership, then dives in.

For those unfamiliar with this particular consensus process, it can be really intimidating to enter a meeting in which people are using mysterious hand signals according to a complex and ever-shifting set of rules. The same can be said for this book. For folks who have had some exposure to this formal consensus process and want to deepen or refresh their understanding, this book is great—and a good reference to have around. For folks that are new to these ideas, I recommend reading the book as a group to offset the dull educational tone—or even turning it into a workshop to share the information



with your organization or neighborhood in a more approachable format¹.

Gelderloos appropriately shifts the center of gravity from making decisions towards sharing knowledge and synthesizing ideas. He also points out that by setting goals early within an overarching strategy, people can focus their efforts and stand a better chance of avoiding the all-consuming feedback loop of working out problems by creating more process.

Gelderloos' depiction of this consensus process reflects my own experiences within those activist communities fairly well. Describing a spectrum from basic discus-

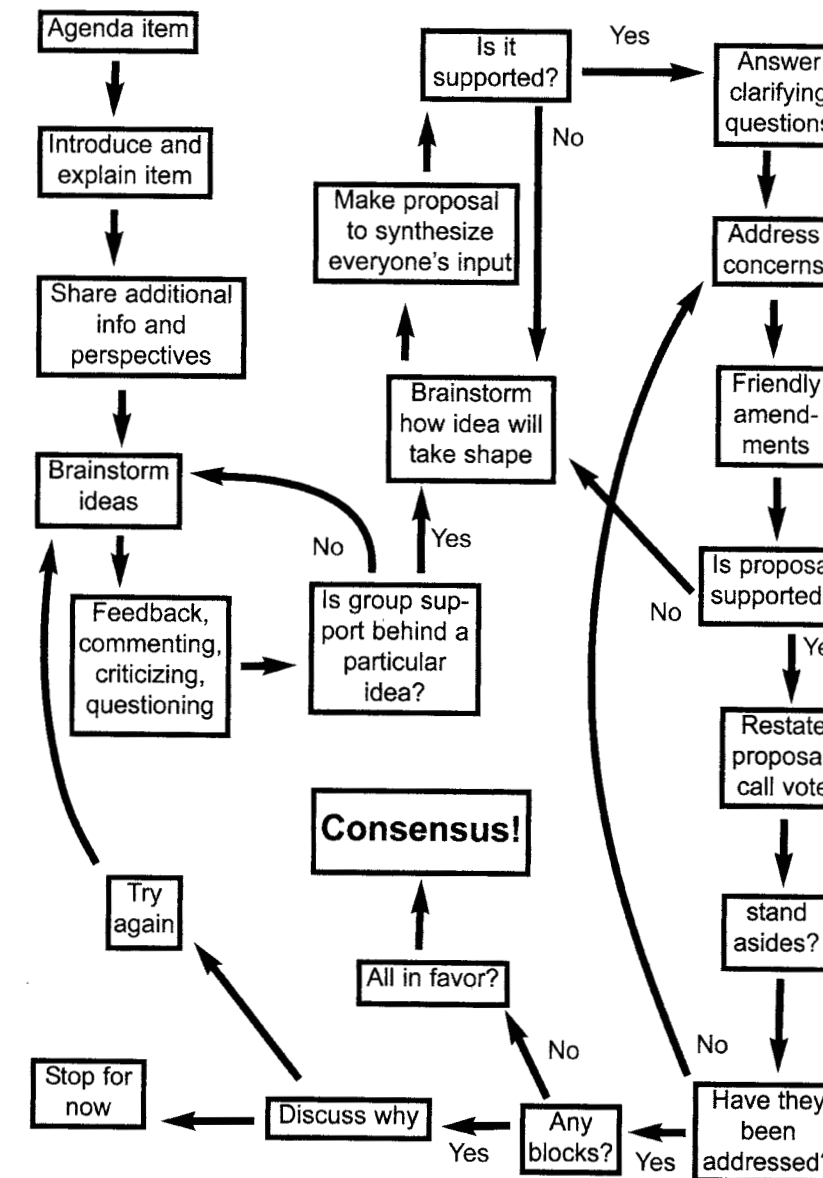
Decision-Making Types Pluses and Minuses

	Representation	Autonomous Action	Spontaneous Consensus	Consensus Process
Large groups	+	-	-	
Across distances	+		-	-
Prevents hierarchy	-	+		+
Leads to individual growth	-	+		+
Leads to collective growth	-		+	+
Expedient		+	+	

+ Decision-making type is effective
- Decision-making type is ineffective
no mark Neutral or mixed

¹ Flow charts, graphs, sample dialogues, and scenarios are already included in the book.

Reaching Consensus



sion patterns to complex tools that can be utilized to relieve tension and ferret out conflict, this model provides many options for the needs of groups ranging from easy to quite emotionally strenuous².

My experience has always been that the better people's individual relationships are and the more openly communication is

happening outside of meetings, the more smoothly and quickly meetings will go. As long as people can remain receptive and without ownership of ideas, informal brainstorming and debate result in ideas entering the formal process as more well-developed, mutually-authored concepts. Also, the more comfortable and capable people feel addressing concerns about work or interpersonal dynamics with one another on their own—with the group's support available, of course—the less those things need to be addressed in the larger group. And that's good for everyone!

To that end, I recommend putting as much energy into socializing as into having

² Although I'd always imagined the "direct response" hand signal to look more like my forefingers moving back and forth between my mouth and the person speaking as if to say "my mouth has something to say to your mouth" and rather less like a gun pointed at the person you want to respond to, as Gelderloos describes it. But I guess that simply speaks more to the personality of the groups I've been involved with.



meetings, as much time into getting to know one another deeply as into implementing a flawless process, as much effort into talking about your unmet needs now as into talking about all the beautiful things you want for the future, and as much courage into opening yourself up to others as into trying to find solutions to problems.

Ekintza Zuzena

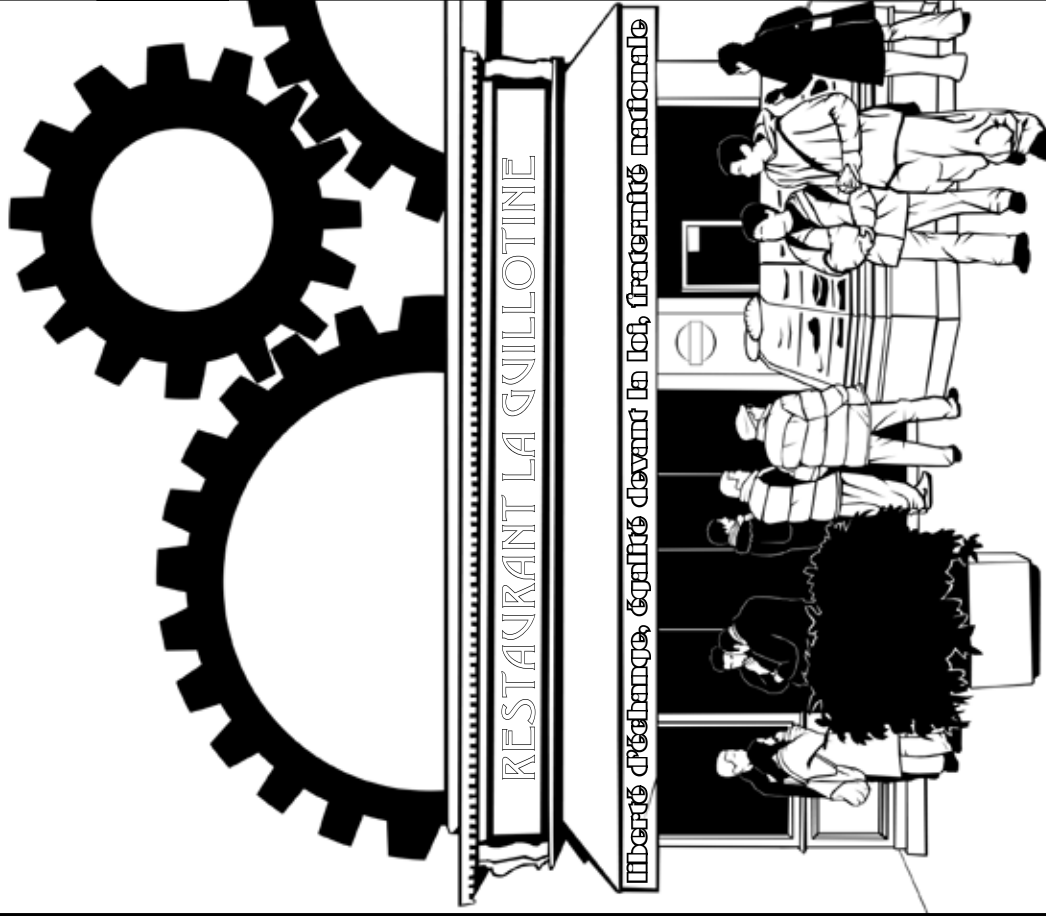
Edicion No.33 AÑO 2006

Excelente Revista Libertaria Vasca nacida en 1988 en Bilbo (Biskaia), sus textos estan escritos en castellano y euskera, consevida asi misma como un espacio para la reflexion, el debate y critica encaminada a conocer e interrogar las luchas sociales y comprender los acontecimientos que nos rodean. De este no.33 destacan; Algunas Notas Sobre la Militancia Politica, texto dirigido a analizar "el compromiso politico en tiempos de confusion y faltas de expectativas," algo acerca de los recientes acontecimientos en Francia, tambien un dossier Carcel que cuenta con entrevistas "La carcel des dentro y desde fuera," "Llevo un año fuera y todavia sueño con la carcel," una breve informacion sobre presos en lucha, tambien una entrevista acerca de Magonismo "Perspectivas Historicas de un Modelo Anarquico Mexicano," mas otros textos muy diversos ademas de una extraordinaria seccion de humor, reseñas y libros. Para ponerte ne contacto con E.Z. puedes visitar su pagina web: www.nodo50.org/ekintza

THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

"Money is like an arm or a leg—use it or lose it."

Henry Ford



Taken from the full-length exposé *Abolish Restaurants*, available from: www.prole.info, P.O. Box 20442, Seattle, WA 98102

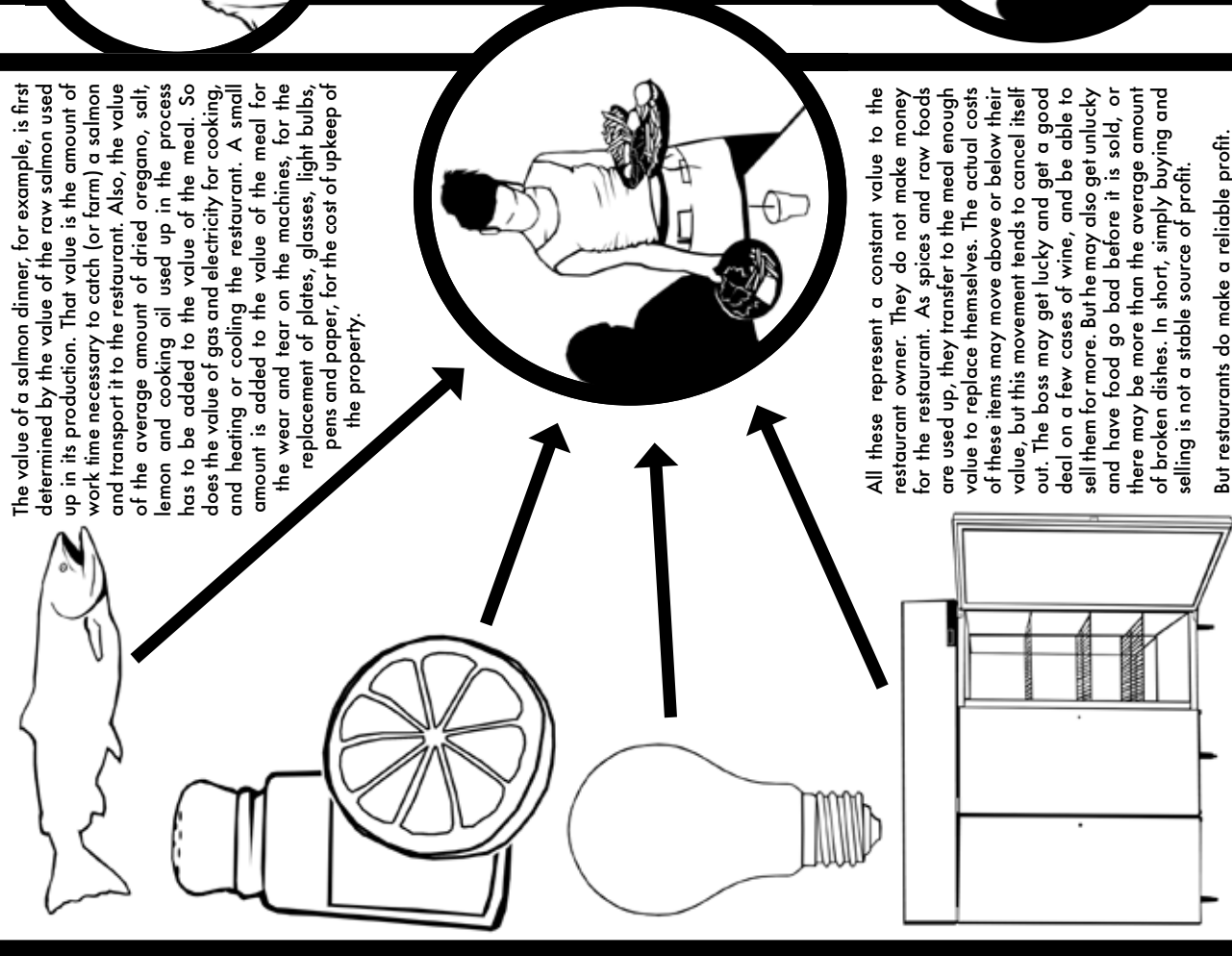
The customers see in a restaurant a meal—prepared food to be eaten on the premises. They also see a place to go out and socialize—a semi-public place, a place to do business, to celebrate one's birthday, to take a date. Customers buy food, but they also buy atmosphere, culture, the experience of a restaurant meal. Customers like restaurants. They are the consumers.



The restaurant owner is the seller. They are really in charge of the production process, and what they have for sale tends to shape the demand of the customers. The restaurant owner isn't in business out of a desire to feed people. They're in it to make money. Maybe the owner was a chef or a waiter who worked his way up. Maybe he was born into money and has no background in restaurant work. In any case, when they go into business for themselves, restaurant owners want one thing: to make money.

They buy ovens, refrigerators, pots, pans, glasses, napkins, knives, cutting boards, silverware, tables, chairs, wine, liquor, cleaning equipment, raw and canned foods, oils, spices, and everything else that is needed to run a modern restaurant. The value of these things is determined by the amount of work time necessary to make them. As they are used up, that value makes its way into the value of a restaurant meal.

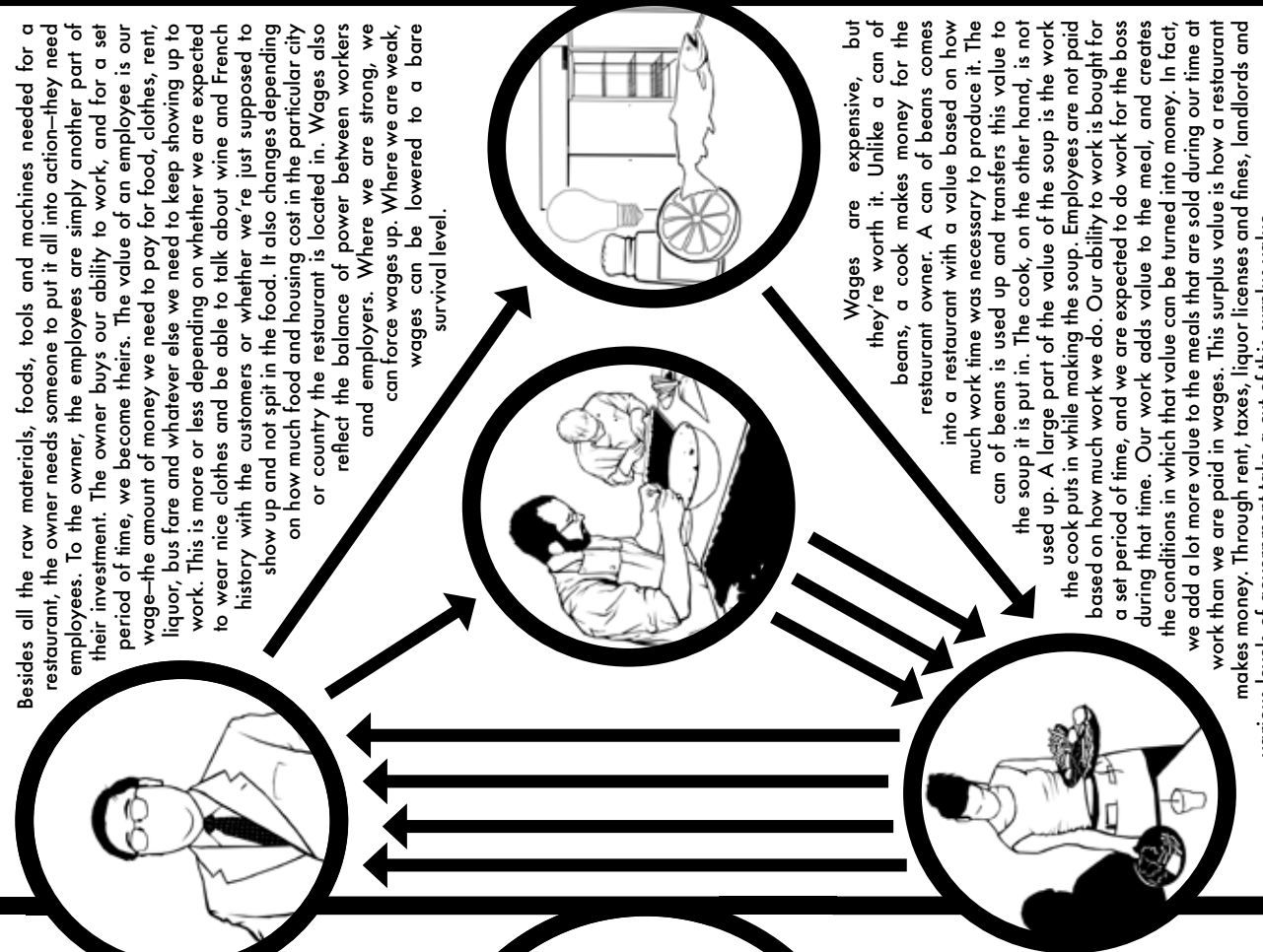
The value of a salmon dinner, for example, is first determined by the value of the raw salmon used up in its production. That value is the amount of work-time necessary to catch (or farm) a salmon and transport it to the restaurant. Also, the value of the average amount of dried oregano, salt, lemon and cooking oil used up in the process has to be added to the value of the meal. So does the value of gas and electricity for cooking, and heating or cooling the restaurant. A small amount is added to the value of the meal for the wear and tear on the machines, for the replacement of plates, glasses, light bulbs, pens and paper, for the cost of upkeep of the property.



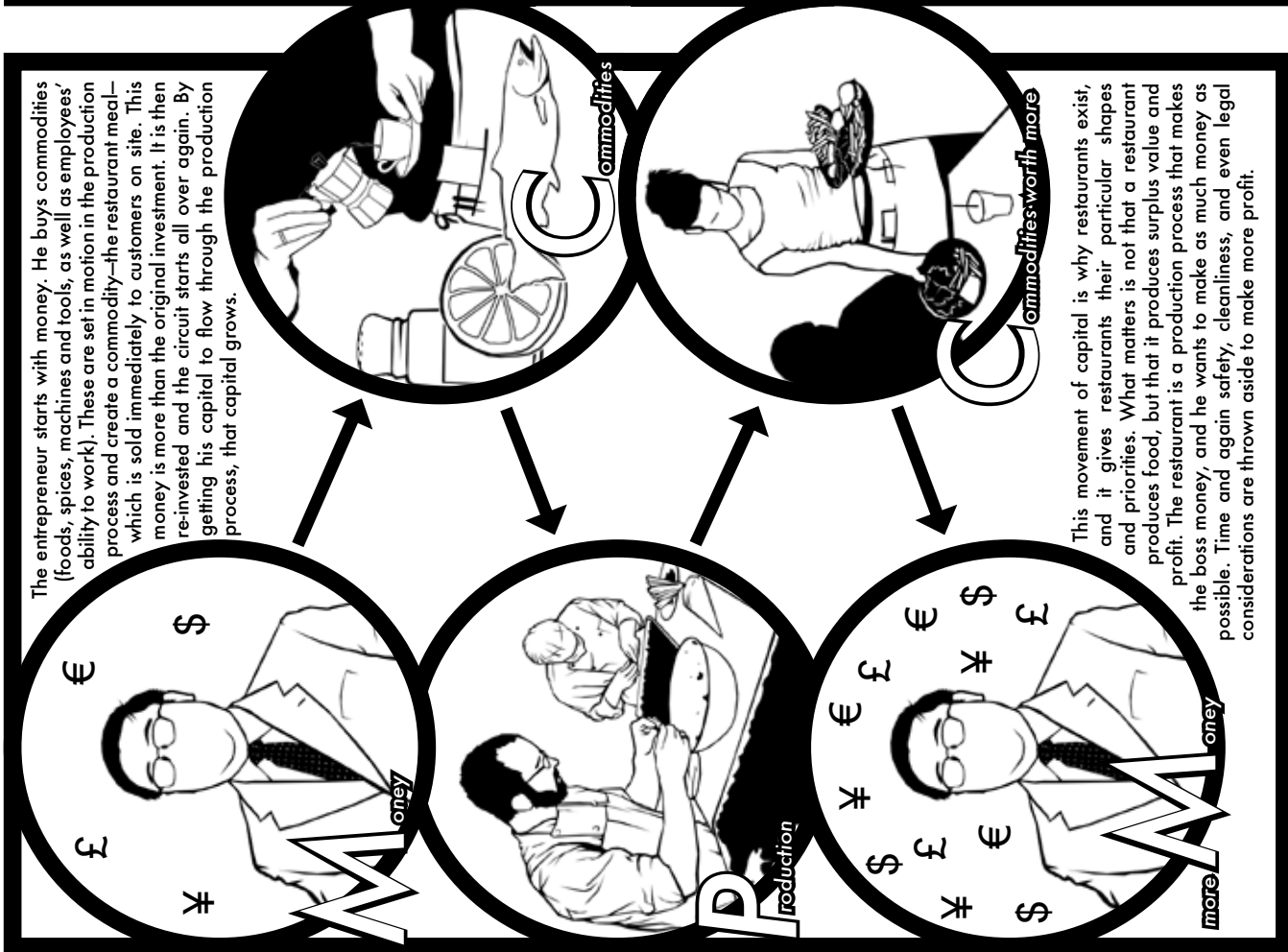
All these represent a constant value to the restaurant owner. They do not make money for the restaurant. As spices and raw foods are used up, they transfer to the meal enough value to replace themselves. The actual costs of these items may move above or below their value, but this movement tends to cancel itself out. The boss may get lucky and get a good deal on a few cases of wine, and be able to sell them for more. But he may also get unlucky and have food go bad before it is sold, or there may be more than the average amount of broken dishes. In short, simply buying and selling is not a stable source of profit.

But restaurants do make a reliable profit.

Besides all the raw materials, foods, tools and machines needed for a restaurant, the owner needs someone to put it all into action—they need employees. To the owner, the employees are simply another part of their investment. The owner buys our ability to work, and for a set period of time, we become theirs. The value of an employee is our wage—the amount of money we need to pay for food, clothes, rent, liquor, bus fare and whatever else we need to keep showing up to work. This is more or less depending on whether we are expected to wear nice clothes and be able to talk about wine and French history with the customers or whether we're just supposed to show up and not spit in the food. It also changes depending on how much food and housing cost in the particular city or country the restaurant is located in. Wages also reflect the balance of power between workers and employers. Where we are strong, we can force wages up. Where we are weak, wages can be lowered to a bare survival level.



Wages are expensive, but they're worth it. Unlike a can of beans, a cook makes money for the restaurant owner. A can of beans comes into a restaurant with a value based on how much work time was necessary to produce it. The can of beans is used up and transfers this value to the soup it is put in. The cook, on the other hand, is not used up. A large part of the value of the soup is the work the cook puts in while making the soup. Employees are not paid based on how much work we do. Our ability to work is bought for a set period of time, and we are expected to do work for the boss during that time. Our work adds value to the meal, and creates the conditions in which that value can be turned into money. In fact, we add a lot more value to the meals that are sold during our time at work than we are paid in wages. This surplus value is how a restaurant makes money. Through rent, taxes, liquor licenses and fines, landlords and various levels of government take a cut of this surplus value.



The restaurant represents something very different to the workers. Those who work in a restaurant don't do it because we want to. We have no other way to make a living but to sell our ability to work to someone else—and it might as well be a restaurant owner. We don't make food because we like to make food or because we want to make food for this or that particular customer. When cleaning the floors or opening wine bottles, we aren't fulfilling a need for some kind of meaningful activity. We are simply trading our time for a wage. That is what the restaurant represents to us.

Our time and activity in the restaurant is not our own—it belongs to management. Although everything in the restaurant is put into motion and works only because we make it work, the restaurant is something outside and against us. The harder we work, the more money the restaurant makes. The less we are paid, the more money the restaurant makes. It is rare that the workers in a restaurant can afford to eat regularly at the restaurant they work in. It is common for restaurant workers to carry plates of exquisite food around all night, while having nothing but coffee and bread in our stomachs. A restaurant can't function without workers, but there is a constant conflict between the workers and the work. Simply standing up for ourselves makes us fight against the production process. We catch our breath during a dinner rush and slow down the production of a meal. We steal food, cut corners, or just stand and talk, and in the process cut into production. The boss, who represents the production process, is constantly enforcing it on us. We are yelled at if we're not doing anything or if we're not doing something faster than humanly possible or if we make mistakes that slow down money-making. We come to hate the work and to hate the boss. The struggle between restaurant workers and restaurant management is just as much a part of restaurants as the food, wine, tables, chairs, or check presenters.

"THE BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAIN"
 (trad. version by Harry McClintock AKA Haywire Mac)

One evening as the sun went down
 Down the track came a hobo hiking
 "Boys, I'm not turning
 I'm headed for a land that's far away,
 So come with me--we'll go and see the
 Big Rock Candy Mountains!"

and the jungle fire was burning
 and he said, beside the crystal fountains

In the BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS there's a land that's fair and bright
 where the handouts grow on bushes and you sleep out every night
 where the boxcars are all empty and the sun shines every day
 where the birds and the bees and the cigarette trees
 on the lemonade springs, where the bluebird sing's
 where the Big Rock Candy Mountains
 in the Big Rock Candy Mountains

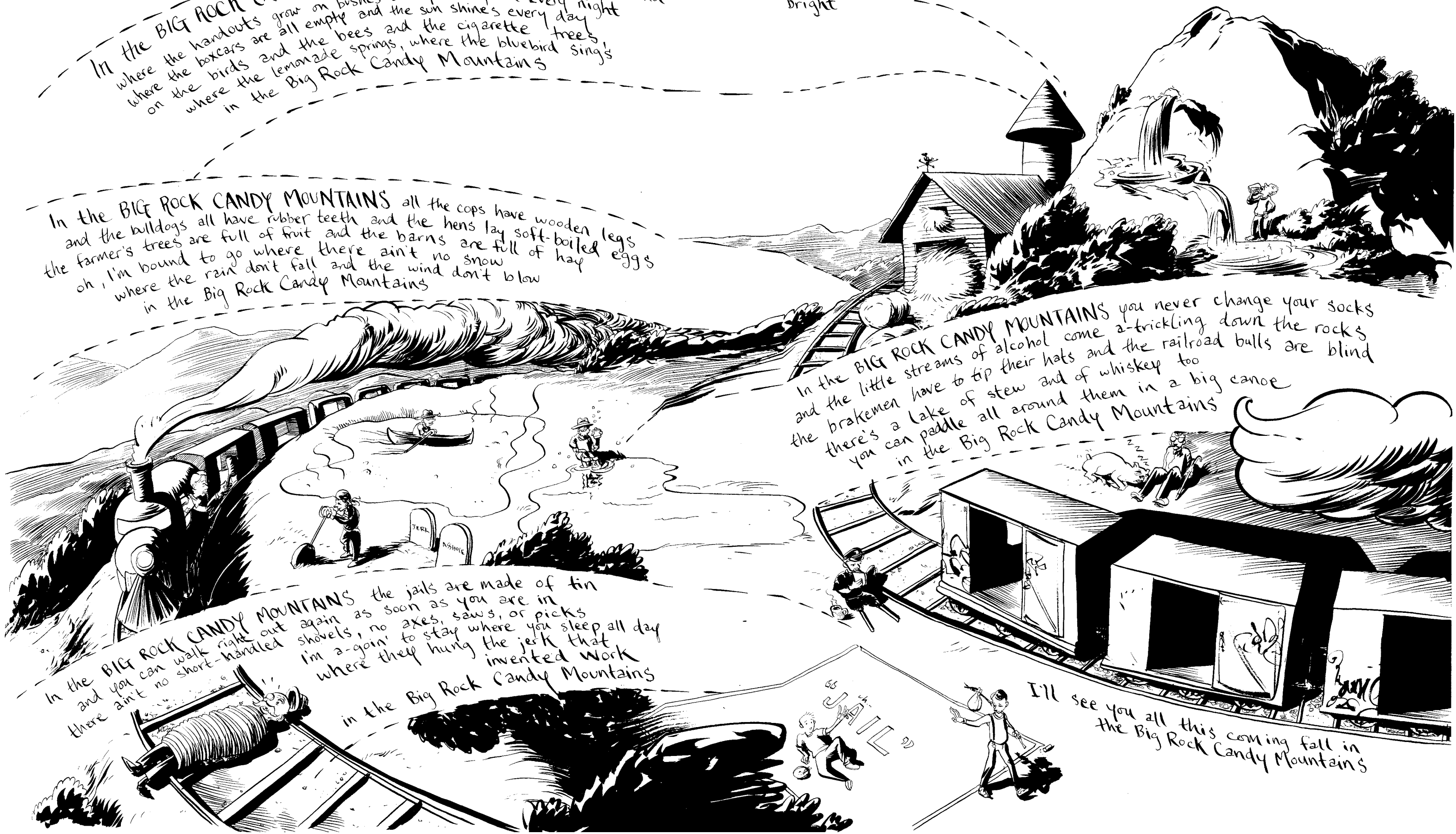
In the BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS all the cops have wooden legs
 and the bulldogs all have rubber teeth and the hens lay soft-boiled eggs
 the farmer's trees are full of fruit and the barns are full of hay
 oh, I'm bound to go where there ain't no snow
 where the rain don't fall and the wind don't blow
 in the Big Rock Candy Mountains

bright

In the BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS you never change your socks
 and the little streams of alcohol come a-trickling down the rocks
 the brakemen have to tip their hats and the railroad bulls are blind
 there's a lake of stew and of whiskey too
 you can paddle all around them in a big canoe
 in the Big Rock Candy Mountains

In the BIG ROCK CANDY MOUNTAINS the jails are made of tin
 and you can walk right out again as soon as you are in
 there ain't no short-handled shovels, no axes, saws, or picks
 I'm a-goin' to stay where you sleep all day
 where they hung the jerk that invented work
 in the Big Rock Candy Mountains

I'll see you all this coming fall in
 the Big Rock Candy Mountains



The Secret World of Terijian

(Excerpt)

This is a teaser from the book The Secret World of Terijian, which has just been published as a benefit for victims of the Green Scare. It is available for \$6; all the proceeds after production costs goes directly to earth and animal liberation prisoners and defendants. To read the story in its entirety, contact:

CrimethInc. Northstar
P.O. Box 40338
St. Paul, MN 55104
www.crimethinc.be

Once there was a little boy named Connor. He was a small child, much smaller than the rest of his peers, and he didn't get along with them much. In fact, he spent a lot of time playing alone.

Connor lived in a neighborhood in which the only other children were very young, too young to walk, let alone play. Don't start feeling bad for Connor, though—he was quite content with being on his own.

Connor's house was built on the edge of a great forest. This is where he spent much of his time between waking up and falling asleep. Little Connor would go into the forests just beyond where his lawn ended, and he would enter a world of make-believe.

Hours were spent playing in this make-believe world. It was not surprising for an animal there to speak to you. Faeries and elves existed and played there, too, and magick was as common as the warm summer breeze.

Connor affectionately called the woods and the world that existed in them Terijian. It was named after a mythic elf that Connor believed had once lived in the forest, who had, according to legend, fought off many great beasts and dragons that wished to destroy it.

Little did Connor know that the world of Terijian actually existed! This secret world of enchantment was hidden just beyond his world of make-believe, right next to the world of mundane things.

There were all kinds of secrets in this world. Magick did exist, and it flowed through everything that lived. Faeries flew through the air by day and at night their lights danced in the sky. And the best-kept secret was the elves that lived in the forest and protected it from harm.

This fantastic everyday world was hidden to Connor. That is, it was, until one day early in summer, a new family moved in down the street. Connor heard that there was a young girl who lived there. Even though he was excited at the prospect of another child his age, he was too shy to introduce himself.

One day, Connor peered out his window and saw the little girl trotting down the street. She had her hands in her pockets as she made her way down the road, up his driveway, and finally right up to his front step. There was a tap at the door, and little Connor peeked out the window before pulling the door open.

The little girl stood on the step wearing a shirt two sizes too big. She withdrew one hand from a pocket of her short shorts and said, "Hi!" with a big smile and a slight wave. "I'm Moriko. My family just moved in up the block."

"I'm Connor," he stated, his hand still cautiously on the door handle.

"Wanna play?" she asked, kicking her foot.

"Alright." Connor grabbed his shoes and stepped onto the porch. "But I have to be back before dusk."

"Okay," replied Moriko as Connor tied his shoes. "So what do you usually do around here?"

Connor hopped up and suggested, "We could go in the woods and play make-believe."

Moriko agreed, and the two little ones scurried through

Connor's backyard up to the edge of the lawn, and then stepped into the forest. The leaves rustled in the wind, blocking out the busy noises of the rest of the world.

The two children began playing a game of make-believe as they entered the woods. Connor became Astor, the druid of Terijian, guiding the warrior Ylva to a sacred grove deep in the forest.

As they journeyed through the forest, the children saw two young deer walking along a path through the trees. The children stopped their play and watched. One deer nuzzled its head against the other before galloping off through the woods. The other pranced quickly behind the first, and the two circled and chased each other into the forest.

Little Moriko and Connor crouched together, looking after the two young deer in amazement. Then Moriko glanced at Connor, bumped her head against his, and darted off through the woods. Connor jumped up and chased after the laughing girl, running through tangled branches and jumping over logs. The rushing forest slowed as they circled each other, giggling in glee.

Connor tagged Moriko before hopping off in another direction. Moriko was much faster than Connor, and she caught up quickly. She reached out her arms and tackled him, and the two rolled down a hill. Leaves flew up as the two tumbled down.

Lying in the leaves at the trunk of a young cottonwood, the two looked up through its branches and tried to catch their breath. "Have you ever noticed how different trees look from the bottom?" Moriko asked as she gazed upward. Connor looked up, and he couldn't quite put his finger on it, but it was as if he had never seen a tree before.

As he lay there appreciating the view of branches against a backdrop of leaves and sky, a tiny squirrel poked its head out from the branches above them. This sent the two children into fits of giggles. The squirrel cocked its head upward towards the tree branches, and Moriko asked, "What do you think it's trying to tell us?"

Connor shrugged as the squirrel scurried up the tree. Moriko jumped up and grabbed one of the lower branches. She pulled herself up onto the first branch, stood up, and looked for another. As she swung up onto another branch, Connor yelled at her, "What are you doing?"

"Come on up," Moriko yelled back, putting her foot on a thick branch and boosting herself up onto the next.

"Nah," Connor said, standing up. "Climbing trees is dumb." Moriko just gave a little laugh before pulling herself up onto a branch. She sat there resting for a moment. "You're just afraid."

"No!" protested Connor. But in fact, Connor was afraid of high places. It can be very hard for people to admit their fears, but it is harder still to face them. Connor yelled up to Moriko, "I just don't feel like climbing. Let's do something else."

"Come on," Moriko replied as she swung her legs, "we can climb to the top and look over the top of the forest!"

It would be a nice view, Connor thought, but it's way too dangerous. Even thinking of sitting on the lowest branch made his stomach uneasy.

Moriko stood up on her branch and stepped over to a neighboring one. One of her feet slipped as she moved, twisting Connor's stomach. She peered through the branches and leaves of the tree, and she slowly parted some of the smaller branches as she inched along the branch.

"Hey Connor!" she yelled down as she peered out of the tree, "There's a nest over there!"

Connor's eyes followed her pointing finger. Squinting in the bright sun, he noticed a bundle of twigs by the top of a nearby oak tree. A bird was perched in the nest, watching its surroundings.

"Let's go look at it."

Sliding down the tree, Moriko got to the ground even faster than she had gotten to the top. The two little ones scurried over to the grove of oaks. Looking up through the branches, Moriko asked, "What kind of bird do you think it is?"

The bird's light brown head scanned the tops of the trees intently. It rustled its feathers, revealing a patchwork of brown and white, before lowering its dark red tail over its little ones.

It only took Connor a moment before he exclaimed, "It's a hawk!"

Moriko started to climb a branch, "Let's go talk to it."

"No, you don't want to scare it away." Connor pulled her down. "We have to make friends with it first."

"Good idea."

Connor admired the beautiful creature as he said, "I want one of its feathers."

"Ask her for one," Moriko replied.

Connor looked up at the hawk and yelled, "Mrs. Hawk!" "Hey!" Moriko hit Connor. "How do you know that she's married?"

"Oh yeah." He started over: "Ms. Hawk? Would you mind giving me one of your feathers?"

The hawk looked down towards him before turning her eyes back towards the forest. Tiny hawks tried to peek out from under their mother's feathers. To Connor, they just looked like puffs of fluff.

"She says you have to earn it," Moriko stated with a laugh.

"Earn it?" Connor thought. Some people admire animals by killing them to hang on walls or wear as clothing, but that seemed like a dumb idea to Connor. "How do I earn a feather?" he asked.

The hawk spread its wings and flew past the trees and over a clearing. The two stepped forward and watched the creature fly. It swooped down over the valley that lay between the two sides of the forest. It screeched as it soared over the woods near the end of the valley. Circling the trees a few more times, the hawk let out its cry, "KEEer!"

Moriko looked over at Connor. "She said that to earn a feather, we have to save the forest."

"From what?" Connor was puzzled. The forest had never been in any kind of *real* trouble before.

Moriko looked out across the clearing. "I'm not sure what, but I think it might be over there." She raised a finger to where the hawk circled. Noises roared out from the trees, and wisps of black smoke rose above the forest's canopy.

“Come on, Astor. Let’s go.”

Connor and Moriko walked through the valley. The grass around them stretched to over twice their height. It whipped and waved as the wind blew between the forests. The rustling of a thousand leaves filled the air.

The two little ones followed the wisps of black smoke that lingered in the air. By the time they entered the other side of the forest, they could no longer see the smoke through the canopy. Instead, the two followed the growls coming from deep in the forest.

Stepping up the steep hill, the two adventurers arrived at the edge of a clearing. Connor had never seen this clearing before. There was no life on the ground. There were no flowers or even grass. Instead, there was only dirt and caked mud.

Ancient trees lay on their sides, naked and stripped of their branches. Giant entangling roots were severed from their trunks, still grasping uprooted soil. Where young trees had once stood, now there were only snapped and broken trunks.

Connor fell into the giant tracks that cut through the ground. His knees sunk in the mud as he knelt before a dying tree. Little Connor could not help but let tears fill his eyes. And although some think it is a terrible thing for boys to cry, especially in front of a girl, Connor let the tiny tears fall. They trickled down his nose and dropped to wet the ground.

Moriko looked across the stretch of barren ground before sitting down on her feet and wrapping her arms around Connor, holding him tight. Connor let himself cry in her arms for a while before eventually rising to his feet.

Moriko looked away from his teary eyes and wiped at her own. The two looked up the hill. A big yellow machine sat at the end of the path of broken trees and torn ground.

“That’s what we need to save the forest from,” Moriko stated as she gazed steadily at the machine. “That is what’s destroying the forest.”

The machine looked like a dingy yellow dragon of monstrous proportions. The tracks alone were as wide as Connor’s outstretched arms, and the wheels must have been at least twice his height. At the front of the machine, there were massive claws and buzzing saws that cut like gnashing teeth.

“How are we supposed to stop that?” Connor stammered, disheartened.

Moriko sat quietly, looking at the broken trees. “I don’t know.”

“Maybe the elves will help?” Connor wondered aloud with just the slightest glimmer of hope in his eye.

“The elves?” asked Moriko curiously.

“Yeah, elves!” Connor replied, looking back at Moriko with wide eyes. “Elves live in forests and protect them. Forests like this one.”

“Oh, I believe in elves,” Moriko reassured him. “But do you really think they live in *this* forest?”

“Sure. Elves live in all forests. They only leave when they can no longer protect the forest. That’s when forests die.”

“How do you suppose we contact these elves?” Moriko asked suspiciously.

“I’m not sure,” replied Connor, “But maybe they appear when they’re needed.” Connor took notice of the darkening

sky. The sun had already dipped below the horizon, and its light was quickly fading. “It’s getting dark though. I probably need to be getting home.”

Moriko took a look at the sky and another look back at the machine. “We need to come back.”

“We will tomorrow,” said Connor as he began walking back into the forest, “but I need to get home, or I’ll be in big trouble.”

Sighing heavily, Moriko turned and ran after Connor. The two little ones rushed home as the sky darkened. When they passed into Connor’s backyard, they parted ways. Connor crept into his house just as dinner was set on the table.

“Connor!” His mother looked at his muddy shoes and dirty overalls. “Wash up and change! Dinner’s ready.”

Connor kicked off his shoes, hurried up the stairs, and changed clothes. After washing his hands, he finally sat down at the table. Connor remained quiet as he ate. His mother peered over at him and watched as the little boy pushed his food around, sighed, and took distracted bites.

“You’re awfully quiet, Connor.”

The little boy shrugged as he stared down at his plate. “Is something wrong?”

Resting his face against his hand, Connor replied, “Why is the forest being destroyed?”

“Destroyed?” His mother asked with surprise.

“There was a big yellow machine out in the woods, and it had cut down a lot of the trees.”

“It’s not being destroyed, Connor. They’re clearing the way for a new road so more people can move near this neighborhood. I’ll bet that in one of those houses there will be another kid your age, and you will have another friend.”

Connor thought about this. He liked the idea of having more kids his age around, but Moriko had just moved in. Besides, he liked the forest more.

“But what about the forest? Can’t people move somewhere else?”

“Well, you see Connor, they are also setting up electric lines. Not only will we have cheaper electricity, but we will also be able to get more channels on the television.”

Connor thought about this again. He liked the idea of having more channels on the television, but he didn’t watch it much anymore. Besides, he liked the forest more.

“But what about the animals in the forest, mother?”

“You know, Connor, they are actually planning to build a park too. Instead of having to play around in the woods, you will be able to go on slides and swings.”

Connor thought about this, too. He liked playing on slides and swings, but it was never as fun as exploring and adventuring in the woods. Finally, Connor came to a conclusion. He liked the forest more.

Like most mothers, Connor’s mother worried about him. She knew it might be unsafe for him to be out there near the construction site. What if a cut tree fell on him, or worse? She forbid Connor to go near the site.

“Connor, I want you to stay away from the construction and the machines. It’s dangerous, and you might get hurt. Promise me you won’t go near it.”

Connor thought about the hawk and his adventure to

earn a feather, but his mother had told him not to go there. So, quietly, he agreed, “I promise I won’t.”

After finishing his food and washing his plate, Connor spent the rest of the time between dinner and bedtime pondering the situation in the woods. When his mother sent him off to bed, he was still quite confused.

He brushed his teeth, changed into his pajamas, and even pulled up his covers, but Connor was still restless. He lay in bed thinking for what felt like forever. He didn’t like that the woods were being destroyed, but he didn’t know what else he could do.

There is nothing I can do about it. This is too big of a situation for someone as little as me.

Just as this thought came to his mind, there was a tap at his window on the other side of the room. He rolled out of bed just as there came another tap. He crept forward slowly, and as he peered out the window another tap made him jump back.

He looked out again. Across his lawn, little Moriko waved at him, holding a handful of tiny rocks. Connor opened his window, and she crept across the lawn.

“What are you doing here?” Connor demanded. “It’s the middle of the night.”

“Let’s go out in the woods,” Moriko said with a mischievous grin.

“What?” Connor said in shock. “It’s midnight, I can’t go out. Plus, I told my mom I wouldn’t go out there anymore. I would get in trouble for sure.”

“Only if we get caught.” Moriko tugged at his arm with a grin. “Let’s go! We’ll be back in a little bit.”

“Moriko, no!”

Putting her hands on her hips, Moriko challenged him. “What are you, scared?”

“No.” Connor paused. But when he couldn’t think of an excuse, he said in defeat, “I’ll go change.”

“Hurry!” Moriko whispered with a giggle.

Connor slipped on his black overalls and tied up his shoes before sneaking out the window. The two crept through the backyard and into the woods. The canopy of leaves hid the forest from the bright light of the moon, leaving a world shrouded in darkness.

Now, Connor wasn’t especially afraid of the dark, but that had always been in the darkness of his own room—a mere veil pulled over familiar surroundings. But as he and Moriko made their way through the woods, he experienced a completely different feeling. It wasn’t so much a fear of the dark, but more of a fear of what hid in the dark. Little Connor couldn’t help but feel as if there were something following him.

Connor whispered into the night, “What are we doing out here, anyway?”

“I wanted to get a closer look at the machine.”

Hearing the echo of twigs snapping, Connor stammered, “Can’t we do this when it’s light out?”

“Of course not,” Moriko said matter-of-factly, “that’s when the workers are there.”

The two little ones trekked towards the worksite. As



they walked through the valley, the moon provided nearly enough light to make it seem like it was day.

Moving through the wavering reeds, Connor whispered, “Did you hear that?”

Moriko paused. The grass around her swayed in a breeze that was quite cool for a summer’s night. “Hear what?”

“I thought I heard whispering.”

The two stood still as the grass around them swayed and whipped in the wind. “Connor, it’s just the wind.”

“I heard voices,” Connor pleaded, “I swear.”

Moriko looked cautiously through the grass as they neared the edge of the valley. She raised her hand slowly, and through the waving grass, Connor made out the shape of a wolf in the trees. At first there was one, then there was another, and then the whole pack materialized slowly out of the forest.

Moriko stepped out of the grass, and she slowly tiptoed forward. But she suddenly stopped as one of the wolves paused and raised its head towards the two children.

Moriko looked into the creature’s eyes before turning her own eyes away. The wolf took a step forward, and then another. Moriko moved forward, ever so slowly, and the wolf bolted through the trees. The pack turned and ran with it as it darted through the woods.

Connor let his breath go, and the two began ascending the hill. The moonlight illuminated the barren wasteland that the machine had created. As the two little ones neared the clearing, they began to see movement in the woods.

At first, it was as if a blinding wind was blowing through the trees, and it sounded as if animals were scattering through the forest around them. Leaves rustled and fallen branches snapped as figures rushed past. Moriko and Connor ducked to the ground.

The forest’s awakening broke the silence of the night.

Were the trees moving and the forest alive? As fast as this thought came to the children, the noise stopped. The forest grew still, and an eerie silence crept across the clearing, like calm before a storm.

Connor and Moriko crept to the edge of the worksite, crouching behind a fallen tree. Their tiny eyes darted across the surreal landscape of barren ground and torn up roots. Sitting in the middle of this forsaken grove was the yellow monster, sleeping in the moonlight.

Just as Moriko was about to ask about the noise, they saw five dark figures standing at the edge of the clearing. They emerged from the trees in complete black as if they carried the forest’s darkness with them. The figures dispersed swiftly across the barren clearing.

“Do you think those shadows guard the machine?” Moriko asked as she whispered into Connor’s ear. “They might know we are here.”

One of the shadows stood near the edge of the forest peering down the barren strip. Two others moved across the site picking up chainsaws that lay scattered around the worksite. Another ran towards the machine and slid between its massive tracks. The last dropped a bag near the side of the machine.

The two little ones watched in silence as this orchestra of movement took place. They did not know what the two were doing with the tools, and they could not see what the one was doing underneath the machine, but they watched as the one with the bag shook a can noisily.

Among the clatter of the group, a hiss served as a backdrop as the last figure moved the can across the machine. The two little ones watched in puzzlement as the figure sprayed in big red letters: “E . . . L . . . F.”

A smile shot across the faces of the little ones, and in a burst of excitement, they both exclaimed, in voices probably a bit too loud for their circumstance, “It’s the elves!”

The last syllable echoed out across the clearing and through the woods. As if the two had flipped a switch, the elves stopped immediately. The one overseeing the group quickly waved the others to the woods. The figures grabbed whatever gear they had and scattered into the dark forest.

Moriko and Connor jumped out of their hiding spot and into the clearing, yelling, “No! Wait!”

But the figures had left in a trail of rustling leaves and snapping twigs. The two stood bewildered in the middle of the worksite.

The next day, the two little ones snuck through the woods to look over the worksite. The big yellow machine was moving across the clearing by the time they had arrived. It had taken the workers half the day to clean up from the night before. Half the chainsaws were unusable, but the machine roared after the crew of workers replaced a few of the parts that had been damaged. The two little ones walked away from the site, their feet heavy with disappointment.

“What are we going to do now?” Connor asked as he kicked at rocks. “We scared away the elves, the only hope of saving the forest.”

Moriko stopped to sit down on a fallen tree. One side of the tree was charcoal; it must have been struck by lightning. “If the elves are gone, then we’re going to have to be the elves and save the forest ourselves.”

Activity Page:

Message in a Bottle!

Are you experiencing diminishing returns from traditional wheatpasting efforts? Maybe it’s time to try out a new format! Simply xerox this page, tear off this instructive text, burn the edges with a lighter for that “time-worn” effect, cork or otherwise seal the message in an empty bottle, and set it free into the world—say, sailing in a pond in your neighborhood, or floating in a clogged sink in the office washroom. For a more massive propaganda offensive, make a hundred copies of this letter and raid a glass recycling bin or center, then spend a night lobbing them by the dozen into public fountains and outdoor swimming pools. Better yet, organize a party at which you and your friends all write S.O.S. notes of your own—nothing beats a personal touch.

Here’s a hint: if you want the recipient to be able to get the message out without smashing the bottle, roll the paper up smaller than the bottle’s mouth and wrap a rubber band around it.

Whoever finds this—

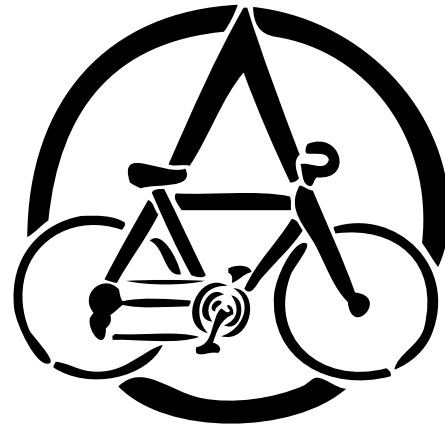
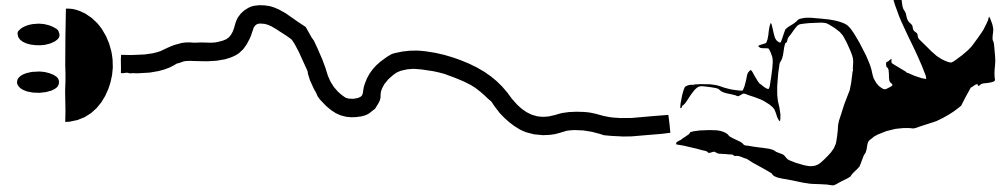
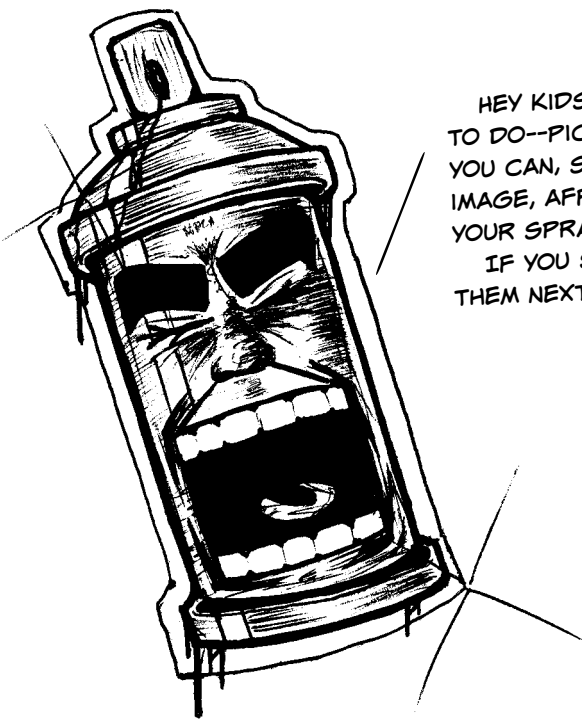
Help, I’m marooned in an alien land, surrounded by dangerous savages, in desperate need of rescue! I can’t know if this will reach anyone, but if it has, all my hopes rest on you.

I thought the last desert island I was stranded on was tough, but this one is really something else. On a normal desert island, you spend all your time alone, with nothing to do except miss being around people; here, I’m surrounded by human beings at all times, yet it’s even lonelier than the South Pacific. On a normal desert island, you’re at the mercy of wild nature, with only your ingenuity to keep you alive; here, technology surrounds me like an impenetrable jungle and even my ingenuity is useless. On a normal desert island, the problem is that you’re shipwrecked and can’t travel home; here anyone can travel anywhere, but nowhere feels like home. On a normal desert island, the days pass like years; here, time is subdivided into minutes and seconds, yet there’s never enough. I’m afraid I’ll turn around and find my whole life has slipped by, like the sailor in the fairy tale who lands on an enchanted island for an afternoon and arrives home old and grey.

My cry for help is probably doomed to be lost in an ocean of other cries—but if this somehow reaches you, please know that there is at least one real person out here longing for rescue. For all I know, you’re marooned here too; if you are, please do what it takes to find me so we can help each other escape.

Yours,

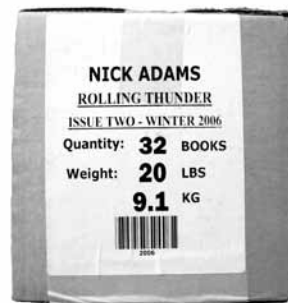
HEY KIDS! WELCOME TO THIS ISSUE'S **STENCIL GALLERY!** YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO--PICK YOUR FAVORITE DESIGN, PHOTOCOPY IT AT THE BIGGEST SIZE YOU CAN, STICK THE COPY TO CARDBOARD OR ACETATE AND CUT OUT THE IMAGE, AFFIX YOUR STENCIL TO A SURFACE IN NEED OF DECORATION, HOLD YOUR SPRAY PAINT CAN EIGHT TO TWELVE INCHES AWAY, AND SPRAY QUICKLY! IF YOU SEE ANY OF THESE UP ANYWHERE, SEND US PHOTOS AND WE'LL PRINT THEM NEXT ISSUE! REMEMBER--BLANK WALLS MEAN BLANK MINDS!



Police officers and insurgent courtesy of Ben Hydra; enraged youth courtesy of BOPF



Commodities



Individual copies of *Rolling Thunder* are \$5; you can get the first three issues together for \$10; if you order ten or more copies for distribution, you can get them at \$3 each.

Rolling Thunder #3, Summer 2006—Our last issue offered coverage of the recent wave of anti-anarchist repression, a retrospective on the work of notorious graffiti artist(s) BORF, and a comprehensive discussion of the struggle against domestic violence. It also featured a how-to guide for funneling resources out of universities, a history of queer direct action, and the usual eyewitness accounts and adventure stories—including a spy’s-eye-view of factory farming and a narrow escape from the flaming Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Rolling Thunder #2, Winter 2006—The second issue of this magazine featured an extensive critique of dropping out as revolutionary strategy, coverage of last summer’s protests against the G8 in Scotland and mountaintop removal in West Virginia, a retrospective on squatting in northern Europe, and a couple heartrending works of fiction.

Rolling Thunder #1, Summer 2005—Our first issue included a massive analysis of the past decade of direct action at demonstrations, feature articles on consent in sexual relationships and alternative conceptions of education, and testimonials from maniacs who squatted their own workplaces and set themselves on fire while fighting police.

Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook—A 624-page handbook for do-it-yourself subversive activity, illustrated with photographs, technical diagrams, and firsthand accounts. The sixty-two recipes run the gamut from *Affinity Groups* to *Wheatpasting*, stopping along the way at topics as disparate as *Hitchhiking*, *Sabotage*, *Behavioral Cutups*, and *Supporting Survivors of Domestic Violence*. \$12

Days of War, Nights of Love: Crimethink for Beginners—Your ticket to a world free of charge: the famous invitation to the adventure of overthrowing capitalism, hierarchy, and everything else, by turns wild-eyed, romantic, and prophetic. \$8

Evasion—The controversial chronicle of one boy’s saga of willful unemployment, crime, and vagrancy. \$6

Off the Map—A punk rock vision quest in the form of a travel narrative, detailing the exploits of two women squatting, hitchhiking, and dreaming their way across Europe. \$3

Rusty String Quartet—Raegan Butcher’s new collection, several hundred poems long, chronicling the first few months following his release. \$10

Filastine “Burn It” CD—A wide-ranging mélange of driving rhythms, electronic experimentation, on-site sampling, and multilingual vocals from a member of ¡Tchkung! and the Infernal Noise Brigade. A full \$5 from every CD sale goes to the non-cooperating defendants targeted by the FBI’s “Operation Backfire.” \$10

Requiem “Storm Heaven” CD—Nine songs ranging from mournful, muted beauty to operatic hardcore punk to the apocalyptic marching drums of street rioting. \$10

The Spectacle “I, Fail” CD—This amazing Norwegian band’s final album: slower, darker, and even more carefully refined than “Rope or Guillotine.” \$10

Zegota 7”—Two songs from the long-running flagship band of eclectic and idealistic hardcore punk: the unabashed street protest anthem “Anarchist Cheerleader Song,” and a spine-tingling cover of the traditional spiritual “Sinner Man” á la Nina Simone. \$4

Umlaut “Total Disfuckingcography” CD—38 songs and 80 pages of depraved terrorist punk rock and propaganda from the most Finnish band of all time. Features sworn enemies of Catharsis. \$9

The Spectacle “Rope or Guillotine” CD—This is the album that picked up where Catharsis, His Hero Is Gone, early Gehenna, and Godspeed, You Black Emperor! left off. \$10

Zegota “Reclaim!” CD—The third wide-ranging full-length album from these expatriate geniuses. \$8

Countdown to Putsch “Interventions in Hegemony” double CD—A blend of punk rock, free jazz, and radical theater that stands as one of the most daring experimental works to come out of the do-it-yourself milieu. \$10

Blacken the Skies CD—This was Stef’s band between Catharsis and Requiem; imagine early Zegota as a d-beat crust band. \$9

Zegota “Namaste” CD—Seventy-one minutes of improvisation, medley, and soul. Many still consider this the defining Zegota recording. \$10

Catharsis “Passion” CD—Even eight years after it was recorded, what can be said about this album? We hoped it would destroy the world and remake it utterly, and for some, it almost did. \$10

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P R O M E T H E U S

When Prometheus was a rash youth, impatient with the ironies of civil society and eager to establish himself in the world, he stole fire from the gods and gave it to humanity. Human beings, of course, didn't know what to do with it at first, and some of them—his childhood playmates—gossiped about how he was putting on airs now, acting like he was better than them.

A little time passed, and a few young people found uses for the fire. Word spread, and a newspaper ran a story about the new wave of theft and disrespect among young demigods, prompting Prometheus's mother to scold him caustically for bringing such negative attention to the family.

Not long after the newspaper ran this article, a young woman setting her first fire accidentally burned down her village, and there was an angry backlash against Prometheus, especially among self-righteous young people, who accused him of selfishly endangering everyone just to have adventures for himself. A few rebellious teenagers did side with him, associating with his deed their own desires to run wild and to distinguish themselves; but, as they failed to recognize the similarities between themselves and him, they put young Prometheus on a pedestal and praised him to the skies, asking what great thing he would do next.

Prometheus was suspicious of such simplistic glorifications, but, in the face of public attack, he was also desperate to feel good about what he had done, and so he couldn't help but take a guilty pleasure in them. He wondered anxiously what indeed he could do next to live up to the notoriety he had established. Word spread that he was planning something much bigger and grander than the fire theft. The gods, who had overlooked him until now, decided that he was finally becoming too much of a bother, and had him arrested.

He was chained to a rock by the sea, and every day a vulture would descend to tear open his body and gobble at his liver. His mother cried and railed at him, wailing that she had been right all along that his rebelliousness would bring him and the family to ruin; but after the cult of young fan-worshippers died away—which didn't take long, as the romance of associating their rebellious urges with his defeat and punishment wore off quickly—she was the only one who would still come to see him, wiping the sweat from his forehead and the blood from his belly and feeding him prunes.

Years passed. Prometheus became an old man, more patient than bitter, and the crime of his youth seemed further away than creation. But back in human society, his story had become quite celebrated, since an author had used it as the basis for a popular novel and many poets and balladeers followed suit. Finally Hercules, in a publicity stunt arranged to distract attention from some recent drunken escapades with the wives of prominent statesmen, came to release him from the rock. There was a flurry of publicity, flashbulbs, interviews, and then Prometheus himself disappeared from the public eye—or rather it disappeared from him, since the appeal of his legend was only diminished by the real life of an old man.

He spent his remaining years visiting his mother's grave and responding with polite sincerity to occasional letters from young people who felt that, unlike everyone else, they truly grasped the beauty and nobility of his epochal act of rebellion. They spoke of attempting similar feats themselves; in perhaps the only truly heroic act of his life, he didn't try to dissuade them.

**ALL
FIRES
START
SMALL!**

TITANIC

empire (not yet submerged)

don't give up hope, little ones

