THE OCCUPIED TIMES OF LONDON
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Editorial

The story of gentrification is familiar to us all: an area undergoes a long period of disinvestment; social housing is allowed to decay; lines of betting shops and pound stores populate the high street; public spaces fall into disrepair. The local council announces a policy of regeneration, based on a pre-prepared blueprint, and with construction firms, politicos and lawyers in tow. Some cultural icon - a theatre, an art gallery, a new "public" park - is announced to large fanfare as the centrepiece of the project. There is talk of "affordable" housing being built, an economy reborn and the return of jobs. The "vibrant" local community, referred to by pundits talking up the value of the area, is simultaneously lionised and erased.

Vanguard retail outlets begin to appear: the much-ridiculed artisan bakeries and pop-up cupcake stalls. The previous community of small traders struggle to compete. Social housing units are unceremoniously emptied; the area becomes something new, other and devoid of all the previous inhabitants who had been promised a regenerated area. To highlight one example amongst many: in Deptford, this small, once industrial patch of turf south of the river that spent decades cultivating the "Dirty" prefix to its name has been transformed in recent years. Now a new generation of inhabitants refer to desirable "warehouse aesthetics" in the area, simultaneously warning of the emergence of "yuppie culture".

These physical signs belie the penetrating and concerted forces of gentrification at work; a dispossession mediated via multiple state institutions which shape the social and class composition of an area. In London, as in other cities around the world, the urban equivalent of a colonial force invades these new frontiers, tearing long established cultures apart whilst inhabiting their edifices, all aided by intensely racist policing and widespread cultural demonisation of migrants.

The freshly installed, quasi-communities settle around the panacea of the moment: the "creative industries". Self-proclaimed 'boutique' galleries, PR start-ups and digital/new media agencies impose themselves on the ruins, their paths carved out by the restaurants and wine bars which preceded them.

A vast reserve army of 'professional creatives' and tech workers has emerged to service these new hubs only to find their roles being undermined by the sharing culture of the digital commons which undermines the enclosures of intellectual property. Without enclosure, culture can't be traded as a commodity. Not only can these wares not be sold, but cultural production is becoming increasingly automated through the ever-expanding use of computer technology, swallowing up labour time.

Employees in the arts/tech/creative world (it's getting very hard to tell them apart) are often regarded as somehow removed from the status of other workers, due to the supposed autonomy of their creative roles. This simply isn't the case. The same exploitative practices pervade the industry: precarious employment, low levels of pay, hours and hours of unpaid overtime, a reliance on unpaid interns and, of course, an outsourcing of labour to poverty-wage sweatshops in the Global South. A classic example of this, from what many regard as a prosperous pinnacle of the arts industry, is provided by the collapse of the VFX house Rhythm & Hues, which shut its doors only weeks before winning the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects for its work on the 2013 film "Life of Pi". Hundreds of workers found themselves uncompensated for thousands of hours of award-winning work. There is barely any collective representation of workers in these industries, although recent strikes and attempts at collective bargaining have been a welcome phenomenon amongst cinema workers across London, who have been fighting for a living wage.

The most popular forms of art our culture consumes are dominated by the forces of capital, from the music, film, broadcast and gaming industry to the white-walled galleries and theatres of 'the arts'. Capitalist production of art and culture will always be restricted by the horizon of the possible and the marketable. A division of labour, bolstered by a network of exploitation, obscures work which examines and experiments with form at the meta-structural level. Instead, these art forms seek out reliable, yet increasingly fragile, profit streams, reproducing reality without critical engagement and crafting an almost hedonistic series of increasingly spectacular and crystalline visions of the violent ends of humanity. We urgently need new forms of collective imagination and production, an ability to craft new ways of producing meaning to break away from this moribund path.

To look across London today is to observe these enterprises as an uneven development. Together they form an obstacle to progress which we can no longer fail to resist. The question "Where will we find a job?" is followed by the increasingly desperate one: "where will we live?"

The Occupied Times of London

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CONTESTING HEGEMONY IN CHILE:
The 2011 Student Movement and Beyond

by Jorge Saavedra Utman

Chileans have lived, since the end of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in 1990, in a neoliberal democracy with essentially two sides to its dominant governance. On the one hand, Chile has recovered its democratic tradition with a multi-party system and regular elections, but on the other hand it has followed a neoliberal dogma based on natural resource exploitation and the dismantling of the welfare state. None of the resources privatised by Pinochet have ever been returned to state ownership and, conversely to what was supposed, the Christian and Social Democrat coalition that ruled the country from 1990 until 2010 continued shrinking the state, taking the privatisation of education, health, pensions, telecommunications, electricity and other basic elements, such as water, to another level.

To depict this paradox, Chilean sociologist Tomas Moulian used the image of a birdcage. He suggested that democracy may be allowed to exist, but only within a certain range of action sanctioned by the multiple forces of Pinochet, military power, right wing parties who supported the dictatorship and the Christian and social democrat administrations who succeeded him in power in the 1988 national referendum and subsequent presidential elections. To ensure this, Pinochet stayed at the head of the army until 1998 while the Chilean constitution - enacted in 1980 by the hand of the dictatorship - remains almost unaltered today.

Neoliberal tendencies have meant that the egalitarian notion of a citizenship of rights and duties has become instead a non-egalitarian citizenship of bills and debt, where the wealthy receive better access to services whilst the rest face impoverishment.

This peculiar country and its promise of an escape from poverty through a life of hard work, has vanished through the years, taking with it all hope that Christian and social democrat parties can promote change. This was the situation citizens faced in 2011, when students took to the streets across the whole nation to claim their rights. These events occurred during the second year of the first right-wing administration for more than 20 years, marking the largest mobilisation since the dying days of the Pinochet regime.

Students' mobilisation was motivated by multiple factors, chief among them an increase in student fees (Chilean universities are among the most expensive in the world when measured against per capita income). As undergraduate degrees in Chile are structured on a 5-year basis, covering this escalating cost was becoming an insurmountable task. The awkward response from Chilean authorities in 2006 was to award bank loans - with the state serving as the guarantor of the debt - on an interest rate of 5.6% per year. Within this new system, banks became the exclusive loan providers for individuals whose only chance for an education now relied on the contracting of debt for many years to come.

As the students began to mobilise in response, their aim soon switched from milder requests for increased financial support to target the whole system, with calls made for an end to profit-driven education, at any level, and the return of public and free education with quality standards for every single person, no matter their socio-economic condition. With these demands, the student movement soon became a general social movement, raising its voice outside institutional channels in street rallies, cultural acts, the occupation of buildings, assemblies, open classes, flashmobs, street dance and performance. These activities helped to fill every space in daily life with conversations about the future of the country, the levels of inequality and the strength and attention citizens would need to best respond to any reactionary state response.

photo by Javier Barrera

At the end of 2011, the state response included the resignation of three ministers of education, as more than 600 schools and all state universities had been occupied, while more than 20 rallies saw over a hundred thousand people in the streets. In Santiago, one million people congregated in O'Higgins Park, expressing their will for change. In the immediate aftermath of these events, however, it must be observed that nothing substantial was secured. Today, Michelle Bachelet has returned to lead the country, supported by a 'usual suspect' coalition of Christian and social democrats, in a coalition that for the first time since 1990 includes the Chilean Communist Party.

The current situation is a story unfinished, especially in light of the fact that some leaders of 2011 and 2012 - as well as other non-traditional politicians - secured seats in parliament. In what may appear to be smaller victories, laws have been applied to prevent educational institutions partly funded by the state from engaging in profit-making activity, amongst other measures.

As the story continues to be told, we cannot celebrate just yet. But what one may observe with a greater degree of certainty is that the neoliberal-democratic notions of good/bad, possible/impossible, reasonable/absurd were contested and broken from below during the mobilisations, beating political and media mainstream powers. It was due to the effort and solidarity of subaltern subjects that the "natural" order of things experienced a rupture.

THE REALLY DARK INTERNET: DECEPTION AND PROPAGANDA IN SOCIAL MEDIA

by Eugenia Siapera

A year after the revelations by Edward Snowden, more or less everybody is aware of the astonishing extent of online surveillance. An outcome of this increased awareness is the development of various protective measures, including encryption practices, privacy protection measures as well as the development of anonymised platforms, such as Kwikdesk, an anonymous and ephemeral version of Twitter. However, other aspects of state and corporate control of social media have received less attention. In the face of rising inequality and increasing political mobilisation from the bottom, the ruling class must pro-actively defend the current power structures and a way to do this includes not only surveillance, but also deception and propaganda in social media. The really dark Internet is a reference to this layer of surveillance and disinformation – the spread of false information which intends to undermine, confuse, disrupt, and eventually defuse any socio-political action that threatens to unsettle the status quo.

With surveillance a given, we must now begin to learn about strategies and tactics of deception and disinformation, coming from states, reactionary and fascist political groupings, and corporations.

While a lot has been written on the signal intelligence contents of the NSA documents, less is known about the kinds of human intelligence used by government agencies and corporations. In a leaked NSA presentation (Pic 1) which would have made Goebbels proud, a British spy agency - the Joint Threat Research Intelligence Group "(JTRIG) - explicitly refers to its digital propaganda tactics: the circulation of false information aimed at destroying the reputation of its targets and the use of insights from the social sciences in order to manipulate online communications in line with their political objectives.

The presentation goes on to list techniques for dissimulation or 'hiding the real' through 'masking, repackaging, and dazzling', and for simulation, or 'showing the false' through 'mimicking, inventing and decoying'; it goes on to refer to techniques for managing attention, infiltrating networks, planting ruses and causing disruption. The aim is to build 'cyber-magicians', who can confuse and manipulate 'targets'. The presentation concludes by estimating that 'by 2013 JTRIG will have a staff of 150+, fully trained'. Though we cannot be sure of the status of such plans following the leaks, it would be naïve to assume that they have been dropped.

Indeed, if anything, evidence suggests that other governments have made use of these or similar techniques, and that they are not limited to spy agencies, but are in fact part and parcel of political and corporate communication in social media. For example, before their overt repression and censorship of social media, Turkey's PM Erdogan and the ruling AK party, decided to hire 6,000 people for their 'social media team'. Their task was to follow and mirror social media users, post positive non-news about AK, and question their social media critics.

This is a strategy that has been used by Israel as early as 2009, resulting in the so-called Hasbarah trolls and shills, who bait, question, attack and lie in order to persuade, influence, discredit or disrupt those with opposing views. Online harassment tactics are also used in Greece, where the so called 'Truth Team' patrols the Internet, 'exposing attacks and lies' against the government. Although, following an uproar, the website and Twitter account are defunct, several Twitter accounts with no overt affiliation or links to the government have undertaken to attack, defame, and harass anti-austerity activists and accounts.

Recently, an unknown user mimicked the account name of the opposition party Syriza's initiative Nea Ellada and asked supporters to send private messages with their names. Occasionally, such accounts are involved in open threats and intimidation of critics. The fascist Golden Dawn is also spreading disinformation, through fake Facebook pages, and through its affiliated blogs and Twitter accounts.

While the kind of disinformation circulating during the 'Venezuela protests' may have backfired because it was so blatant, mud, as Goebbels might have said, sticks. And it is not only governments and political organisations that employ such tactics, but also corporations. The best known example is that of Nestle, and its "Digital Acceleration Team", which uses software to track negative comments on its water business and subsequently seeks to deflate them, distracting attention or otherwise trying to reverse critiques by 'engaging' posters. This is flak, as Herman and Chomsky called it, but directed towards anyone who criticises corporate products or practices.

The impact of these tactics on anti-austerity and other social movements is difficult to gauge. In terms of the personal cost for those targeted, parallels can be drawn with the mental abuse suffered by activists targeted by the Forward Intelligence Teams in the UK. The patrolling and policing of social media spaces through harassment tactics is likely to lead to self-censorship, with people thinking twice about their posts. More broadly, such tactics may lead to widespread distrust, cynicism and suspicion. And this is something that must be avoided.

As recently argued by Paolo Gerbaudo, one of the gains of the Occupy/Indignados movements has been the harnessing of the digital mainstream, and the shift towards what Marta Franco has called "the politics of anyone". Rather than creating and occupying small pockets of resistance, spreading into the mainstream has been central for recent mobilisations, and I would argue, it should remain a priority. There is, however, a clear tension involved in widening the movement and protecting it from infiltration, deception and disinformation. Yet this should not be prohibitive. New tactics can and should be devised in order to counter those of government and corporate intelligence units.

Counter-tactics should capitalise on the popularity of movements and subject new information to the 'crowd intelligence', asking them to evaluate and corroborate it. Verification techniques such as those developed by the now-corporate Storyful, both automated and manual, can be used to verify photographs, videos, data, information as well as Twitter accounts and Facebook pages. Exposure of deceitful tactics alerts people to their existence and deployment. In short, we need to develop an arsenal of counter-tactics that will address and defuse the deception and 'magic' deployed by government and corporate spy agencies. When the message finally reaches its destination we must ensure that it is not a lie.

CYBER-AUTONOMY: A TACTICAL APPROACH TO MEDIA ACTIVISM

by Sam and Annie

Public debate on digital media tends to be organised in "either-ors." Such polarisation allows for clarifying positions, but it doesn't do justice to the messy dynamics of everyday digital practice. Paolo Gerbaudo's recent contribution on internet activism in OT24 is no exception. He contrasts what he calls a "cyber separatist strategy" allegedly pursued by veterans of the anti-globalisation movement with "occupying the digital mainstream," which he sees as a more inclusive and forward-looking strategy adopted by contemporary tech activists.

Although the juxtaposition "Cyber-Separatism versus Occupying the Digital Mainstream" is catchy, we think it's a dead end. The argument suggests that today's cyber-activism is split into two entrenched and incompatible positions: One camp embraces commercial online services while giving up any claims to net autonomy, privacy and security. The other maintains a minimum of net autonomy at the price of severing all links to the digital mainstream. Thus media activists are stuck between the rock of compromising privacy and the hard place of inhabiting a relatively secure island in the web with no ties to the buzzing flows of communication, conversation and collaboration on commercial online services.

As veterans of media activism, we'd like to complicate this neat line of argument by throwing in our version of radical history and a reminder of the classic confusion over tactics and strategy.

The term "Cyber Separatism" to describe digital activism in the alter-globalisation movements is simply wrong. We reject it. It sets up a false distinction between today's generation of media activists and their predecessors. It implies that back in the mid 1990s, there was a choice to adopt or reject the digital mainstream when in fact none existed. Digital media activism in the ensuing decade relied almost entirely on autonomous server infrastructure and homegrown free software. This was not due to an abstract ideological commitment. There simply was no alternative.

In the era of Web 1.0, no free corporate platforms were available, let alone a commercial social web. There was nothing to separate *from*. You either built it yourself or you had nothing. If you wanted to use this tech stuff for political means, you had to create it yourself. Online tools had to be conceived, built, coded, hosted and maintained by a network of sympathetic "techies" who were in permanent dialogue with users in the activist community.

Establishing an autonomous digital communication infrastructure was an utter necessity. Having direct control over our own parts of the evolving infrastructure that was the internet gave us cyber-autonomy. When talking about core tenets of the alter-globalisation movement's tech vision, we find cyber-autonomy a more useful concept than cyber-separatism.

Running an autonomous infrastructure takes time, effort and commitment. It requires looking after, maintaining, and decision-making. This can be tedious, but as politics are put into practice on a daily basis, it is also empowering and innovative.

The autonomous infrastructure in the physical sense was –and still is - separate from commercial platforms such as AOL or Yahoo. "Islands on the Net" consisted of the servers, boxes, clusters, cupboards and cables, and the collectives and techies that ran them. However, the purpose of this digital environment certainly was not to create minoritarian spaces of resistance (these we kept for our own self-organisation and experiments in co-ordination). To the contrary, much of the services provided and most of the websites and platforms themselves were designed to speak to the world, to enable participatory communication, to create possibilities to talk to and as "the 99%."

At the time, this kind of distributed digital infrastructure was not an isolated endeavour, but cutting edge technology. One of the largest fashionable currents of the time was Tactical Media: Projects like Next Five Minutes, the Yes Men and others favoured short-term tactical interventions in the media sphere over a strategic approach to dominate online communication in the way of Facebook, Youtube and the like. Myriads of autonomous servers rather than a single coherent structure. Fluid networked collaboration rather than command line. Digital experimentation rather than internet domination. Tactical guerrilla warfare on enemy terrain rather than trench warfare to defend one's own territory. Today's social media activists continue the tactical approach, when they use commercial platforms to circulate oppositional news and organise protest.

In today's digital environment, it's hard to imagine media activism without smartphones, Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, and that digital political communication once took place largely on mailing lists and bulletin-board forums. Interaction meant that you could click on a link or send an email, and only a small number of people had the actual skills to hand code a website.

In the late 1990s the emerging movement against neoliberal globalisation started to stage synchronised mass protests occurring simultaneously in different countries, alongside large scale confrontations around the sites of international government summits. The internet had been used in 1997-98 to mobilise for and coordinate protests against the proposed MAI trade agreement (Multilateral Agreement on Investment). This combined international coalition-building with on-the ground street protests and blockades. Increasingly, the internet was also used for reporting protests. For "J18", the Carnival Against Capital (1999), activists produced a detailed record of connected protests in scores of cities worldwide, using Internet Relay Chat (IRC), mailing lists and a manually coded website.

The introduction of the participatory functionality of Indymedia in support of the Seattle WTO protests meant that, for the first time, anyone could instantly publish their text, photos or video online. This innovation proved revolutionary. Indymedia gained more visibility than we ever dreamt of – both inside and outside of the "activist ghettos."

As part of a radical autonomous digital online

structure, Indymedia contributed to a main success of the alter-globalisation movement: shining a spotlight on international financial institutions, corporate players, trade agreements and their interplay. To decipher and reveal the monopolies and how they exercised power over us, to identify, denounce and delegitimise them in front of the whole world. Today many would argue the financial crisis and the austerity actions of governments has succeeded in advancing this process. Half of the arguments are at least well known if not fully won.

The ascent of this digital media project was breath-taking as the much vaunted interconnected networks of resistance became a reality. With its open, non-hierarchical, participatory attitude that deliberately defied just about every rule of corporate journalism, Indymedia prefigured what is now known as "citizen journalism." Eventually, with the Indymedia network evangelising the concept of "open publishing" and demonstrating the power of crowdsourced citizen journalism, a new, more interactive and collaborative approach to news reporting began to enter the mainstream.

Protecting activists' privacy and providing secure communication channels was viewed as crucial, especially when organising movements for radical change. Indymedia specifically provided anonymous publishing, where the identity of the contributor was protected. This was a necessary defence against law enforcement agencies as governments and police in different countries attacked the alter-globalisation movement, shut down websites, seized servers, and arrested tech activists.

In the face of encroaching commercialisation and increasing regulation of the internet, control and spying by governments, open and anonymous publishing underlined a public political stance that encompassed a dialogue around electronic civil liberties, free speech, intellectual property, online rights, encryption use – a dialogue that is no less relevant today.

Also, do not forget the rush of utopian enthusiasm engendered in the early days of cyber-activism. Many expected that the monopoly-busting, game-changing tsunami that was the internet would lay waste to the old concepts of property, ownership, and the very means of production in a new world of collective empowerment.

The political landscape of the net was in development. Arguments were being formulated, corners being carved out, positions had to be taken. In this context there was no separatism. Tech activists, media activists and net campaigners fought for the heart of the internet, identifying ways of working and interacting that reflected, hardwired and hardcoded their political beliefs. We just needed the rest of society to catch up, log on and participate. As it turns out, perhaps we could have done with some hundreds of millions of dollars to create more stable, user-friendly platforms that would make mass adoption a reality :Ø

The explosion of Indymedia in the early 2000s echoed a clamour to publish and interact on the internet. The first commercial blogging platform went online around the same time as Indymedia, followed by Myspace (2003), Flickr (2004), Youtube (2005), Twitter and Facebook (2006). In 2007, some London-based activists discussed the state of Indymedia. The result was a small drawing: an island with a small Indymedia logo planted on it, amidst but separate from a wide ocean called web 2.Ø, filled with happily interconnected boats called Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube and so on. We nodded. Yesterday, Indymedia was a highly innovative political online project with street cred, probably the most "global" network and certainly then the biggest political hub on the digital realm. Today it appeared more like a leftover from a previous era. How did this happen?

Indymedia had turned from guerrilla tactics to a more strategic approach. Protecting core values such as the privacy of the users had become the prime directive. From playing with syndication, RSS and aggregation across a global, multilingual network, Indymedia had changed to a closed shop. A walled garden island on the net. Not from any deliberate separatism, but to safeguard the security and privacy of the users in an increasingly repressive environment.

The debate on security had been ongoing within Indymedia for years. What started out as a necessary position of cyber-autonomy became doctrine. At first we simply didn't trust "them" with our data. As corporate platforms expanded, activists advanced a critique of the corporations. To use them was to jump into bed with the enemy and endorse a capitalist model of commodification of both self and internet. To potentially give away your rights to privacy all in one go while kicking the free alternative providers in the teeth. Some of this tipped over into a form of cyber-fundamentalism, a desire to inhabit an ideologically pure position. The ability to evaluate and make decisions decreased. Even using a Windows laptop on a tactical level became highly controversial if not unacceptable.

In the light of ongoing internet repression seen in the recent wave of uprisings and the Snowden revelations, the obsession with security and privacy has proved well founded. But for Indymedia, it came at the high price of its ultimate decline in many cities.

Is the claim to cyber-autonomy now redundant? Has it turned into cyber-separatism: an albatross around the neck of media activism? We don't think so. We still need hardware and software to protect our privacy and this requires autonomous infrastructure.

In the practices of today's media activists, there is no "either-or." Behind the scenes, Occupy et al and their tech supporters made much use of autonomous servers for things like internet chat and encrypted communications for coordination, as well as using corporate communication tools and social media.

A tactical approach to media activism means using all available tools without worrying too much about ideological purity, but with careful consideration of political purpose and situated adequacy. This includes tweeting and facebooking, but also the digital ecosystem of resistance. Torrenting, Tor, Wikileaks, secure email and chat; using pastebin, pirate pad and other current versions of anonymous publishing all involve cyber autonomy.

Like the bonds that join people when they experience struggle in the streets, media activism can bring people together and create solidarity. Being part of collective action online comes with its own thrill especially when it takes the form of international collaboration in times of social crisis. The convergence of shared experiences that inspire and motivate is what mobilises the masses. At these times you use everything to hand based on tactical choices, and the more choice the better.

Sam and Annie were part of the collective that ran Indymedia London until its closure in 2012 and part of the group that created Indymedia UK in May 2000.

CSA CAN VIES: A LIVING LABORATORY OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

by Jordi Blanchar

"The day after the Can Vies eviction, the neighbours got up as if we were suffering from the amputated limb syndrome. At the moment, the pain deriving from the loss of an essential part of our body is unbearable. They have taken away from us a place where many of us met for the first time and learnt how to self-organise, where we enjoyed small victories and coped with defeat, where we put mutual aid into practice and learnt to become active in politics. Can Vies has been an autonomous space which has transformed us into the heterogeneous community we presently are."

These are the opening words of the communiqué released on May 27 from La Ciutat Invisible, a cooperative based in the Sants district of Barcelona. Can Vies had been violently evicted the day before by several units of the Mossos d'Escuadra - the Catalan police force - after 17 years of experimenting with autonomy and nurturing practices of self-management.

The CSA Can Vies has been an Autonomous Social Centre (hence the acronym CSA) since it was squatted in 1997. It is situated in Sants, a predominantly working class district away from the cleansed and tourism-centred areas of downtown Barcelona. The building itself and the land where it sits are property of the Metropolitan Transport of Barcelona (TMB), a company owned by the city's Council. Throughout its existence Can Vies has had a strong link with workers organisations, first as an outpatients clinic for the municipal transport workers, and then as the headquarters of the local branches of the CNT and CGT anarcho-syndicalist unions. In 1997, as a continuation of this historical legacy, the building was taken over by an assembly composed of squatters, activists and local neighbours, with the aim of setting up a self-organised social centre that would have deep roots in the local community.

The Social Centre's history is not only full of symbolic capital but it is also an example of continuous evolution; from its beginnings with a marked 'autonomist squat' identity, to gradually opening up to the local community by forging links with many other groups and platforms active in the area, thus increasingly enjoying widespread social backing and legitimisation. With an antagonistic and confrontational stand against the neoliberal city model, and with a clear commitment to collective action towards positive social change, the project's primary focus has always been the defence of the local community and struggles for the 'right to the city' against gentrification, privatisation and the enclosure of public space.

It is, therefore, not a coincidence that at the time of its eviction the Social Centre played host to over 50 groups and projects. These ranged from the production of a regular local alternative publication called La Burxa to groups engaged in traditional Catalan popular culture, and from language lessons to rehearsing studios for music bands. At the same time, Can Vies has been an active participant in countless campaigns and struggles, as well as organising regular gigs, film-screenings, fund-raising activities, theatre and performances, and a regular popular kitchen. It also offered a home to many groups organising around feminism, LGBT, antifa, anti-repression, anti-gentrification and anti-capitalism struggles, to name just a few.

Given this history and Can Vies' deep roots in Sants, it is highly surprising that when the City's government sent the police to attack the Social Centre - at midday on Monday May 26 - they imagined they were 'only' evicting an activists' squatted building. But it is perhaps for this same reason that, in a clear show of complete arrogance and authoritarianism, they did not only storm the building but they also started to demolish it straightaway, as if history itself and years of building autonomy from below could be quickly brushed off at the authorities' whim.

Can Vies is perhaps a unique example of cohesion and correspondence between the local community and the social movements active in the Sants neighbourhood, and the City Council and police authorities should have known this. Their attitude shown towards the Can Vies project, and their general mode of governance focused on selling off the city to the global tourism industry, city developers and corporate investors clearly shows a great degree of ignorance and disregard towards the city they govern. As Gala Pin, a local activist, stated hours after the eviction: "If the district councillor and the mayor of the city can't predict what would happen if the centre was attacked, then they clearly don't know their city and have no capacity nor capability to govern it".

It is in this context that the popular reaction to the attack on Can Vies' political and social project, and to the partial demolition of the building, can be viewed. Even the Social Centre's assembly has admitted that they did not expect such levels of resistance seen in the streets of Sants during the days and nights following the eviction. Solidarity demonstrations and actions also quickly spread to other districts of Barcelona, as well as in many other towns and cities across Spain and beyond.

During that initial week of daily demonstrations and protests that gathered thousands of people, and which often ended with burning barricades and clashes with the police, over 70 people were arrested - two of which were preemptively sent to jail, and around 200 injured. The Sants district effectively became a militarised zone with hundreds of police stationed in the area and a police helicopter continuously hovering over the neighbourhood, thus increasing the tension and the generalised sense of outrage. At the same time, several towns and cities across Catalonia and Spain called for solidarity demonstrations, thus exponentially increasing the #EfecteCanVies (the Can Vies Effect).

On Friday May 30, Barcelona Council suddenly declared that any further demolition of Can Vies would be suspended. This was seen as an initial victory in the collective defence of the Social Centre, and perhaps, the fact that the huge bulldozer that had been brought in to demolish the building was set on fire during the second night of riots had something to do with the Council's decision?

Can Vies quickly reacted to this new situation by calling for the retake of the building, and for a weekend of active reconstruction that would focus on clearing the rubble left by the partial demolition of the building. They called for the neighbourhood to gather on the morning of Saturday 31 to start "collectively rebuilding what the Council has destroyed". Hundreds of people turned up, and by the end of the day Can Vies had effectively been retaken.

A citywide demonstration was also called for that Saturday evening, which saw columns from several districts of Barcelona marching towards the meeting point in the city centre. This was not only seen as a clear attempt to bring the 'Can Vies Effect' into the centre of town (the symbolic site of power) but it also meant allowing some breathing space to the Sants neighbourhood, whose streets had already seen a week full of daily confrontation. Up to 20,000 people answered the call, and, in a clear show of force, they demonstrated through the main tourist areas of downtown Barcelona behind a huge banner reading "Building Alternatives, Defending the Neighbourhoods", even though the police operation was one of the biggest seen in Barcelona's recent history.

On Monday June 2, the City Council's degree of improvisation became apparent once more when they announced that they were prepared to stop the eviction and allow Can Vies to retake the building on a temporary basis (between 24 and 30 months) and under some bureaucratic conditions.
In response to the evolving situation, Can Vies called the whole neighbourhood to attend an assembly on Wednesday 4, where hundreds of people discussed the latest developments. The Assembly decided to reject the Council's 'offer' stating that Can Vies had already belonged to the community for many years, and that they did not need the City authorities to legitimise this fact. They stated that, in fact, it was the Council's actions which brought a long collective process to a standstill and that they should leave and let the project "resume in peace". At the time of writing, the rubble of the demolished annex has already been cleared, and several groups of people have been working on a daily basis to rebuild the Social Centre. Further assemblies have been called and new working groups are being set up. Even a new issue of La Burxa has already been produced and distributed in the neighbourhood, and a #RefemCanVies (Remake Can Vies) crowdfunding campaign has been launched to fund the reconstruction of the building, and to cover the legal costs resulting from the eviction and the defence of those arrested in the protests.

Only time and people's resolve will determine what the future holds for Can Vies, but what seems clear is that the political and social project already escapes the four walls of the building that the City Council tried to demolish. Barcelona's authorities should perhaps ask themselves why a community with such a strong social fabric goes from a long established experience of self-management to the barricades for five consecutive nights. One possible answer might be found in the profound and generalised malcontent that has been taking root in society during the last few years, but probably also in the fact that the collective political subject demands respect and it is not getting any from those in power.

Updates & more info: #EfecteCanVies / @SomCanVies / @CanViesViu / canvies.barrisants.org / reconstruim.canvies.org

photo by Sergi Bernal

62 Fieldgate Street: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow

by Mark Kauri

photo by David Hoffman

This issue of the Occupied Times was hand-folded at the London Action Resource Centre (LARC) in Whitechapel. For a little over two years now, following the eviction of the St Paul's protest camp and moves by the OT towards full independence from any affiliation, we have been meeting at LARC to prepare new copies of the OT and contribute to the upkeep of the building.

Recently, a few of us have been talking history. In particular, local histories of resistance, worker and community organising: the kind of stories that can easily fade into the past, so much so that were it not for a handful of scant sources, individual testimonies or ageing, printed publications, they might be at risk of disappearing completely. So - what better way to draw on these interests than by focusing on some history close to home? We present here what we have managed to pull together from the rich history of this one corner of the East End now occupied by LARC, and its more recent reclamation of Whitechapel's radical roots.

The building at 62 Fieldgate Street began life in the late nineteenth century with an 1884 application by Christian Methodists to build a mission hall in this corner of the East End (what was at that time the corner of Charlotte Street and Nottingham Place). Traces of the architecture from those early days remain, including the gothic windows on the second floor and the stone-work in the lobby and ground floor main hall. The sizeable mission hall remained into the second decade of the twentieth century until a transition occurred that would transform the space, placing the building more in alignment with Whitechapel's radical legacy of the previous century.

In March of 1921, the building began to host the last of the International Modern Schools through an association with the long-standing, albeit waning, community of Jewish anarchists in the area. The school, which initially held classes on Sunday afternoons and on one evening a week, as well as during the summer months, declared its intention to combat the anti-social environment of capitalist education, to raise children in the "spirit of freedom" and to explore subjects and methods of teaching that would look to interest and instruct without dominating. This philosophy drew from the tradition of Catalan anarchist Francisco Ferrer, who had established a model for education among working class communities in Spain that was based on a non-coercive method.

The extra-curricular activities of the school included May Day marches that would set out from Fieldgate Street, field trips to Epping Forest and the Zoological Gardens, as well as the publication of a student-authored magazine which ran articles on topics such as history, science, biography and satirical critiques of state institutions. Classes held at the school included clay-modelling, talks on evolution, science, botany, singing, poetry readings and storytelling. Former student Lou Appleton, whose father had left London in 1917 to take part in the Russian Revolution, remembers his education here as a rich cultural experience in an atmosphere unconfined by rules and regulations, and recounts with delight his experience of being part of a movement helping to "fan the flames of discontent". He remembers a poem often recited at the school, entitled *Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow*, which opens with the provocative verse:

> *"Our yesterday was very bitter*
> *Our today is not sweet either.*
> *Tomorrow only brings more rods for our backs*
> *And chains for our feet and hands."*

The school ran for the best part of seven years until it was forced to close due to a lack of funding and difficulties finding available teachers, though at its peak it was attended by more than 100 students, after starting with only 30, and saw an average weekly attendance of 85. Today, the interior of the building still contains traces of this former function, such as a second hand-rail that runs the length of the stairwell to the top floor, which is fixed below waist height, within the reach of children.

Although the Ferrer school is one of the most well-documented uses of the space, it was not the only function of the building at this time. Following the suppression of the *Arbeter Fraynd* (*Worker's Friend*) Yiddish radical publication during the First World War, and the closure of the group's premises, Fieldgate Street became host to the activities of this and other groups. The *Worker's Friend* resumed publication for a time under the editorship of J.M. Salkind, who also gave lectures at the school and was chosen by the local community as a delegate to attend an international congress on anarchism organised in the early years of the decade.

Throughout the 1920s, the building hosted numerous social events, often to raise funds for the anarchist newspaper *Freedom*, which, like the building, also started life in the mid-1880s, at *Freedom Press,* which can today be found across the north side of Whitechapel high street (the longest-standing anarchist publishing house in the English-speaking world). Leafing through archived copies of *Freedom* printed throughout the twenties reveals widespread activities of solidarity, organised discussions and mutual aid among working class groups, with locations across the East End hosting social gatherings and dances to raise funds for different individuals and groups.

The building, known at this time as the new *Worker's Friends Club*, also began to host meetings of the *East London Anarchist Group* from late 1923 onwards. The group's secretary, E. Zaidman, was a notable public speaker at events including a well-attended public debate at Tower Hill in 1919 on the "Fallacy of Marxism" as well as other open events run by the group where large amounts of political literature and copies of *Freedom* were distributed.

A year after the closure of the Ferrer school, the building underwent a further transformation, firstly to serve as a Synagogue and listed *Linus Hazedek & Bikur Cholim* (hospice for the sick). These remained active until 1946 after which followed a stretch of rag trade use of the space under the ownership of tailors Abraham Spitalowitch and leather manufacturer H. J. Victor throughout the fifties and sixties.

While the details of the building's history between the 1970s and the late 1990s remain foggy at best, the activities and social conditions in the area at this time shed some light on the broader context. Since the early 1970s, the East End became home to many people of Bangladeshi origin amidst the war that gave rise to their nation's independence, as well as the devastation caused by the Bhola cyclone. As opportunities for work were limited, low-paid employment in the textile trade was common among immigrants, and there is some speculation as to whether sweatshops were operating in Fieldgate Street; a continuation of this long-standing labour practice in Whitechapel that had, in the previous century, often recruited cheap labour from the Jewish immigrant community.

This period of migration, marked by outbreaks of racial violence and conflict in the community, coincided with an active squatting scene across the East End, which helped to save the nearby nineteenth century tenement blocks known as Fieldgate Mansions that had been scheduled for demolition in 1972, allowing them instead to be taken over by a community housing trust. Squatters including gay rights activist Tony Mahoney, the co-founder of the East London chapter of the Gay Liberation Front, took part in some of the spectacular and media-savvy activities that would save this historic site. Former squatter David Hoffman recounts some of the activity at this time:

"Bengali families were having a hard time and we were opening up flats in the Mansions for them to live there. We were really active, taking over other empty buildings that were being kept vacant in Myrdle St and Parfett St, because the owners found it was cheaper to keep them empty."

LARC was first conceived of in 1999 by a group composed of people largely involved in the *Reclaim The Streets* movement of resistance opposed to corporate interests and neoliberal globalisation. RTS originated out of anti-road protest camps, but throughout the course of the decade would switch its main focus to the broader target of capitalism, through non-violent direct actions such as street parties that would pull in people by the thousands, road blockades, as well as organisation among striking workers and strikes against oil companies.

As RTS was facing increasing levels of state suppression, with squats frequently facing the threat of eviction after related actions, the group wanted to create a safe space and resource for London's direct action groups, to serve as a catalyst for discussions, strategies and to form a network of affinity groups. Resources were pooled and the group collectively bought what was, at this time, a very run-down, ramshackle and disused building: 62 Fieldgate Street.

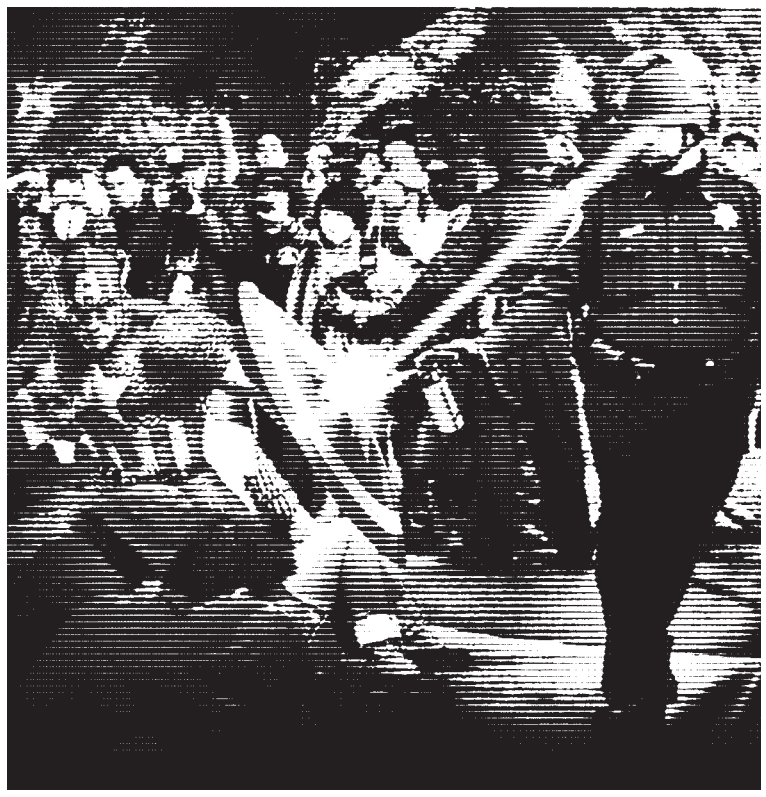
From the start, following a few years of intensive refurbishment work, LARC was set up as a non-hierarchical, inclusive and safe space for groups and individuals working towards social and environmental justice. The building has three storeys, as well as a cellar below street level which today hosts the studio for the twice-monthly Dissident Island internet radio show. On the ground floor, the main hall that once formed the central space of the mission hall and the Synagogue remains an open space for functions and meetings. The top floor houses an office which opens onto a terrace and roof-garden overlooking Parfett Street, while the second floor contains a well-stocked library that was first set up by early users of LARC, among them local resident Martin, who continues to contribute to the library, the building and the community of user-groups. The library has gained donated books and refined its collection over the years, offering hundreds of titles on politics, feminism, history, Marxism, anarchism etc.

The space today, which is a legally owned non-profit, is entirely self-funded, often through donations and fundraising events, and is maintained by its various user-groups who carry forwards the initial aims of LARC, whilst, at the same time, circling back on history in reclamation of the radical roots of this corner of London's East End.

With many thanks for assistance in researching this piece to Peter Guillery of the Survey of London, Nick Heath, Martin and Chickpea at LARC, David Hoffman, Vicky, Tony, Mark and the original RTS crowd.

IMAGES & PROPAGANDA

by Joss Hands



Words are spectral – they present what is not present, they slide and deceive and are defined by their power of deferral. While there has always been power in the persuasion of words, somehow their very symbolic nature cannot conceal their character as media: we are always aware that they conceal as much as they reveal. Yet images hit us with the force of reality, as Christian Metz tells us, "the impression of reality is the reality of the impression". The image resonates with our very identity. The character of our own subjectivity is, in the terms of Jacques Lacan, an image of itself, a reflection. Yet from the start this 'truth' is misrecognition and fantasy. This capacity for images to construct us, places them prior to our acquisition of language and in a direct connection to our understanding and framing of the world. Images envelope us, they dazzle us, they make us – but they also deceive. From Plato's cave to Descartes' evil demon, the deceiving image is a powerful icon precisely because, try as we might, it's hard to disbelieve them.

Modernity's most influential picturing of the deceiving image is perhaps that of Karl Marx with his observation that, "in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a camera obscura". This understanding of an inverted world is followed through into one of the most powerful critiques of the image, that of the Situationists. Here the deceiving image has become the totalising spectacle of capitalism, in the words of Guy Debord: "In a world that really has been turned on its head, truth is a moment of falsehood."

It seems obvious in this context why the image is such a well-used and powerful tool of the propagandist. Propaganda, as defined by Theodor Adorno "does not employ discursive logic but is rather... an organized flight of ideas. The relation between premises and inferences is replaced by a linking-up of ideas resting on mere similarity". We can see this as a kind of psychic trickery in which an audience is lulled into a sense of having knowledge, but which is based on nothing but drilled association. This provokes what Adorno describes as "The loosening of self-control, the merging of one's impulses with a ritual scheme is closely related to the universal psychological weakening of the self-contained individual".

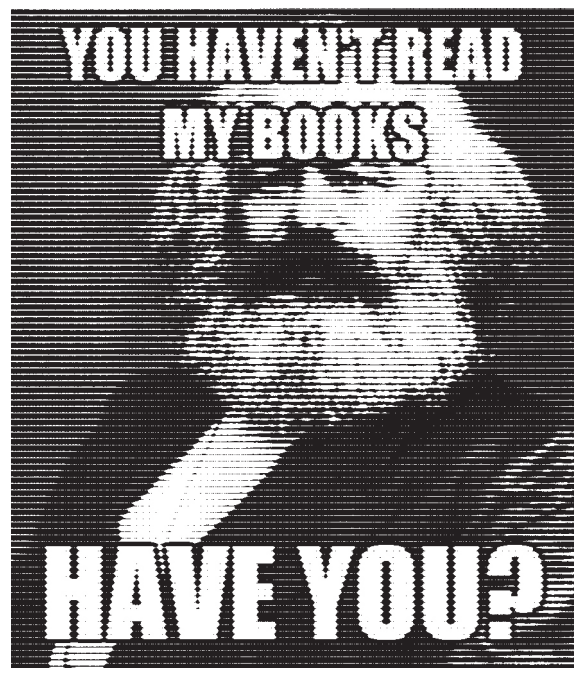
Images are able to combine disparate elements effortlessly. There does not need to be a 'bending' of logic or a 'distortion' of language – images make meaning precisely through the combination of elements. In the world of advertising the practice, that nobody who has ever seen an advert is fooled by, is to put something people desire in proximity to something that its viewers are being encouraged to desire. Such 'montage by attraction' works because they see through it: they feel it.

Because of this character images make great memes. Memes, as defined by Limor Shifman, are singular combinatory ideas that circulate freely and voluntarily, but which consist of multiple elements, blended together to be iterable, variable and simple. The combinations do not necessarily form propositions or logical claims; indeed this is characteristic of them - the more jarring and unexpected the juxtaposition the better - they are designed to produce attention: the underpinning commodity of the society of the spectacle. In the digital age memes are the mode of instant communication, the messages of an accelerated age aimed deep into the amygdala.

So it is that in the digital age the mode of transmission of the spectacle has increasingly become the meme. Memes capture, compress and reproduce dominant meanings and understanding, and perhaps the ultimate variation of the commodity form of the spectacle: the brand logo. Unsurprisingly one of the main avenues of resistance to the spectacle has become the counter-meme or, what Adbusters refer to as the 'subvertisement'. The 'subverted' images are supposed to make us think, they are supposed to operate in the way of ideology critique, to expose the contradictions in the image's ideology, and to some extent in the way that it reproduces the logos of late capitalism, in that it functions by an attempt to reverse the dominant logic as such – but the spectacle does not care. Altering and circulating such images in a world merely turns it right side up, but in the world of the spectacle right side up is the wrong way around – as such it is always already an inter-passive exchange. We are inaugurated in the age of the selfie, the active production of the self as circulating image-commodity.

Is the answer then to disavow the spectacle, to promote a digital era iconoclastic Beeldenstorm, smashing the cameras, screens and networks that carry the memes? This does not seem either likely or desirable.

Here is a modest two-pronged proposal. Not breaking up, mocking or smashing images but mobilising them. Firstly, taking a concept from hacker culture, of the exploit (that is a flaw or a weakness, a crack, that can be worked open to redirect, re-task or recombine to produce a new thing), we need to find ways to expand and complicate, not to repackage an image with a convenient constricted and inverted meaning. If images are to proliferate then perhaps it is best not to invert or negate, but expand, re-articulate and recombine. This is a form hypertrophy, an acceleration that takes an exploit and unfolds it – that finds its truth in extraction and dislocation - not to destroy or tear apart but to create new meanings through a new syntax. Alessandro Ludovico and Paolo Cirio undertook such an approach in their 'Face To Facebook' art project, harvesting a million Facebook profiles and recombining them in a faux dating website. This is not a counter-meme but the articulation of a strategy of ongoing recombination and complication. That approach constitutes the seeds of the second prong, a fidelity to the exploit – that is to build a strategy out of it.

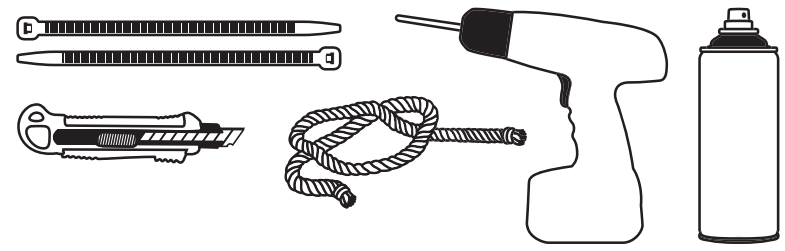


One of the great propagandists, Edward Bernays, offers a prolonged rationalisation for propaganda. While his rationale is deeply problematic his methods have something to tell us still in the production of digital counter propaganda. Bernays tells us, "The engineering of consent... depends on interlocking all phases and elements of the proposed strategy". As such, the imperative for digital age counter-propaganda is to triangulate exploit-based action, with a strategic seeding of new connections and recombination in and between movements, this means building complete pictures, not just images, of concerted positions that can then meaningfully interlock. If we see a picture, as WTJ Mitchell suggests, as "the entire situation in which an image has made its appearance," then by picturing the world in a way that has fidelity to the exploit, we at least stand a chance of escaping the inter-passivity that plagues the strategy of meme-making as critical practice. The image must form part of a picture that enables the power to bond, to inspire and mobilise.

www.josshands.net

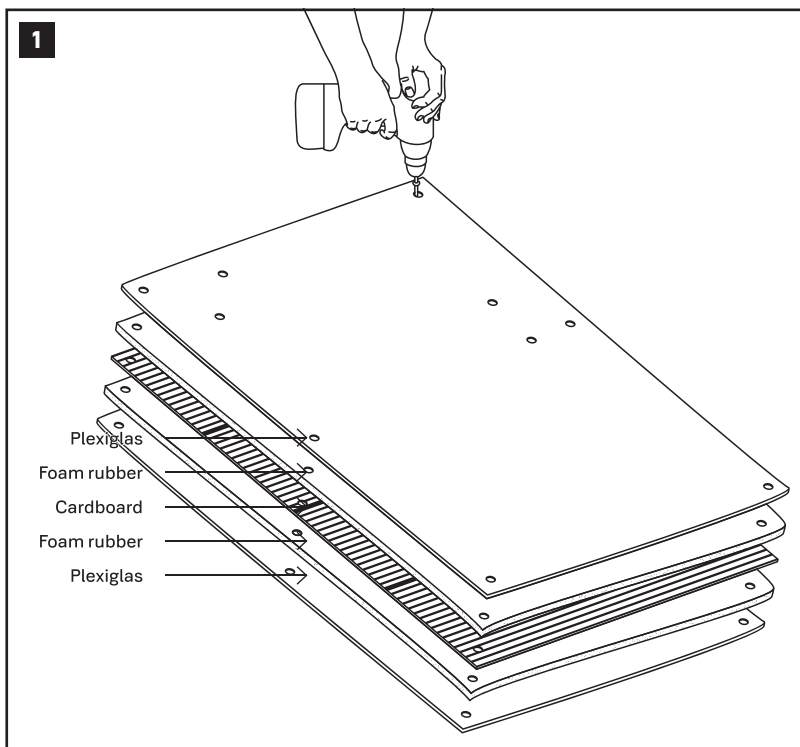
BOOK BLOC

A COLLECTIVE DEVELOPMENT



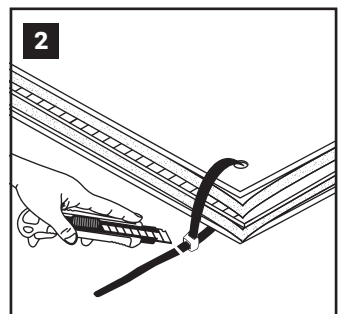
by Gavin Grindon

1



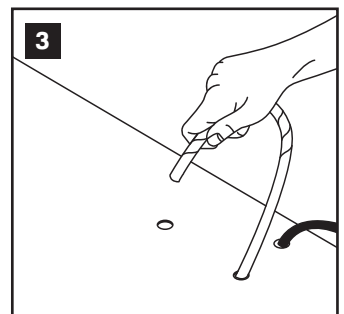
Layer the five sheets of material as shown above. Drill three holes on each long side of the block and two holes for each of the rope handles.

2



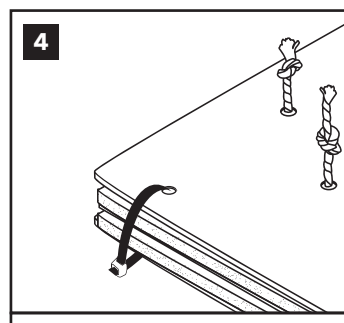
Secure the side holes tightly with cable ties. Cut off the ends that are sticking out

3



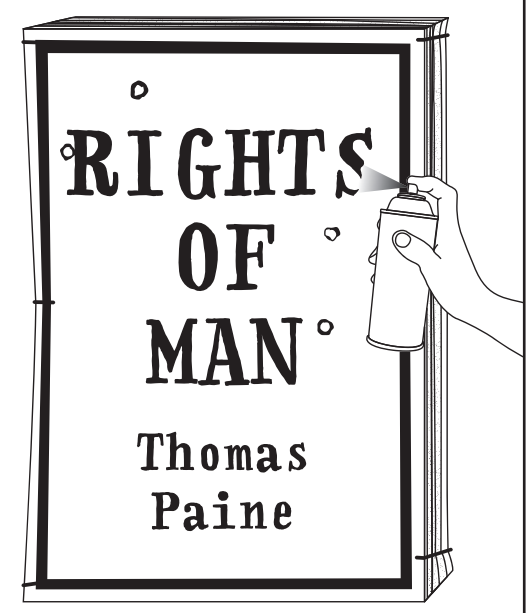
Insert a single length of rope into the holes to form the arm handles.

4



Place your arm in the rope handles to make sure it fits well, then tie the ends of the rope from the front.

5



Cut off the ends of the rope from the front. Think carefully about which book will represent you. Use paint or spray paint to draw the cover artwork

The book bloc has been a visible feature of a number of protests since 2010, appearing in actions in a number of countries. Gavin Grindon is co-curating a new exhibition called Disobedient Objects at the V&A, which collects a number of "the objects of movements". He spoke with Luther and Rosa, two people behind the London book bloc, to discuss the ideas behind the props and how community development of the objects could be regarded as a collective art practice.

Gavin: What book did you pick to make?
Luther: Mine was *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Orwell said it was his least favourite book, but its story about trying not to interact with money spoke to me a lot at the time. It was a personal story about austerity, in a way.
G: How did what you did relate to the Italian book blocs?
Rosa: We were thinking a lot about how to connect to a global crisis. Like, what's your connection to Via Campesina, or some protest elsewhere in the world? The books sort of did that. It was such a clear, perfect idea. Once we saw the idea, we became really committed to making one too, especially how it was visually striking and practically useful. It was really joyful.
L: There was a similar struggle in Italy, a neoliberal marketisation of education, and a similar local context. We were inspired to run a workshop to make them after seeing pictures of the Italian demo on Indymedia. We had no communication with them, but it was like a visual conversation. A week or two after, we responded by making our own book blocs. They did another action with new ones. It felt like we had dialogue without any interaction, except for the creation of an aesthetic.
R: Like birdcall.
G: Or a kind of swarm design? It's like you composed an aesthetic collectively, even between movements, each making their own changes back and forth.
I think about this that like, where Marx argued that commodity objects circulate capital, these disobedient objects can circulate struggle.
R: Capital moves across borders so easily. But you couldn't actually fight side-by-side with people in Italy against it, but you could take heart from other people's actions. Just seeing the photos gathered around a laptop with your friends, and then you think - what would they think to see it reflected back at them from London?
G: Did it connect to other groups in the UK, too?
R: Yeah, from older movements. One person from the WOMBLES (a group in the early 2000s who used padded suits to break police lines, after the Italian Tute Bianche) came down to the workshops and gave us advice on making the books and told us stories about their actions, which was really amazing. I hadn't met anyone from that group, but I'd read about them. So we used bike inner tubes instead of rope for the handles, which had more elasticity.
G: So the objects began to weave together and embody knowledge and know-how from more than one movement? What was the design process like?
L: Whoever made their book chose what book it was. It was great because it was something collectively made but also individually expressive, with different modifications. We collectively wrote a statement using consensus and put it on the back of each book, above the handles.
G: Would you change how you did it now, with hindsight?
L: You had the coloured shield bearers in front, and then behind them, like archers, the matching brightly coloured paint bombs, but the two crews didn't meet up on the day. I think they would have made an amazing image of the protests together, and worked well too.
R: We didn't have pads around our hands, or our heads, which would have helped. I'd be more strict about where the arm loops went, too. We later looked at how Romans used shields in formation, but we never had the same momentum to put this into action. Better rehearsals!
G: The shields at Heathrow Climate Camp used foam tube sleeves.
L: Aesthetically, I kind of like how they were put together in a real ramshackle way using whatever materials we could find for free. In that image of the state attacking education, the books crumpled and the message was clear.
R: There was a lot of anger in the air. The books stayed militant but also sent a clear message with joy and humour. We noticed how the media were hungry for any image, however scrappy, and this provided one. But it used the media to spread a meme. It told a clear story of what the struggle was.
G: In many ways it feels counter-intuitive for this exhibition to appear in such a mainstream museum. Talking about movements using institutions outside of those movements (museums, mass media, academic publishing) always involves discomfort. The exhibition was developed through a series of workshops in which groups lending objects and other movement participants helped set its terms, the questions it asks and even its physical design. It sort of takes the liberal public museum at its word and tests its claim to be a space for debate and public thought. A lot of the objects were sitting getting mouldy in social centre basements, but now people can see them again. But others are from unfinished struggles, and will go back to them after the show. How does it feel seeing one of your books in this context?
L: To take these things from the street into the museum the danger for me is that they become fossilized and lose their original function as a political tool. I think in the case of this exhibition the objects take on a new function of sharing stories, ideas and tactics- and the DIY guides also breathe new possibilities into them. When I write a press release for example, it's an attempt to manipulate and exploit the massive distribution of the mass media and share information using their channels. I see this exhibition in a similar way of utilising the huge visibility an institution brings and holding control of the arc of narrative.
R: There's a risk of canonisation, but the museum will reach people who won't see a living archive being kept in a squat. There's a value in being wilfully marginalised, but sometimes it is quite useful to speak louder than that.
L: Who knows who might come in too? And that's really exciting. Thinking about young people I work with who haven't encountered these histories before- it can become a real source of inspiration for the present.
R: I hope it has some liveliness to it. I don't think I would have got involved in as much protest as I did unless I was really enjoying it, in a way. The moment it becomes a chore, about work instead of friendships and love, then it's over. These objects are all built out of love. They represent the joy of discovering your own autonomy and power. I hope the exhibition can reflect that.

Disobedient Objects is open at the V&A in London from 26 July 2014-15 Feb 2015. Entry is Free.

6

Hold your ground! Place your arms in the rope handles and use the shield to non-violently push back against police containment lines. Practice using the shields in group formations for display and protection. Remember you are turning the media's 'story of the battle' into a battle over the story.

Book Bloc Shield Illustrations by Marwan Kaabour at Barnbrook

by Fred Paxton

Lights, Camera, Direct Action!

A growing wave of direct action is bringing change to the low wage culture of London's cinemas. One fifth of workers' pay in Britain is beneath the living wage (or 'poverty threshold wage') of £7.65 an hour. The employees at London's independent cinemas are amongst those experiencing exploitation, but a growing wave of direct action at two cinemas in particular – the Curzon Cinema chain and the Ritzy cinema in Brixton - is beginning to challenge that. There are lessons from these campaigning workers which "Low Pay Britain" can learn from.

Both Curzon and the Ritzy have well-established reputations as leading art house cinemas; the places to go for quality screenings, comfortable surroundings and progressive values. Look a little closer, however, and the reality for those running the cinemas day-to-day couldn't be further from this luxurious image. Employees' wages have stagnated at poverty levels, with the current hourly rate of £7.24 for Ritzy and £7 for Curzon, leaving workers barely breaking even after the exorbitant cost of London rents and transport. These cinema workers form part of the lowest paid 13.1% in London.

In the past few years, cinema ticket prices have soared to around £15. Meanwhile, the numbers of independent filmmakers attending the cinemas continues to drop. Yet, in direct contradiction of their desperate penny pinching, recent Curzon press releases proudly boast of new cinemas opening and luxurious refurbishment by the end of the year. The Picturehouse chain, which runs The Ritzy, is also reportedly engaged in a substantial expansion programme.

The tension between the culture of management and that of cinema employees is clear. Workers at Curzon care passionately about the cinemas in which they work and want to make them inclusive centres of arts and culture. Instead, harsher and harsher workplace rules have been imposed on them, accompanying the poverty wages, to create a ruthlessly 'efficient' and soulless enterprise - marking a disconnect between the way the two sides view the institution.

The zero-hours contracts used by Curzon have placed employees in a very vulnerable position in regards to any attempt to speak out and improve their conditions. The grim prospect of not receiving any shifts in future prevents employees speaking up. Tania El Khoury, a former employee, said that after voicing opposition to the direction taken by the cinema in recent years, she was told by management: "we would totally understand if you decide to leave the job."

Since early 2013, the campaigning Curzon workers have been seeking four things (anonymously, of course): the London Living Wage for all employees, flexible secure contracts (rather than zero-hours), recognition of their union BECTU, and the reintroduction of concession tickets for customers. Two of these have been achieved – as BECTU are now recognised and concession tickets have been reintroduced. The massive support gained so far is thanks to direct action, of a suitably creative nature.

An online petition begun in April 2013 in support of Curzon workers has now received over 6,500 signatures, as the glaring contradiction of a supposed champion of progressive values opposing basic employment rights for its own staff outraged many thousands of cinemagoers. The comments left alongside the signatures can be summed up by the words: "I expected better."

The backlash has spilled out from the internet and reached behind the red curtain, as many in the film industry have joined the campaign. Last November, Stanley Schtinter, co-producer of the 70×70 film season with Iain Sinclair, pulled out of a screening at Curzon Soho and announced a boycott of the chain until they recognize the BECTU union and begin negotiations. Actors Viggo Mortensen and Miriam Margolyes have also signed the petition, as well as directors Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, who said they were *"shocked to discover such an obscene difference between the exemplary way [Curzon] treat their public and their cynical exploitation of their staff"*. Irvine Welsh, author of Trainspotting, voiced his support for the Ritzy campaigners: *"People have to live and that becomes impossible when they aren't getting the London Living Wage. The clue is in the name: London. Living. Wage. Picturehouse, times may be hard for cinema operators, but they're a damn sight harder for cinema staff."*

Comedian-activist Mark Thomas creative flair was applied to his protests in support of the exploited Curzon workforce. He transformed the Curzon Soho readograph (the sign in front of the cinema) to read 'Give Us Fair Pay' and held what was billed as 'the world's first day-glo demo' at the cinema. Mark and other campaigners stood in front of the screen holding illuminated placards showing reworked cinematic slogans, such as 'I'll have what she's having – concession tickets' and 'Alright Mr DeMille, I'm ready for my living wage'.

Across the river, at Brixton's Ritzy Cinema, a more traditional form of protest has erupted. There have been a series of strikes, voted for by 85 per cent of union members, over three days in April and most recently on May Day. The strike action has received strong support from the local community, who recognise the part the exploited staff play in making the cinemas profitable.

For the workers themselves, the past year has been an awakening. There is a feeling of empowerment - united in the campaign, they are no longer willing to be pushed around. The overwhelming support from the public shows the passion that the issue of low pay ignites among the public. The caricature of an apathetic public seems utterly false to the campaigners.

Despite all the support, protests, and the many promises from Curzon management, the living wage is no closer to being introduced at either Curzon Cinema or the Ritzy. The gaining momentum is firmly behind the campaigners though. Their brave actions will bring change to their workplaces eventually, and in doing so they are inspiring others affected by the unfairness of living below the living wage.

photo by Jack Dean

ON BALANCE

by May Topple

I moved studios this weekend and everything is still on the floor. Every surface is covered in piles of books and bin liners full of clothes. These days, a typical 'studio' day - or a 'not at my job' day – involves meetings with other artists, working on job applications and studying. When focusing solely on finishing a piece of work for exhibition or publication then a studio day involves a lot more writing and editing, and trying out different installation forms. For four days a week I am officially employed elsewhere. I live in my art studio which is basic but cheap. As a single person with no dependents, it's okay on a temporary basis - but it's far from ideal. I juggle this way of living, but behind the scenes there are, of course, worries: money and the future, mainly.

To go over some aspects of what I enjoy about making art: broadly speaking, it's the learning that happens through making – gaining an understanding by doing. There is the craft or discipline of an art practice, repeating something over and over again until I start to make some sense of it. There are also the people I have met through making art who are very supportive - a huge amount of generosity with time, skills and knowledge is exchanged amongst us all.

In my studio time recently I've been thinking about the idea of oppositional language. For me, if what I want to do with my art practice is an analysis and making of a critical language, can it ever be truly critical if it is not simultaneously self-reflexive and has a vocabulary which presents opposition? I think it needs both these conditions.

However, in thinking about this in a wider sense, and as a form, oppositional language is problematic when it exists only in opposition to the thing it is opposing. By which I mean that it can sometimes be a language that occurs entirely in its relation to a pre-existing dominant language or political structure. Therefore, it will only ever be a shadow cast by this big energy-absorbing, ever-present thing - an opposition that ends up defining itself by what it is not.

In my practice, how do I communicate an opposing position whilst at the same time avoiding this permanent 'anti' state of being? How do I stop it from ending up as an exhausted cliché or over-used linguistic and visual forms? Within a particular critique political art may be considered as art which is made politically (this is usually attributed to Jean-Luc Goddard in the 60s: "not to make political art but to make art politically"). The idea here is that the artist (if they choose to or wish to address this in their work, or position their work in this context) is aware of the conditions of the art piece production. In turn, the recognition and confrontation of these conditions are evident in the work itself in some way or another and form a foundation of the critique within which it wants to be considered.

Depending on the artwork in question and the language it uses, political art can vary in form hugely, and can appear to be highly explicit to very subtle, but evident nonetheless. And this has less to do with the act of making art and more to do with the society and the power structures that this art is situated within, hence the politics of what is and what is not visible, who does and does not want visibility, and how people encounter art forms. What are the conditions that decide who and what is heard or not? This lies in institutions, in ideologies and in a massive web of different factors – and in the development of a critical language, the politics of communication are revealed.

The art works that affect me usually manage to be aware and reflexive whilst avoiding cynicism and hopelessness. Maybe they talk about something I didn't know before or hadn't thought about in a material or conceptual way? Maybe they've mastered the language of their practice beyond a self conscious reiteration of what is possible in a certain form? Or maybe I have no idea why I am affected by them at all and understanding will likely take me some time?

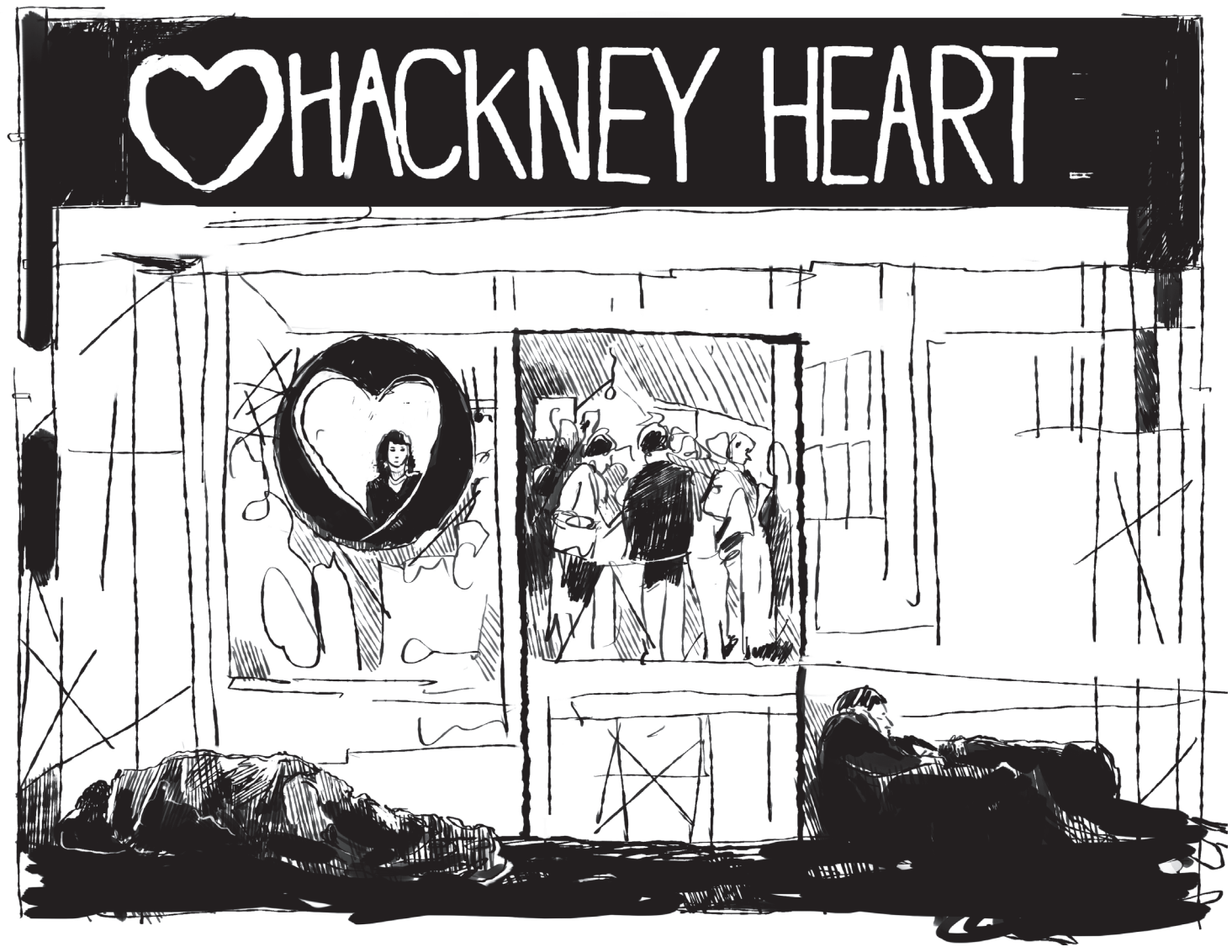
These works are clever, brilliant, very difficult to achieve, and maybe not without an admittance to failure in certain areas too. This is the work I like anyway. Even then, I am aware of how a critical language develops generally and within myself; what might seem excellent at one moment may fade over time and vice versa.

As I type and structure this text, I am aware of an ache in my face. This is from a cheerful-ish facial expression I've been wearing that lacks the acerbic quality of how I feel most days. In part this is a technique in writing to concentrate on how full my life is. I appreciate the choices that I have presently and have been able to make in the past. Nevertheless, this approach masks the choices I do not have and how that impinges on my life and my work.

For all that I am endlessly happy for, I have a grinding jaw and an embedded anger about what is not okay in my situation and in the situations of others. For starters: that there should be a citizen's wage, that there should be significantly more state-supported social housing, that there should be free education for all. That the "getting by" strategies I have been involved in are utterly contingent on the resources I have had access to – and that these resources are presently not available to everyone. And whilst those strategies are okay for a short while, if they do not at the same time address and challenge the conditions that necessitate them then nothing changes. And so: to try again.

by Alex Charnley

SOME THOUGHTS ON ENTERPRISE CULTURE



In February of this year, the popular community newspaper, Hackney Citizen, published a story about the Hackney Heart, a pop-up enterprise that first brokered a temporary home on Narrow Way, before moving on to more established premises on Mare Street. The "cafe-cum-gallery" was set up by food and travel writer, Jane Egginton-McIntyre, who describes it on her website as somewhere "desirable and democratic", showcasing "Hackney's rich range of designers and creators", whilst being an "interactive public space and venue for workshops, pop-ups and parties." The "perfect place to meet friends, collaborate, and contemplate purchases over deliciously rich coffee beans hand-roasted in Hackney and locally-made cakes from Rumptious Recipes."

Despite claiming to act "out of love" for the local area, it soon transpired that this retail enterprise was only made possible because of a generous subsidy from the Hackney Council riot regeneration fund. This act of deference incensed anti-gentrification protesters who questioned why the Hackney Heart should have been given favourable terms, when the council had previously insisted the recently departed, Centerprise, "a well established and valuable local resource for the black and minority ethnic community, should pay a market rent." As a result of this state intervention, something close to a riot was regenerated. To the dismay of the kind hearted entrepreneur, anti-gentrification protesters staged a sit-in and demanded the pop-up be closed down.

This kind of event is becoming commonplace as local London councils take an active role in the gentrification of the city. But this specific conflict actually gives us a glimpse into the messy interactions between art, politics and enterprise culture.

The 2001 intervention, One Week Boutique (OWB), by the art collective, Temporary Services, is perhaps the most obvious counterpoint to the faux activism of the Hackney Heart. As Greg Scholette explains in *Dark Matter* - an essential book on the last thirty years or so of art, activism and enterprise culture - marginal groups like Temporary Services are part of a rich history of artists and collectives who have engaged the city as an immanent site of class struggle:

"TS [Temporary Services] transformed a fire-escape room adjacent to their small, eleventh floor office in the Chicago Loop into a free "drop-in" center modeled after the San Francisco Diggers of the 1960s. Clean donated garments were neatly hung within the space, coffee brewed, and copies of the group's signature booklets about urban politics, art, and public interventions neatly stacked for visitors. A sign placed on the sidewalk downstairs encouraged passersby to 'come by, drink coffee, look at our booklets, try on clothes in our dressing room and take whatever clothing they want.'"

At the time, this particular intervention represented a short circuit with the debt fueled hyper-consumption of 2001 and a means of confronting neoliberal urbanisation. Yet the emergence of pop-up culture - which as Scholette shows, can be tracked back to the transient art scenes of the Lower East Side and other downtown districts of the global Metropoli - is forever presenting difficult questions for artists and activists who engage the city as antagonists of enterprise culture. The Hackney Heart example shows how emancipatory projects like OWB can now be straight forwardly digested into state gentrification schemes - the very schemes they hoped to negate. In defence of the social aims of the state funded retail enterprise, Egginton-McIntyre parrots the emancipatory language of OWB:

"People can come in here and not buy anything. People can take books away for free. Many, many people come in here and don't buy anything. Elderly people come in just for a chat...It's a free gallery space and a free events space... It's almost what anyone wants it to be."

This comparative example is not intended as a recourse into leftist melancholy, yet it remains important to address these ongoing exchanges between art, politics and enterprise culture in order to think of ways we can reclaim and build on common histories of resistance. It is therefore worth sketching out how some of these radical ideas have interacted with the spiritual aspirations of the capitalist class in order to map out some considerations for social movements to come.

The object of many Western countercultural groups since the watershed crisis of Fordist capitalism in the early to mid 70s has been to take art into the city in the form of happenings, situations and interventions. These art experiments remain incisive today, extended by more recent movements like Occupy, who employ carnivalesque performance and the temporary occupation of privatised space as a means to symbolically reinstate the ancient rite of the commons. Brian Holmes calls this interplay between art and politics a kind of "do-it-yourself geopolitics" that premises the "resymbolization of everyday life... as the highest constructive ambition."

This kind of political aesthetics (or aesthetic politics) has a range of philosophical coordinates - impossible to unpack thoroughly here - that span anarchist and marxist traditions. Hakim Bey, an anarchist insurrectionist and poet wrote: "Is it possible to create a SECRET THEATER in which both artist & audience have completely disappeared--only to re-appear on another plane, where life & art have become the same thing, the pure giving of gifts?" *The Situationist Manifesto* said something similar: "At a higher stage, everyone will become an artist, i.e., inseparably a producer-consumer of total culture creation." Herbert Marcuse - an advocate of May 68 - also committed to a version of this idea: "Art transcending itself would become a factor in the reconstruction of nature and society, in the reconstruction of the polis, a political factor. Not political art, not politics as art, but art as the architecture of a free society."

These different warrens of thought are incommensurable in many ways, but all point to a time where the boundaries of work and leisure have become blurred; where "art becomes life" - a political horizon that promises an end to the capitalist division of labour. This powerful and creative commitment continues to be rethought, recycled and repurposed as global capitalism fails to resolve its alienating contradictions. But in other ways, capital has attempted to answer this problem with its own movement towards a higher stage of "total culture creation" qua "the creative economy."

Richard Florida, a neoliberal urbanist, coined the term, "Street Level Culture", in order to describe the visible output of "the creative economy" and its role in the regeneration of the city. In a vulgar reframing of "art becomes life", Florida backgrounds the conflicts of gentrification in order to promote his own imminent vision of post-Fordist capitalism: "a teeming blend of cafés, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros, where it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators."

This Floridian spirit has trickled down to local councils as they aggressively compete to attract rich speculators and consumers to their struggling municipalities. Yet perhaps most disconcerting is how this neoliberal commitment to a world of boundless creativity can be actively affirmed even as the material conditions of everyday life fall apart. In this way, it is both telling and unnerving that the aforementioned Hackney Heart entrepreneur could shrug off the anger of the people she came to help with an optimistic bit of PR that is strangely reminiscent of the most naive kind of activist discourse: "I welcome this publicity in one sense as it has given me the chance to do some outreach work and give a massive shout-out to anyone who wants to use this space."

The emergence of state sponsored activist projects like the Hackney Heart ask important questions as to how *temporary* acts of detournement, intervention, prefigurative politics and occupation can continue to build on a rich heritage of resistance and political experimentation? The desire for visibility is the ancient expression of politics. Yet the problem, it seems, especially in the politically redundant UK, is how anti-capitalist experimentation can connect with wider community struggles (and its own fragmented body of affects) in order to achieve some *permanent* footing in material life.

Perhaps a good place to extend and build on the radical commitments of groups like Temporary Services and other Dark Matter dissidents - like those brilliantly described by Greg Scholette - would be to begin *mapping the common*. A geo-political project of this kind would involve pinpointing all the abandoned buildings of financialisation and all the social space being defended, claimed, cultivated and fought for as *common*. This would be both a network and image of resistance that could bring together conflicts over disused buildings, evictions, the removal of healthcare provisions and the multifarious interventions of artists, activists and everyday refusers. As a simple digital tapestry - using the available online mapping technologies - something like this could begin locally and simultaneously before growing and connecting into a visible universal project. As a shared cartography of struggle, or live history of social space, the old and the new could be put back into an animated dialogue that could perhaps provide a more *permanent* base or home for radical claims to everyday life.

For times as strange as these, there is an urgent need for constructive ideas that can bring all this resistant energy and creative invention together into a more programmatic and sustained politics. Failure to congregate around points of conflict and develop the means to dig in and scale up will only mean drifting into an even more unbearable cacophony of aesthetics and brutality - something like what Walter Benjamin saw in the cult-like displays of an aestheticised society. Writing of Europe at a new threshold of catastrophe, he wrote:

"Humankind, which once, in Homer, was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure."

AESTHETICS OF

Everyone has their favourite gentrification horror story. The Hackney cafe which took over an Asian Women's Advice Centre and used the language of advice pamphlets to advertise their overpriced fry-ups. The 'Champagne and Fromage' bar which pushed the 'foodie' transformation of Brixton's Granville Arcade – rechristened 'Brixton Village' - into the realms of parody. But you'd be hard pushed to find a more egregious example than that of New York's Bowery House hotel.

The Bowery House opened in 2011, on the top two floors of a building on the Bowery formerly known as the Prince Hotel. The Bowery is a lengthy street running through the centre of Manhattan's Lower East Side, and has long been a place of refuge for the city's homeless population. Dozens of 'flophouses' were built there during the Great Depression, including the Prince, providing cheap living spaces for poverty-stricken New Yorkers. By the 1950s more than 200 residents were crammed into the Prince's tiny wooden cabins, paying a few dollars a night for a bed, a shared bathroom and a ceiling made out of chicken wire.

The Prince was sold in the mid-90s, and stopped accepting new residents. By the time plans to convert it into a hotel emerged, there were barely ten residents left. The hotel developers moved them all onto the second floor, and turned the cabins on the higher floors into upmarket 'tribute' versions of the rooms downstairs. Guests at the hotel, who pay anything up to $154 a night to 'live out their flophouse fantasies', therefore now climb past a floor of chicken-wire rooms inhabited by real-life 'bums' in order to reach their 'authentic' cabin beds.

One room has even been named after 'one of the most colorful longtime residents', although no-one is sure whether so-called 'Charlie Peppers' is aware of the 'tribute' being paid to his 'colourful' life. But whether he knows or not, his poverty, and that of his neighbours, is now a cultural niche to be mined for profit. It's probably one step up from being thrown out on the street altogether, but there's a peculiarly insidious violence about a vulnerable person's entire existence being exploited as a tourist attraction behind their back.

As grotesque as the example of the Bowery House is - not only expropriating homeless people, but shamelessly turning their lives into a paid-for 'experience' - its extremity reveals something fundamental about the specific cultural forms through which gentrification is often expressed. Gentrification is ultimately driven by capital's need to generate surplus value from the built environment. But theories of the 'rent gap' or state-sponsored 'regeneration' cannot on their own explain why encouraging people to pretend to be 'bums' for a night might be a good way to do so. And while the aesthetics of gentrification are easy to mock – the industrial warehouse artspaces, the 'kooky' pop-up shops – they are certainly not mere 'superstructural' irrelevancies. They are crucial conduits for the flow of capital around the urban environment, and are therefore an equally crucial site of struggle.

It's worth examining why the Bowery House's exploitation of their 'long-term residents' is so repulsive, in order to see how art is implicated in this process. The people living on the second floor of the hotel are no longer people, but objects in a museum. The complexity and depth of their lives has been completely hollowed out, leaving only a paper-thin appearance. Their lives and their suffering have been transformed into things to be looked at, things to be mimicked and 'experienced' as a kind of vicarious thrill – and ultimately, things to make money from.

Prescient as ever, Walter Benjamin could see the Bowery House coming, some 80 years before it opened its doors. In his 1934 essay, 'The Author as Producer', Benjamin castigates a German photographic art movement called the 'New Objectivity', which he suggests, like the hotel, had 'succeeded in making misery itself an object of pleasure…a consumer good'. The leading proponent of New Objectivity was Albert Renger-Patzsch, whose elegant, people-free photographs of urban locations (factories, houses, bridges) were published in a book entitled 'The World is Beautiful'. For Benjamin, this title summed up everything that was wrong with New Objectivity: it reduced the world to surface appearances. The lives of the people who lived and worked in the photographed buildings – whether they were happy or sad, rich or poor – were irrelevant. All that mattered was aesthetic beauty.

Benjamin argued that artists should be aiming at more than merely 'transfiguring' the appearance of the world by 'treating it stylishly and with technical perfection'. Rather, they should use technical, formal innovations to reveal how both the object and the process of producing a photograph of it 'stand' in the wider relations of capitalist production. Art that fails to do this is doomed to merely 'renew[ing] the world as it actually is from within, in other words, according to the current fashion.' It ends up just reproducing the dominant relations of production, giving everything it touches (including misery) the structure of a 'consumer good' – even if the artwork's 'content' is, on the face of it, politically opposed to those relations.

As Marx showed, once something becomes a consumer good, a commodity, its use-value (its social purpose) is subordinated to its exchange value (the quantitative amount of value it bears in the market). In an artwork this contradictory relation between use and exchange is pushed to its limits. An artwork, as Theodor Adorno noted in 'Aesthetic Theory', is the 'absolute commodity', because it has no use-value whatsoever. It doesn't do anything, except hang on a wall or stand in a gallery. This is something of a double-edge sword. On the one hand, Adorno argues that by rejecting all use-value in a capitalist world, the artwork points towards a revolutionary world of new, untainted use-values. On the other, the absolute eradication of use makes art the goose that lays capital's golden egg: pure exchange value. This is why art attacking and developing its own form and conditions of production is so important to both Adorno and Benjamin: political *content* is not enough on its own to challenge art's status as the absolute commodity. As Benjamin writes, 'the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication can assimilate an astonishing number of revolutionary themes, and can even propagate them without seriously placing its own existence or the existence of the class that possesses them into question.'

This becomes clear when we examine the particular historical relationship between artists and the Bowery. Around the same time as the New Objectivity was in the ascendancy in Germany, documentary photography was making its first appearance in the States, with the Bowery's itinerant population a popular subject. Beautifully shot pictures of homeless men abounded in books and newspapers; sitting on the street surrounded by their meagre possessions, or passed out in doorways clutching an empty bottle. As Martha Rosler notes in an essay tracing the history of documentary photography, here the 'political message' of these pictures was that of the emergent liberal social conscience, calling for the 'rectification of wrongs' presented in the photographs. In this view, poverty was something akin to a natural disaster, an unfortunate accident that should no longer be tolerated, rather than something necessarily produced by the processes of capital accumulation. Therefore, rather than challenging the relations of production which led to the poverty on display, the political demands were limited to moralistic reformism: inadequate institutional responses, or charitable donations.

This dynamic was played out within the photographs too, with the isolation of poverty from the processes that produced it reproduced in the 'beautiful' technique of the photography itself. The 'aesthetic-historical' value of the 'street scene' is ripped from its social context, and turned into a fixed image, an aesthetic effect, to be 'appreciated' on its own, separate plane. This means that the 'political message' of the image has to be consumed *alongside* the image, via an explanatory text, not through it.

The liberal reformers would have no doubt found the idea of a hotel opening specifically to exploit the image of the homeless people they were photographing appalling. But by failing to challenge the separation of the 'aesthetic' from the 'social' inherent in their own production process, the political 'content' of their work was unable to resist the process of commodification which that separation sets in motion. Art

was once again an important mediator in the next step of this process, namely the artists moving into the Lower East Side in the 1980s who were drawn to the Bowery 'bums' as subjects for their work. Instead of liberal moralism, these artists, working in the midst of the first neoliberal attacks on the welfare state, presented the poverty of the 'bums' as being the 'pathetic-heroic choice' of 'victims-turned-freaks', as Rosler puts it.

This approach offers no challenge to the relations of production either - in fact, it simply reproduces the neoliberal

by Matt Bolton

GENTRIFICATION

notion that poverty is something chosen, not produced. In this respect, it hardly matters whether that choice is viewed as a moral failing or as an admirable 'opting out' of mainstream society. 'The boringly sociological [became] the excitingly mythological/psychological', writes Rosler – and it is precisely this supposed 'excitement' of poverty which has led to the opening of the Bowery House 'flophouse experience'. There is therefore a direct link between the 'concerned' photography of the 1920s, the 'celebratory' artwork of the 1980s, and the outright exploitation of the Bowery House. Once poverty has been aestheticised and reified as a 'consumer good'; once the conditions of production, the historical context, have been expelled from the image in favour of aesthetic effects; it is a short logical step to keeping a few real-life 'bums' downstairs to add further value to the consumption of that aesthetic commodity.

And it is the same logic that turns Brixton or Hackney from a place to live into 'Brixton' or 'Hackney', 'the place to be', the 'up and coming area'. In his essay, 'Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification', David Ley invokes Benjamin's character of the urban 'rag-picker' to illustrate the way in which the aesthetically-minded see themselves as converting 'junk' into 'value'. Excluded from economic power (albeit often through choice), those with an aesthetic disposition respond through the autonomous award of 'recognition and prestige', using criteria supposedly far removed from 'traditional' bourgeois tastes. In the built landscape, this is articulated through a valorisation of areas often dismissed as 'ordinary and everyday, even plebeian'. These areas 'can be valorised as authentic, symbolically rich and free from the commodification that depreciates the meaning of place' – in other words, isolated from their social context and fixed in position as 'cool', 'authentic' or 'vibrant'.

What this actually means is that the social relations of the city are deprived of their contradictions, their depth, their changeability – they are 'made beautiful', held at arms length, separated from themselves. Once this distance, this dehistoricisation, has been established, it hardly matters whether these social relations have been alienated in order to provoke admiration or concern, to be 'experienced', or, as will eventually happen as capital flows in, cast aside. In each case, society is silenced, petrified and smoothed out; formally primed for its exploitation by capital. Aesthetic valorisation therefore actively facilitates capital's desire to recapitalise the full ground rent of depreciated property.

This process must be situated in the wider role of urban space in post-Fordist capitalism. In 'From Management to Entrepreneurialism', David Harvey suggests that the rapidly increasing mobility of capital, supported by developments in communicative and transport technologies, has removed most of the spatial constraints once associated with production. Under these conditions, rather than risk the fostering of industries which could up sticks to lower-wage economies at any time, cities compete in 'the production of those kinds of services that are (a) highly localised and (b) characterised by rapid if not instantaneous turnover time'. Harvey's examples include 'tourism, the production and consumption of spectacles, [and] the promotion of ephemeral events', such as the Olympics. Big one-off events remain important, but the aestheticisation of whole swathes of cities could be said to be even more effective. Unlike a spectacular event, the consumption of a place which generates 'monopoly rents' by being regarded as uniquely 'cool' or 'authentic' is not limited by time.

But the importance of aesthetics does present an obvious problem, in that as gentrification takes hold, it invariably leads to the loss of the very 'authentic', working-class and often ethnic-minority character of the area which prompted such 'rag-picking' in the first place. People can no longer afford housing or rents, or are deliberately 'decanted' by local authorities keen to capitalise on rising land values. The attempted solution to this contradiction is the premium placed on the appearance of 'authenticity' in the bourgeois cafes, bars and restaurants which are the visible symptoms of gentrification. Hence the proliferation of commercial properties which appropriate the aesthetics of 'anti-capitalist' spaces, as well as the desperate campaigns to stop 'commodified' shops such as Sainsbury's Local opening in areas like Stoke Newington. But the failure to challenge the formal identity between aestheticisation and commodification makes any attempt by first-wave gentrifiers to somehow 'stay true' (on an aesthetic level) to the spirit of the areas they are gentrifying seem ludicrous, if not, like the Bowery House, downright offensive. Once the process has taken hold, under capitalism there is only one direction in which it can travel: towards capital accumulation.

None of this is to say that art is somehow responsible for the way that capital flows around a city. But it is to say that an art that does not attempt to transform its own 'apparatus of production', that does not challenge its own position in post-Fordist production, is reduced to meekly helping capital and gentrification on its way – even if the content of that art is ostensibly against gentrification. With this in mind, it's hard to think of a worse response to gentrification than the recent Facebook group proposing that London-based artists 'all move out of London together' to somewhere 'regional', such as Bradford. Not only does this strategy manifestly fail to confront art's own role in the processes of gentrification, it precisely replicates the separation of aesthetics from social relations which leads to art being exploited in such a way. Worse, it risks turning the struggle against gentrification itself into another aesthetic consumer good.

This holds true for other modes of aesthetic and literary production too: there has been no shortage of 'concerned' journalistic articles about gentrification in recent months. As with artworks, unless such articles (this one included) are accompanied by a ruthless critique of their own relation to the processes of capital accumulation, and a *political* rather than merely aesthetic struggle against those processes, they will – in Benjamin's cutting phrase - 'have no other social function whatever, than eternally to draw new effects from the political situation in order to amuse the public'.

by Tom Gann

SOCIAL CLEANSING IN SOUTHWARK

"Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start." Raymond Williams.

Both sides of the debate, now in vogue on the left, around how far culture is to blame for gentrification are limited, which suggests the question itself may be the wrong one. Those who seek to explain gentrification through the behaviour of cultural workers tend towards sullen moralistic attacks, merely inverting the celebration of the agency of the "hipoisie" by gentrification's boosters, refusing to recognise the role of capital in gentrification and ignoring the lives of working class communities displaced by gentrification. Equally, those "Marxists" resorting to economic explanations tend towards a restating of mechanistic shibboleths, paying no attention to local circumstances and ignoring local resistance to gentrification.

Instead, the question should be inverted so that we ask what kind of culture is produced by gentrification. This question would also expand the conception of culture, not just the activity of artists, as in the previous question, but also, culture in its ordinariness, as Williams had it: a "whole way of life…[to be] interpreted in relation to its underlying system of production." It is also necessary to remember that culture is always contested, both on the terrain of culture itself and through contestation within the underlying system of production and that culture has material effects, particularly by accelerating processes of gentrification.

This essay will focus on what is made legible in various figures of the urban pioneer and urban frontiers. These constructions all present a new kind of gentrification which is, as argued in one of Southwark Notes' vital essays, amnesiac and produced by social cleansing and the attendant cleansing of social memory.

Gentrification is always rooted historically in, as Neil Smith argues, patterns "of investment and disinvestment in the built environment". Prior to its gentrification, Peckham had experienced decades of often racially motivated disinvestment, creating the conditions for it to be experienced as a "frontier" for 'urban pioneers'. Smith explicitly links the idea of the urban frontier to the racism of settler colonialism's construction of the frontier, in which Native Americans are treated as part of the wilderness, similarly, "contemporary urban frontier imagery treats the present inner city population as a natural element of their physical surroundings. The term 'urban pioneer' is therefore as arrogant as the original notion of "pioneers" in that it suggests a city not yet socially inhabited; like Native Americans, the urban working class is seen as less than social, a part of the physical environment." Peckham has been consistently sold as "edgy" and "vibrant" as if these were natural properties, rather than a dubious distortion of cultures made in conditions of and against oppression and exclusion.

Much of the artistic production coming out of Peckham is similarly rooted in the sense that the culture of Peckham's inhabitants is exotic and natural rather than social and produced. This is the case both in art forms that enclose this "vibrant" culture and commodify it and in the public art that treats pre-gentrification Peckham as a cultural wasteland, whereby, as Southwark Notes observes, 'culture' is imposed "into local areas in the form of public art as if we have not been making our own culture for hundreds of years here."

Notable here for its occlusion of cultural production and contestation is the Peckham Peace Wall, a public artwork commissioned in response to the 2011 London Riots. The piece is derived from messages on post-it notes that were stuck to a burnt-out Poundland, which have now been transformed into a permanent artwork. Limited edition prints, signed by the "artist", are also available for £68 each. The Peace Wall is typical of the art produced by gentrification. Firstly, only certain sentiments are admitted to the work, creating a homogenous local patriotism of "real" inhabitants of Peckham against those involved in the uprising, hiding contestation. Secondly, these sentiments are presented as natural not already cultural, which is further testament to their authenticity, an impression which is supplemented by the (often false) naiveté of a lot of the pictures and handwriting so cultural production is hidden. This allows the artists to pose as the producers of the work, with the original post-it notes treated as a natural resource.

The amnesiac art of gentrification has also been used, consciously, to work on individual preferences to encourage gentrifiers, for example in the council-funded, Antony Gormley-designed bollards in Bellenden Road. Smith notes that next to already gentrified areas, individual preferences of gentrifiers become important in initiating the process. More generally evident in Bellenden Road is gentrification kitsch, rooted ultimately in capitalism's uneven and combined development.

Gentrification kitsch begins in a middle class effort at distinction from "working class" mass-produced commodities. In Bellenden Road it is often anti-modern in its vintage clothing and antique radiator shops (but always amnesiac and unhistorical in that the commodities of the past are abstracted from their social context, from the whole way of life that produced them, transforming the past into an immense accumulation of commodities). It is also, comically, anti-urbanist, with the area styling itself "Bellenden Village" - a cohesive community, without antagonism, with a "village grocer" and "general store". However, this already stereotypical individuality necessarily overcomes itself by contributing to making the area more attractive for capital. This then raises potential rents - there are already complaints that many of the artisan shops on Bellenden Road are being forced out by rent increases.

The culture of the gentrification of Elephant and Castle is similarly amnesiac but with a much crueller ideological expression and it is underpinned by a much larger role for both big capital and the state. Two aspects of Smith's analysis are vital here. Firstly, the centrality of potential ground rent - that is, rent for the land rather than for the building on the land. Regardless of the quality of the building on the land, potential ground rent can be increased by, as we've seen in the case of Bellenden Road, changes in the surrounding buildings and amenities. Secondly, without state action and big capital to destroy them, existing buildings (particularly when inhabited by council tenants or leaseholders) are a barrier to realising the gap between actual ground rent and its potential. In the case of the Heygate Estate, disinvestment almost since it was built, served as an excuse for its demolition allowing, as Southwark Council's regeneration guru demanded, "a better class of people" to be moved into Elephant and Castle.

The social cleansing and the mass evictions of the existing community reveals the truth of the "pioneering urbanaut" in the boosterist literature. When Southwark Tenants and Lambeth Renters occupied a flat in the tower, the estate agent was, above all, terrified by what would happen if potential buyers discovered how easy it is to outfox the sophisticated security system and allow the outside world in. Even in Smith's writings in 1996, there is a tinge of nostalgia for the liberal sensibilities and urbanism of the gentrifiers, when contrasted with the development of revanchist anti-urbanism, "a desperate defence of a challenged phalanx of privilege". Smith further argues that revanchism need not be opposed to gentrification, and indeed in aiming to cleanse the city could be a favouring condition of a resurgence of gentrification, which " will not mean…a kinder urbanism. The more likely scenario is of a sharpened bipolarity of the city in which white middle-class assumptions entrench a narrow set of social norms against which everyone else is found wanting." In the revanchist city, culture here becomes a site of contestation in which white middle class assumptions are valorised against the "feral" and "uncultured", with no right to inhabit.

More than anywhere else in London, Elephant and Castle is an instance of this fusion of anti-urbanist revanchism and gentrification. This is clearest in the timid, anti-street life ethos of Strata - with Elephant insufficiently cleansed, the world outside the securitised tower is experienced as always threatening and uncultured. This accelerates even the anti-urbanist devitalisations of culture in gentrification in Bellenden Road. As Smith argues, "very vital working class communities are culturally devitalised through gentrification as the new middle class shuns the streets" towards dystopia.

The amnesiac new of Elephant and Castle is a new that expresses both the progress made with social cleansing and wills its completion. It is at best tactless, at worst gloating, as Southwark Notes observe, "the Heygate site…is an open wound for many people who were treated by the council with appalling contempt…it is not an empty site ripe for adventures in the art playgrounds of the recent graduates from St. Martin's and Chelsea art colleges." This amnesiac new has been substantially aided by Southwark Council, particularly in the case of the Artworks boxpark, which involves the enclosure of a well used public space containing "a large expanse of grass, large mature trees and a small kids playground" that will now only be open to the community under the sufferance of the developer.

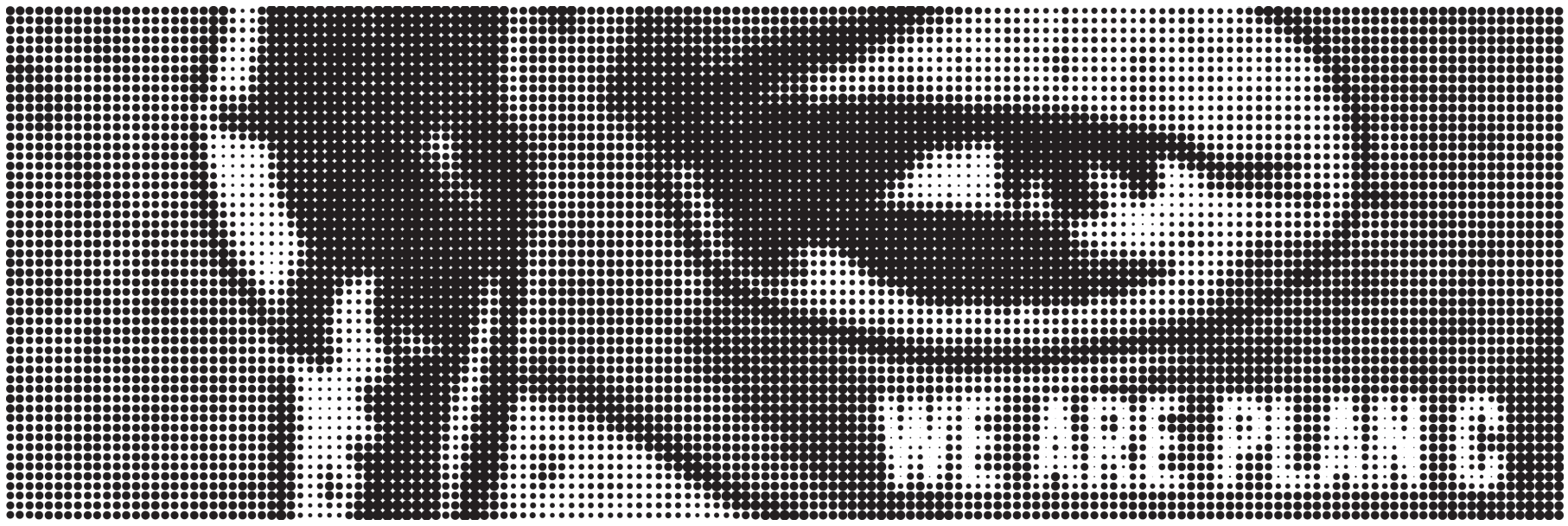
There is a temptation - especially from those sections of the left who blame artists, or consumption preferences more generally, for gentrification - to retreat into a resentful idealisation of imagined pre-gentrification working class communities. This idealisation, however, repeats the conceptions of culture produced by gentrification but sullenly inverts them. Working class communities are again defined by their consumption preferences, which are imagined as authentic and pure and unrooted in struggle and oppression. Its sullen rejection of false happiness also removes any consideration of true happiness in urban life. Further nostalgia for a working class past that never was cannot reckon with the lack of investment in housing. In his analysis of gentrification in Harlem, Smith points out gentrification's Catch 22, that "without private rehabilitation and redevelopment, the neighborhood's housing stock will remain severely dilapidated; with it a large number of residents will ultimately be displaced".

Smith's Catch 22 of gentrification is constituted by the lack of any possibility of public investment in housing, part of the demand for a new against gentrification involves demands on both national and local governments that there is public investment in housing stock without social cleansing. The second aspect of the Communist new is trust in the capacities and knowledge of working class people to initiate solutions to urban problems. These capacities (against the amnesiac and bureaucratic new of gentrification) are necessarily grounded in long experience. These possibilities are suggested by the efforts of local people in Elephant and Castle who, as Southwark Notes describes, have "come together repeatedly and put their precious time to seek that genuine community benefits come to the area. They have put forward serious, considered proposals for creative uses, employment chances, health matters and maintaining public spaces". They are also suggested by Henri Lefebvre's outline of a critique of technocratic and capitalist anti-urbanism in the name of the possibilities of an urban experience including possibilities for play and creative activities for all, initiated, necessarily, by "the presence and action of a working class, the only one able to put an end to a segregation directed essentially against it.

photo by Jack Dean

by Leeds Plan C

HUNSLET TURNED UPSIDE DOWN



The city of Leeds was once a Victorian powerhouse of capital accumulation, high employment, rich industrialists and grand civic architecture. Today the city centre markets itself as a haven for financial services, high-end shopping, and innovative PFI schemes. The financial crisis of 2008 has caused this story to stutter, but will this allow other visions to raise their heads? Leeds Plan C explore how this might play out in the Hunslet area of Leeds.

Leeds is haunted by the ghosts of developments past; both the buildings that didn't come to pass and the futures those failed projects promised. Of these it's Leeds' ghost towers that are most visible, although of course only through their absence. There are gaps in the skyline, holes in the ground. The failure of the council's 'Tall Buildings' policy may be hidden behind hoardings, but no one is fooled. And as the plan to develop Leeds upwards has faltered we move to the default, development outwards.

Just a mile south-east of the city centre, Hunslet was once home to Leeds' manufacturing and heavy engineering industries. A rump of those industries remains but the working class which laboured in them was broken up and relocated by the redevelopment of the late 1960s. Fifty years later, Hunslet and South East Leeds stand on the verge of another episode of 'regeneration'. With plentiful brown field sites and cheap corrugated buildings, it's the prime target for the outwards spread of the city centre. Yet as we researched the often obscured development plans, as we walked the area and pieced the different schemes together, it soon became clear that they didn't add up. So, on a sunny day in early May, we led a guided walk around the area to discuss the various ways this could all play out.

We began the walk in the Tetley building, now an arts centre, which only a few years ago served as the centre of Tetley's brewery complex. The smell of hops that once floated across the city centre is gone for good and so too are the jobs the brewery provided - up to a thousand in its heyday. The Tetley building now sits isolated in the middle of a large car park - a familiar sight in a city choked by cars and lacking effective or affordable public transport. Yet the creative industries, for which the Tetley is an outlier, are central to the story being told about Hunslet. They are meant to provide not just 'destination' attractions to drag consumers across the river Aire, but also to provide employment. And it's here that the development story starts to break down.

The creative industries are an elastic category. In Hunslet they include not just the cultural sector but also the world of digital start-ups. There has been wild talk of South Leeds becoming the new 'silicon roundabout', ignoring the fact of the original in Shoreditch. The dissipation of the latter in the face of rising real estate prices shows the real source of 'growth' in the UK. In Hunslet, an ex-casino is to be re-developed into a 'super building' called the Engine. It will contain 'flexible workspace' allowing entrepreneurs and 'creatives' to rent table space by the hour and create synergy in the coffee shops. This may seem familiar as the same story is trotted out up and down the country. Embarrassingly, the same spiel was told about Leeds' previous development target, the adjoining area of Holbeck, which just four or five years ago was crowned Leeds' creative quarter. If it didn't work there then why should it work two miles to the East?

The problem is not geographic, it is inherent to the digital and creative industries. Even when they succeed they just don't employ many people. When Instagram, a popular photo-sharing site, was sold to Facebook for $1 billion in 2012, it had 30 million users, yet it only employed 13 people. In comparison Kodak, which filed for bankruptcy a few months earlier, employed 145,000 people at its height. The production of phone apps is never going to provide the kind of mass employment that Holbeck's industry once did.

The other new jobs in the area will be in the public sector, more specifically in education. There are plans to open a new school in Hunslet in 2016. Several further education colleges are also being built. But where will the students come from? No doubt they'll end up being bussed in but officially the school is meant to promote inner-city family living. There is talk of 8,000 new housing units in the area, many of these family homes. Those young professionals now living in a cramped city centre flat, so the story goes, will no longer need to move to the suburbs to raise a family. They will just cross the river into a vibrant but family-friendly community. Yet a quick walk around the neighbourhood raises some serious doubts - it is dominated by traffic. When Leeds became the 'motorway city of the 70s' and the M1 was brought to the city centre, Hunslet was cut in half. This played a big role in the area's depopulation. Today it's still a traffic hub, a noisy and polluted place which people and things pass through on the way to somewhere else. Not the kind of location where many people would choose to raise children.

So what do we do with this story that won't make sense? We could look for corruption and ask who owns the crumbling buildings that litter the site. Developers, after all, don't need their plans to work out in the long term as long as a buzz is generated and real estate prices rise in the short term. But is such research enough? Won't its revelation just reinforce the prevailing mood of public cynicism? Is this politically effective? Perhaps we need to move beyond critique and propose different ideas of the future.

Hunslet is a peculiar case of drawn out gentrification. Its depopulation in the 60s and 70s makes the usual campaigning approach unfeasible. We can't defend the rights of existing residents if none are being displaced. This gives us a chance to ask a different question: if current plans don't make sense then what would be needed to make them work? Let's put it another way. The story of creative jobs in a green and vibrant family environment is attractive. The desires for this sort of life are currently being mobilised towards a real estate scam. But can they be mobilised in a different direction? Can they trigger the kinds of political struggle and campaigns that might actually bring their alternatives? And along the way can we make these desires more equitable and sustainable?

The first change we need is in transport. The private monopoly of public transport has been a disaster. Prices have risen so fast that families consider taxis the cheaper option. If cars are to stop clogging the roads and polluting the air then fares need to come down and free public transport must be the horizon. Such campaigns may not sound glamorous but they can have far-reaching effects. The Brazilian Autumn of mass protests in 2013 was sparked by a small group acting on precisely this demand.

The other side to the reduction of prices is the raising of incomes - but how can this be achieved when well-paying jobs are ever scarcer? One idea that makes sense in this context is the Universal Basic Income, which guarantees basic needs regardless of employment. Not only would this strengthen the hand of labour when demanding higher wages but it might also allow the spread of creative jobs for all who want them. The dictatorship of the unpaid intern would finally come to an end. It could also lead to the enlargement of the collaborative commons, which have been revealed by digital technology but whose potential goes much further. If we followed such a path, more and more of our lives could be extracted from the dictates of the market. Of course this would not be easy to bring about, but its logic follows from the myth of the 'good life' currently on offer.

Chief amongst the obstacles in our way is the current distribution of power. Economic inequalities in Leeds are sky high, with large parts written off as surplus populations. Surplus to requirements and so simply a public order issue. We desperately need affordable housing and the end of subsidies for landlords. What we don't need is more luxury accommodation. Yet the council's policy of 'developer-led development' locks in the super-rich's monopoly over visions for the city. So ultimately we need to re-democratise, to shift the balance of power. Any development that doesn't address existing inequalities will only reinforce them.

Preoccupying:
Selma James

SELMA JAMES IS AN ACTIVIST AND A PROLIFIC WRITER ON ANTI-RACISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS, FOUNDER OF THE INTERNATIONAL WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK CAMPAIGN, AND CURRENT COORDINATOR OF GLOBAL WOMEN'S STRIKE. THE POWER OF WOMEN AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY, CO-AUTHORED WITH MARIAROSA DALLA COSTA, LAUNCHED THE 'DOMESTIC LABOUR' DEBATE. IT POSITED THAT THE WORK THAT WOMEN DO - NOT SIMPLY THE 'ROLE' THAT THEY PLAY - OUTSIDE OF THE MARKET PRODUCES (AND REPRODUCES) THE WHOLE OF THE WORKING CLASS AND, BY EXTENSION, THE MARKET ECONOMY. IN 2012, SHE PUBLISHED SEX, RACE AND CLASS: THE PERSPECTIVE OF WINNING, A COLLECTION OF HER WORK SPANNING SIXTY YEARS. WE SAT DOWN WITH SELMA, NINA FROM LEGAL ACTION FOR WOMEN AND LAURA FROM THE ENGLISH COLLECTIVE OF PROSTITUTES AT THE CROSSROADS WOMEN'S CENTRE FOR A CONVERSATION WHICH COVERED A WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS AND STRUGGLES - A HEAVILY EDITED VERSION OF WHICH IS PRODUCED HERE.

FOR THE FULL INTERVIEW, VISIT ***bit.ly/SJames***

OCCUPIED TIMES **As part of the International Wages for Housework campaign you demanded money from the state for women's unwaged, domestic labour. The lives of women with families continue to be characterised by unwaged work, and many also have the added struggle of more traditional waged labour. Do you sense a re-emergence of the kinds of analysis and drive that led to this campaign in the 1970s? What lessons can we learn from its successes and failures, and how best can we continue to challenge the exploitation of women today?**

SELMA JAMES Now, what happened with WFH was that it came out of the movement of the 60s. It came from single mothers who fought for welfare, who immediately turned onto WFH, when we talked about it, and who said that the state was paying them too little for the work that they were doing. What women would say from that movement is 'I have money of my own and therefore I am financially independent of men. My next door neighbours are often jealous of me because I have more freedom than they have in spite of the fact that they have access to more money. They themselves have less money that is their own. All they have is the family allowance (now child benefit)'.

Now, I had been a full-time housewife, but I had also been a factory worker, an office worker, a typist, and I wanted money so that I didn't have to be a factory worker and an audio typist. I'd been my husband's [C.L.R. James] secretary, I'd been doing all this secretarial work but I didn't think of myself as a secretary. I was just doing the work. It was kind of the 'family business'. And I was raising a child and then I was also helping to raise a stepchild. I was the caring side of the family.

I had also just finished reading, in a study group, Volume One of Capital and discovered that [Marx] speaks about labour-power as a commodity and I thought my comrades had really been remiss in not mentioning that women made the basic capitalist commodity. And of course they'd never made the connection between labour-power and women - as astonishing as that seems it took a mass movement for that to be clear. That's true with mass movements; they clarify a lot of things.

Nina *There was a demand for 24-hour childcare*

SJ That was one of the first demands. I was not for that. I didn't fight it, but I was not for 24-hour child care. It was enough that you had to give your child to the state when they were 4 or 5 years old, I found that intolerable. But I didn't want to give my life to educating my children. I shut up and swallowed hard, but many of us believed that the children we have should not be handed to the state for its morality, its view of history, its view of discipline, for the state's view of who you are and what you should be doing with your life - that's what the schooling system was.

People who oppose it [WFH] aren't threatened in the same way. Women have made their mark and have gone up in the society, like the women on the front benches who came in via the Labour party, and now the Tories, even they have a few feminists in front. They know they're going to get some jobs, or they're going to fight among each other over which one is going to get the job. But, there's a job there for girls and so, they don't feel as threatened. But, the grassroots women are different. Women felt they deserved the money, but they didn't think they'd get it, and they didn't see that feminism would've supported them getting it. And so, they decided, I'm going to go for a job. They went for a job because they wanted money of their own. Now, this is 30-40 years later, they're tired. They've been there, done that, are fed up with the lot of it and they know they're not going anywhere unless they make a struggle, and so they are interested in WFH and considering what their chances are and how they can organise for it. But they haven't decided yet. You'll know when they've decided it, because you'll look out the window and they'll be there, in some thousands. Until that happens, they're still making up their minds, people are working it out...

OT **In Revolution at Point Zero, Silvia Federici rethinks the Wages for Housework campaign, stating 'the creation of the commons... must be seen as a complement and presupposition of the struggle over the wage' and that the production of commoning practices are of crucial importance. Federici mentions new collective forms of reproduction and confronting divisions of race, gender, age and geographical location that have been forced upon us, whilst acknowledging that communal forms of living are central to reorganising everyday life and creating non-exploitative social relations. Do you agree with Federici's assessment? If so, what do you believe the creation of the commons will require? What steps can women, and communities more broadly, take to transform everyday life in ways that will last?**

SJ I don't know about the 'creation of the commons' but I do know that many people in the industrial world are trying to squeeze some forms of cooperation into their lives outside of production - community farms, communal childcare. In Africa, collective work is traditional, though much of this has been destroyed by imperialism. But the power of the state/industry/the market limits our time and resources even to begin most of the time, and they sabotage our every attempt to be independent of them.

Our Centre tries to be a genuine collective, but it's a struggle. Wages for Housework stands for women and men having the choices to live our lives with as much autonomy from the state as we can, but we have no illusion about building a utopia within capitalism. When we first demanded wages for all unwaged work some people said, we want services instead; we replied: we demand money, we are owed and we'll make the services we want, that we collectively determine. Confusing wages for housework with this call for collective services is going backwards. It was hard enough to build collective services in Venezuela when there was a revolutionary government headed by Hugo Chavez. And they were wonderful. The neighbourhood women often ran them but they often didn't get paid. There is no alternative to confronting their market, their repression, and organising to do that.

To believe that "the possibility of the commons is that it has the potential to create forms of reproduction enabling us to resist dependence on wage labour and subordination to capitalist relations" is a fantasy for most of us in the world who are struggling to survive. Are sexism and racism going to evaporate? Is it no longer necessary to address them or to address class power? The idea that we can remake society without overthrowing the state is classical utopianism. I found utopianism absurd - for academics. For most of us struggling to survive it is a joke but not a funny one.

ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND RAPE

SJ [Women are] uncertain about whether they should organise as women, for many good reasons. But when they *do* organise as women the first thing they organise against is rape. Because that is absolutely intolerable and that is a woman's fate unless we organise against it. The fury that women feel about rape - at our Centre you can see how strong that is - expresses the fury against all the other restraints that women suffer. But they feel that we can get through more easily on the rape issue because it is now morally indefensible: even the state says it's wrong. Mind you, they don't do much about it, and then you have to fight against them because the police will not investigate and then they'll drop it and they treat you like hell. And then they finally get something together and the CPS [Crown Prosecution Service] gets some stupid lawyer to prosecute. And then the rapist gets a woman to represent him. It is widespread for women barristers to represent rapists. And they tell you that they do that, women barristers do that, because they say that they can't get jobs defending people accused of other crimes. So for many at least, the only jobs open to them are defending rapists. And they behave just like any prosecutors defending a rapist: demeaning and destroying the victim.

ON ACADEMIA AND "THE LEFT"

SJ You know, we had a demonstration at the Left Forum. In 2012 I attended the Left Forum because the anthology 'Sex, Race and Class' was published so the publishers arranged for me to go. And the Strike [Global Women's Strike] had a workshop on prisons (I work with Mumia Abu-Jamal and edited his book '*Jailhouse Lawyers*' which is really a good read, he did a wonderful job.) And so I met Victoria Law, who concentrates on women prisoners and she said "You know I've been trying to get the Left Forum to have childcare and they will not have childcare." The GWS was there, we started a petition, we got signatures. 2013 we still agitated. In 2014, there was still no childcare. We met someone who was interested in having a demonstration and we said "YES!" And about 50 women, and there were some men and children in it, had a demonstration within the Left Forum and they watched us as we passed. I never saw anything like it. Some younger men applauded but very few came and joined us.

If you want to know about academia, that was a really good snapshot. And we were quite shocked. They have not acknowledged the work that women do except as an academic subject. They have not acknowledged that a crucial part of what keeps any working class movement together is the work that women do. They have not acknowledged the debt that the anti-police repression movement owes to women who have always been there in the courtroom, in the prisons - this is the work of keeping the movement together. This is the work of undermining repression. They have never acknowledged what it means, really, to reproduce the working class, what it means to be raising a working class kid. What a tragedy that is for women on a mass scale. All of these questions the Left has left out.

ON TECHNOLOGY, MARX AND WORK

SJ The left is interested in a very 20th century idea of what production is about. Anybody who says 'we want jobs' is not addressing people today. Technology eliminates jobs but not work, and at the same time governments are eliminating welfare, so that, fundamentally, we will be threatened with starving to death or at least dying young. And there are so many ways they are killing us. The food industry is destroying our health and then Big Pharma is interested in giving us medicine to keep us alive until we keel over. They are into death. People in the movement are not always clear about how much we are under attack. The Left have a great fascination with technology and think that "development" is the development of technology. Now, in that book I showed you ['*UJAMAA: The hidden story of Tanzania's socialist villages*']: Nyerere, first President of Tanzania, said 'Development is the development of people'. We haven't heard that from anyone in a long time.

[Marx] knew, always, that central to production was people, and he said that's the difference between us and the capitalists: their end and aim is not people, but their own wealth. And, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy - they do it because the money itself requires them to make money, the whole economy is based on the necessity to increase and develop, increase and develop to compete. We are not interested in any of that – we are interested in whether people are developing, and that the technology is at our disposal. People don't seem to know that about Marx. People on the Left seem not to mention that. They say we want jobs. We've never wanted their jobs, we wanted technology to eliminate those jobs so that we would have time, including to remake the world – it's a crucial part of what you do when you have time, you remake yourself or your community!

OT **In thinking about looking for wages for domestic and reproductive work and trying to tackle this idea of capital accumulation at the same time, it's interesting that you mentioned prophecy. Are we now in a time of a contradiction of capitalism where productivity is being squeezed so much with new technology, and labour-power strangled with redundancies, zero-hour contracts and so on? We have seen capital remould itself in times of crises, but after the last round in 2008, which we are still feeling the effects of from the state and in the labour market, how do you think capitalism will progress?**

photo by Wasi Daniju

SJ There is no capitalist crisis. There is a working class crisis. You know, they're getting richer and richer – they're not in crisis. We are in crisis because we have not worked out how to build the movement in a way which will not turn out to be the opposite of what we intended. That's our crisis. Every single movement we have built, has turned into 'a whip for your own back'. So that all of the movements are now headed by people who sit down and negotiate with the enemy and then, if they don't, the media says the leaders are "irresponsible". Irresponsible means you have not sold out your membership. We lost the miners' strike because of the unions, because most of the unions scabbed, and the members of the union did not collectively say 'no'. That's part of the crisis that we face.

OT **One of the big problems we saw with the Occupy movement – this very same process which came from this overarching umbrella concept of some kind of popular uprising, but women were shoved out, people of colour were shoved out. Nothing which questioned the validity of the state was allowed, nothing that mentioned capitalism was allowed. It became a naked careerist thing for people to put something on their CV to show that they 'do' politics, to get jobs, to do PhDs, be PR executives etc. The rest of us were thrown back to the scrapheap to try again.**

SJ This is a really good statement of what happened with Occupy here in London. What you are saying is that people came into Occupy because they thought of it as a career option, which is very common in organisations of the movement. Police agents would be welcome because their purpose was the same as careerists: to ensure that the boat did not rock. And included are the vanguardists – which is another form of pursuing power for oneself. The only way to ensure that those types don't dominate is to organise and ensure that the grassroots is in charge, and make a fight about the question of racism and the question of sexism even if it causes splits. If Occupy had been split some part of Occupy still might be going. But because it didn't split good people were put off.

In general it has been difficult to stay autonomous because so many people want to take you over once you have organised a little power. The way we have done it in the WFH campaign is to be very disciplined among ourselves and to ensure that our principles are constantly before us judging what we do as well as what others do and listening hard to people in our network for what they think and what they are doing. We work on ourselves and our consciousness rather than on anybody else's, and that consciousness is shaped by the fact that we have autonomous organisations - women of colour, queer women and men, single mothers, women and men with disabilities. And that ensures that these issues are always dealt with, always on the basis of the principles that we all agree about - autonomy but not separatism.

When you organise in this way you train others, and others train you, so that you can be of great ongoing use to the movement. Just one example is that when the hunger strikes began to take place at Yarl's Wood detention centre for asylum seekers, it was Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women of Colour-Global Women's Strike who advertised it, supported it, got media for it and especially let people know that it was happening and were constantly in touch with the women inside. The Strike did that job because we had been trained in all that we had been doing up till then. It was our job to support them in ways that would promote them *rather than ourselves*. That's a big principle and everyone who is serious, politically, needs it.

It is the challenge of building a movement. The movement, by its nature, must cross these boundaries, which means that you are always addressing the power relations among us and always in your struggle, whoever you are and wherever you are, you must seek to undermine these divisions. That's what your job is. Your job is not merely to organise; your job is to - I hate to use the word now that it is discredited - 'unify'. But unify in such a way that nobody's demands are demeaned or ignored. I think that intersectionality is a word that academia uses in order to draw the lifeblood out of the struggles to destroy the power relations among us. To overcome those divisions is really to win against capitalism.

ON HISTORY: LENIN AND VANGUARDISM

SJ [By] 1906/07, according to C.L.R., Lenin had grave doubts about what he had written in 1902 (*What is to be Done*), calling for a vanguard of intellectuals. C.L.R. would say to me often, often because it was something that preoccupied him, that Lenin didn't want *What is to be Done* spread about. He would ask are you sure this is what we [the Bolsheviks] should be saying? Lenin didn't know where he stood on *What is to be Done* because it is a very elitist view, and he had gone through a revolution, which changes you dramatically. It says only the intellectuals can have revolutionary consciousness, and that the working classes can only reach trade union consciousness. Can you imagine?!

The academics would agree with that entirely. By the end, 1923, Lenin wrote three important essays. One of them is *On Co-operation*. He was offering the population to take charge of production through co-operatives because he was turning away from the whole emphasis of a vanguard; he thought they could do it through their collectives now that they had state power. In this and other writings, he was trying to work out how the working class could take power. And this is the exact opposite to *What is to be Done*. Every Trotskyist and most other organisations of the Left, except the ones who are horizontalist, believe in *What is to be Done*. It's over 100 years old, it's mouldy, it's reactionary, and it's not Lenin any more. We know another Lenin. The one who made the revolution could not have believed in that because the party would not take power and Lenin said 'If you do not take power, I'll go over your heads to the masses' who loved him. He said, I'll just push you aside, so they said, all right, we'll take power. That was the great Russian Revolution led by the Bolshevik Party. This is the party that was no good then, it was also anti-semitic and chauvinist against the nationalities. Like Lenin said, scratch a Bolshevik and you find a Russian Chauvinist!

ON RACISM

SJ What has happened on race is crucial. People are against racism. Most white people don't like racism. It doesn't mean that they are not racist, but it means that you can win them over with a show of Black power which is compassionate and which is class-based, which means the poor are us and you and me, we belong together. In "Bulworth", Warren Beatty sings that 'white people got more in common with coloured people than they do with rich people'. You can work with anybody today in a way that would have been impossible, even in the sixties. Racism, sexism, and anti-gay etc, is discredited.

I kissed a tory (and I liked it)

by Huw Lemmey

They seem like a very teenage expression of rebellion, but I've seen a pin badge around London that nonetheless shocks me every time: "I've never kissed a Tory". I've tried to pick apart its meaning. No doubt it's intended as a cipher of just how deeply one's political commitment goes. It's also a tacit nod and wink (as these discussions too often are) to an underlying acknowledgement that the person is indeed political.

But I always look at the badge and think "well how do you know?" I try to reimagine my sexual history by placing bodies I've touched (or that have touched me) on a political compass, and realise that for every comrade-in-arms there are ten points where data is insufficient. Perhaps never fucking Tories is a declaration of sex-strike, or an implication that there's a correlation between conservatism and an ungenerous sexual attitude. That's never been my experience.

I don't say this to shame those pin-wearers; a partisan sexuality is an idea pregnant with possibilities. I just wonder whether the pin demonstrates the limits of a communist politics of sex today, where the little plastic badge stands in for a discussion about sex that is almost wholly focused on controlling and shaping the political and cultural representations of sexual identity, but where discussions of the material concerns of sex are strangely absent.

Whether you fuck Tories or not comes down to a number of different factors: how do you meet sexual partners, and where? Do you enjoy access to social difference in a romantic or erotic setting? What are established protocols for negotiating sex? How long do you know your partner(s) for? Where do you fuck them? Where could you fuck them?

These are all political questions, and furthermore, they're often more troubled and contested, more influential on the development of our sexual lives, than the question of whose box you tick. These are questions of infrastructure and infrastructure is marking itself out as a key battleground for political contestation in the 21st Century. As well as understanding sexual politics as a fight over representations and over rights, how can we build a sexual politics based around an explicit concern for the material; the sexual infrastructure?

Let's discuss an example. In popular retellings of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, numerous factors are used to explain the huge upsurge in contestation of sexual, gender and domestic norms. These are often philosophical and cultural; a turn by a younger generation against the greyscale certainties of austerity Britain, a new spirit of freedom. They are also infrastructural concerns, however - not least in Britain. Perhaps most well known amongst these is the combination of a new public form of health provision, the NHS, and the development of the contraceptive pill. I'd add to these a third, important but overlooked: the implementation of a widespread social housing project.

If you'd walked through Victoria Park, Hackney, at dusk between the wars, you'd find a public urban space filled with bodies coupling — heterosexual coupling. For young, working-class couples, still courting and unmarried, finding space for sexual contact was virtually impossible in any domestic setting. A housing shortage, and low wages, meant families living in shared accommodation up to, and even after, marriage. Siblings shared rooms and even beds. Like today, social taboos and awkwardness around sex were strong and formal sex education nonexistent. As a result, outdoor sex became, if not the norm, then part of the sexual subculture of young inter-war London. In his book 'Queer London' historian Matt Houlbrook recounts that 'Between February 1918 and August 1919, for example, sixty-nine "heterosexual" couples were prosecuted for indecency offences on Hampstead Heath, while there were only two instances involving same-sex couples.'

The gradual introduction of new housing stock, alongside the slum clearances of the old East End, helped move sex back into the private sphere. Today outdoor sex is an unusual enough activity to be virtually classified as a paraphilia; "dogging" has socially written outdoor sex as a specific kink, a fetishistic perversion in its own right.

Homosexual public sex remained more commonplace, queer citizens long having a different relationship towards public and private space. With the shift towards a more rights-based gay politics, however, even cottaging and cruising Hampstead Heath have become rare fetishes, set apart from the more heteronormative forms increasingly pushed as appropriate sexual models.

This small example of the effects of infrastructure on our sexual behaviours could take its place amongst a thousand similar examples, from the introduction of downlighters in cinema aisles (an anti-sex measure) to the inbuilt sexual biases within the coding of sex and dating apps, especially geosocial networking apps such as Grindr or Tinder. Each one highlights how poor our vocabulary and conversations regarding the material politics of sex can become: whilst we obsess over the representation of sexuality, the everyday means of getting laid are shaped by forces further and further out of our control. Perhaps one way to establish that dialogue is through the lens of #stacktivism, a hashtag-turned-public-conversation, where we can start to collate these disparate infrastructural effects into a comprehensible public discussion on their effects on our lives — and maybe take back that control.

In his book "Times Square Red, Times Square Blue" sci-fi novelist Samuel R. Delany looks back over a 30-something year period where part of his sex life inhabited a very particular sexual infrastructure in New York, an infrastructure created to provide an environment for men who, due to their domestic circumstances, often need a "third place" to initiate and conduct sexual relations. In the (straight) sex cinemas of Times Square, men could cruise and fuck in open sight; Delany's tender prose mourns the loss of a sexual community literally destroyed as its infrastructure was destroyed, forced out when the Square was "cleaned-up" — a telling phrase — under Rudolph Giuliani's 'regeneration' scheme in the mid-90s. One of the strengths of an open, public sex culture, Delany argues, is the ability to mix widely with groups that precisely don't share your background, wealth or political allegiances. What he calls "cross-class contact" was a mark of a rich urban environment alive with sexual possibility, pitted against the monocultural, class-locked ideology of "family values". The loss of these contacts through an explicit policy of changing the infrastructure of Times Square through sexual cleansing should be regretted.

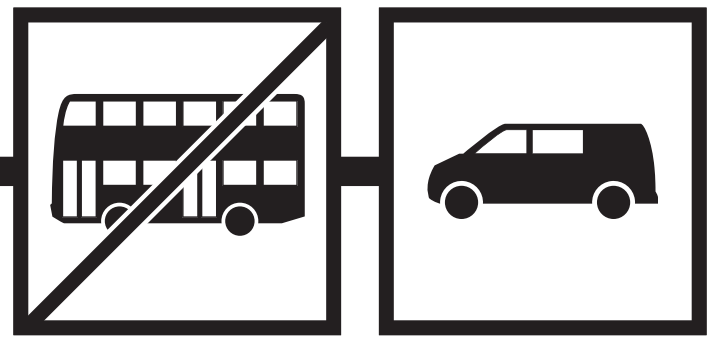
Sex continues to become a more private affair, with narrower implications for human experience. It becomes a commodifiable asset as the infrastructure is effectively privatised; a spectrum of behaviours and expressions become compartmentalised into specific, discrete (and discreet) kinks or tribes. It feels to me that a politics that reclaims the possibilities of urban space by understanding and making-democratic infrastructure space is more vital and exciting in its potential than limiting ourselves to a sexual politics of restriction and prohibition. What is exciting about not kissing Tories?

MASS ARRESTS ARE USED TO INTIMIDATE PROTESTORS AND GATHER THEIR DETAILS, SOMETIMES LEADING TO MALICIOUS PROSECUTION FOR AN UNLUCKY FEW. THE TACTIC REQUIRES COMPLIANCE TO BE EFFECTIVE. DO THE POLICE HAVE THE RESOURCES TO CARRY OUT MASS ARRESTS IN THE FACE OF MASS NON-COMPLIANCE? ACT COLLECTIVELY TO ATTEMPT TO SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER. HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS:

HOW TO OBSTRUCT MASS ARRESTS

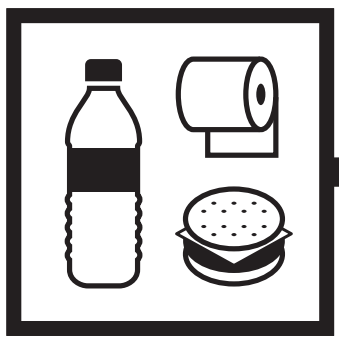
1 PASSIVELY RESIST

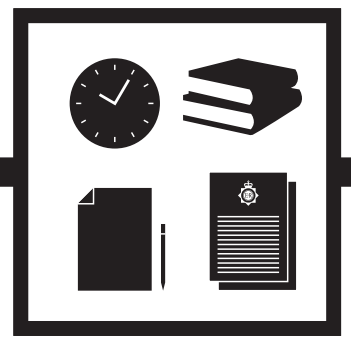
Refuse to walk onto buses brought in to transport arrestees / Make them bring vans for each of us, requiring masses of transport & cops to carry us into them



2 DON'T TALK TO COPS – THEY'RE NOT ON YOUR SIDE

Do not engage in "friendly chats" – They're fishing for information / Answer "NO COMMENT" to all interview questions / Police doctors and medics are still police officers



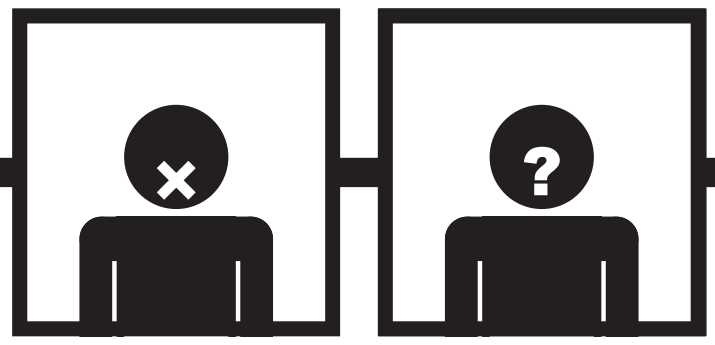


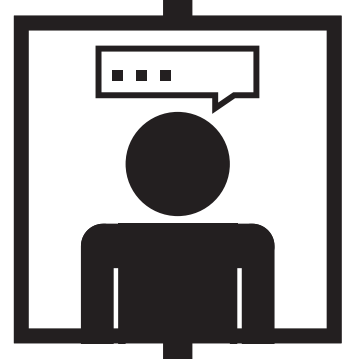
3 DEMAND EVERYTHING YOU CAN

Water, Food, Toilet Paper / Phone Call, Medical Help, Solicitor / The Time, Pen and Paper, Books, Police Code Of Practice

4 REFUSE EVERYTHING YOU CAN

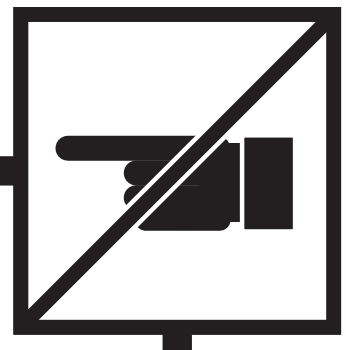
Resist sharing personal details until speaking with solicitor / If in doubt, ask loudly "am I legally obliged to do that?" / Avoid signing things - this maintains an illusion of consent





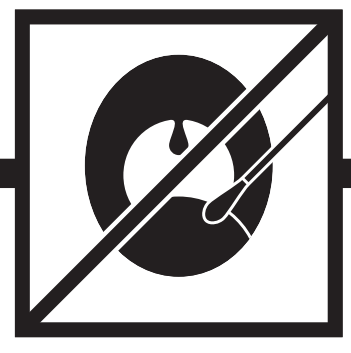
5 AT THE POLICE STATION, BE RESISTANT

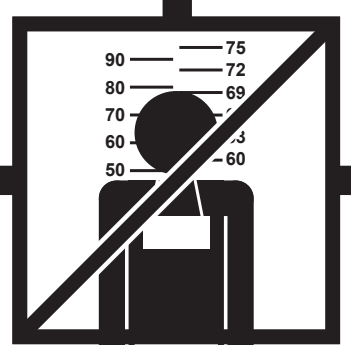
Refuse to go where they tell you / Refuse to put your hands on the fingerprinting machine / Refuse to open your mouth for a DNA swab / Refuse to sit calmly for mugshots / Refuse to undress if they attempt a strip search



WASTE THEIR TIME!

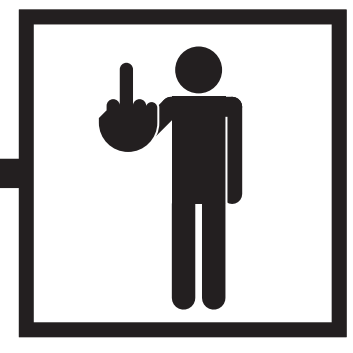
MAKE BEING IN CUSTODY AS DIFFICULT FOR THE COPS AS YOU CAN / WHY WALK INTO A PRISON? ONLY WALK OUT!



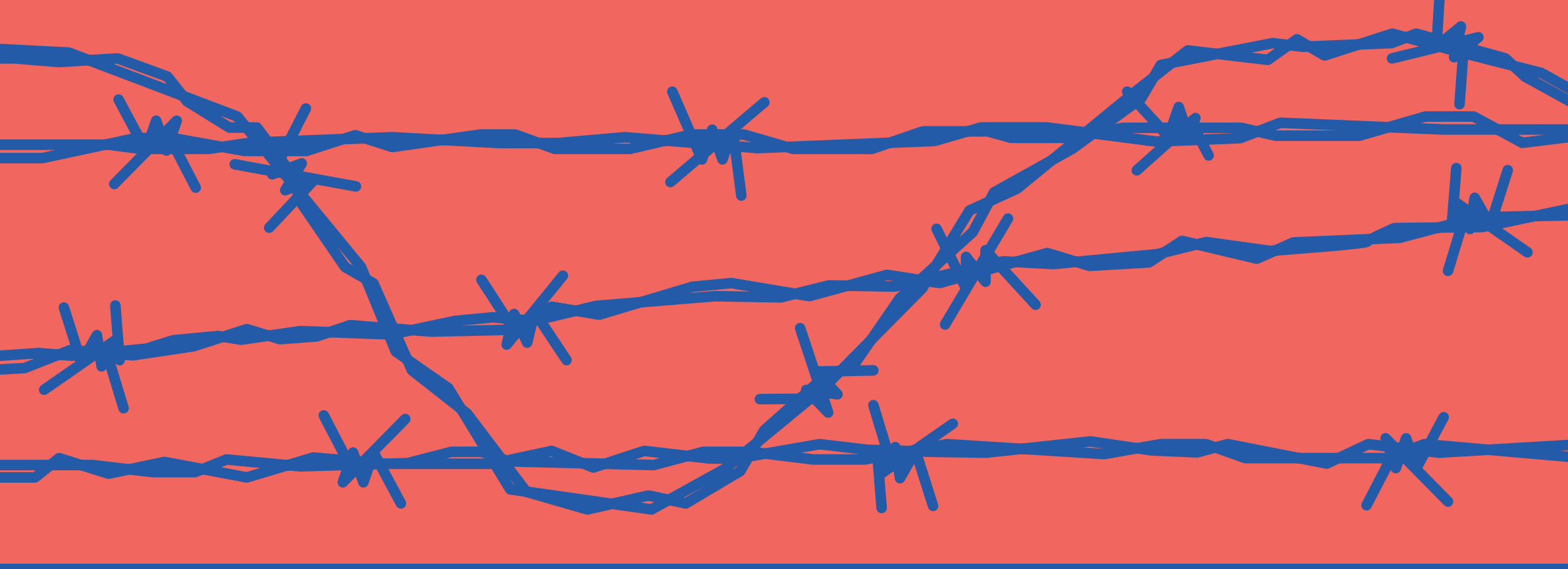


DO IT YOUR WAY

These tips are not obligations / Trust your own judgement of the situation / Develop fictional personas / Stay unpredictable



THIS ADVICE MAY NOT PREVENT YOUR ARREST, BUT IT WILL REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF FUTURE MASS ARRESTS.
DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS POLICING BY CONSENT.



NO FENCE UNCUT

NO ONE IS ILLEGAL

NO WALL UNCLIMBED