



The Base

Introduction

The Base is one of the only revolutionary social centers in New York City today. The Base was founded on anarchist principles yet it operates in a nonsectarian way. Our hopes for the space can best be described in a dual manner. We intend for the space to have an impact on revolutionary milieus and for the broader populace of New York. The Base functions, for revolutionaries, as a space to experiment with different ideas in a respectful non-traditional environment. Every program functions differently with little or no input from groups who met previously. The autonomy of each group enables programs to function anarchistically as regards the space itself. Secondly, due to the public nature of the space, the programs revolutionaries create are intended to have broader implications and intersect with people with little to no political background.

One of The Base's primary functions is to engage with the larger population to familiarize people with revolutionary politics, with the eventual goal of making social revolution a desirable reality.

Background

At the conception of The Base, New York was in the midst of Occupy and other movements that were playing out in the streets of Manhattan. We were meeting people and exchanging ideas frenetically. Yet while the demonstrations were dramatic, they were seemingly disconnected from the neighborhoods that we and many participants lived in, and seemingly disconnected from most people's day to day lives.

We realized that a public space would help these new relationships turn into more long-term, cohesive organizing projects. We wanted to be situated in the midst of where we lived and ate, to allow for cross-pollination with people who were so clearly feeling the brunt of capitalism. We saw Bushwick as a place that had not been completely served up to the interests of finance capital, but a contested territory where the battle being waged through rent increases and criminalization is an indisputable fact of life. Finally, we wanted to create a space where revolutionaries could find each other and form projects in an environment fertile for experiments.

The Base is founded on the political intentions of anarchism which intends to tear down the repressive arms of nation states and capitalist institutions, all insidious hierarchies and representations, while building up new social relations founded on mutual aid, free association, and absolute egalitarianism.

Bushwick

The location of the Base was one of the most important decisions we made for the entire organizing project. The project had to be entrenched in a neighborhood; outside of the dizzying grandeur of the NYC metropolis, but also not too far removed from the city. We chose Bushwick, Brooklyn due to several reasons.

- + The neighborhood is one of the major focal points of gentrification and capitalist development.
- + Bushwick is situated between several other districts each with rather disparate social compositions. Bushwick is bordered by Bed-Stuy, East New York, Williamsburg, and Ridgewood; all of which are remarkably different than Bushwick, so outreach efforts can vary in nearby places.
- + We believe that our organizing work must begin at the local level. We intend to set up long lasting relationships with people outside of radical circles, and end the process of isolation radicals have found commonplace.
- + Bushwick has recently gone through a capitalist revitalization process; however, discontent is still widespread.
- + The Base intends to fill certain roles that capital and the state cannot and will not fill. Through this process we intend to start the seedlings of a long lasting political and social force in the city.

Bushwick is a community that is familiar with uprising and transformation. In the earlier 20th century Bushwick was a wealthy enclave, famous for its suc-

cess with the brewing industry and home of NYC mayor John Hylan. However, the advent of suburbanization and capitalist rezoning policies changed Bushwick dramatically.

Bushwick was rocked by a mortgage scandal manufactured by real estate operators. These agents secured mortgage insurance for low-income clients who often couldn't repay. The massive amounts of defaults left vacant, foreclosed homes. To expedite a quick return, real estate agents exacerbated racial tensions in a neighborhood by moving one black family into a predominantly white neighborhood, then fliering the other families with cards urging them to sell cheap before it's too late. The agents profited by buying the houses at a fraction of the value then inflating the price to sell them to new African American and Puerto Rican residents.

This process left houses dilapidated and this area of the city partially vacant. State services almost entirely neglected Bushwick and it rapidly deteriorated. White residents left in droves. Landlords and the cities neglect continued unabated until local discontent erupted in the 1977 blackout riots. Vast swathes of Bushwick and Bedstuy were burned to the ground. Some residents felt the streets looked like "Dresden in 1945." Throughout the 80's and 90's Bushwick, like most US cities suffered from the influx of crack cocaine, Reaganomics, and neoliberal reforms.

By the turn of the century Bloomberg and local assemblyman Vito Lopez launched the Bushwick Initiative. The program was a highly successful counterinsurgency campaign, which led to the incarceration of vast swathes of the population, while simultaneously offering huge benefits for developers. "During one

four-week period, there were 56 drug related arrests," made through the Initiative. After this process Bushwick is now one of the most rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in America.

Partially due to this process we decided this would be fertile area for revolutionary organizing. Residents who have lived in the neighborhood are being displaced in horrific ways and the whole city is seething with anger at police excesses. French military officer, David Galula argued, "permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population, isolation not enforced upon the population, but maintained by and with the population," is the overarching goal of national governments. Our goal is to end our isolation and become entrenched in the material needs of our neighbors. We've long seen that the state and capitalism have created vast swathes of social problems. It is our job to fill in those gaps!



How it Operates

The Base is a social center that offers classes, reading groups, organizing projects, a library, pragmatic workshops and talks. Projects are run by volunteers who pay monthly to keep the space open. The overarching mission is to engage with people who would like to learn more about revolutionary movements and radical left politics, while also being a vehicle to inject revolutionary politics into the city in a grounded way.

The Base is not an organization, but rather a skeletal structure that people and groups plug into. There are only a few criteria for projects in the space:

- 1) Projects oriented toward the anti-authoritarian left.
- 2) Projects oriented towards people outside the revolutionary milieus.
- 3) Projects must treat others involved in the project respectfully.

People who run a project here won't be censured by others involved in the space: the vision and execution of a project is completely up to them. This is how the organization puts anarchist methodology into practice. A multiplicity of opinions and practices can coexist with each other, even if they disagree.

On one level the space creates a very basic level of communism through resource and knowledge sharing. This is also materially supported by free programming, a free store, and a lending library.

The second purpose is to further the anarchist historical mission.

1) The idea behind The Base is that free interchange can only happen by choice when people feel that they have the dignity to decide their terms of engagement. The Base is not there just to fill empty brains from full ones, but a place to build definitions, ideas and strategies collaboratively.

2) Similarly, organizing projects are based on this collaborative, responsive model. Rather than waiting for mass movements to arise, the idea is to build in-roads, interest in, and sympathy for revolutionary tactics, practices, modes of operating, and outcomes in a particular neighborhood, so that when a mass movement does arise, revolutionary practices will already be common place, and revolutionaries won't begin from an isolated place.

This is where individual autonomy meets negotiation and socialization. This is where our political strategies become prefigurative and an experimental structure for a new political movement materializes.

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