

# “Good Politics”

Property, Intersectionality, and the Making of the Anarchist  
Self

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# [Front Matter]

## Abstract

Contemporary anarchist activists aim to manifest non-hierarchical social relations within their own social milieu, as well as topple the social hierarchies that characterize the dominant society, such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism: Anarchists observe the importance of “means” matching “ends” and work to bring about “a new world in the shell of the old”. I argue however that anarchist activism in North America does not entirely subvert the logic of neoliberalism. Colonial property relations, bureaucratic legalism, and statistical fantasies of the sovereign state (among other linear equations) continue to inflect anarchist politics and self-making projects: the rhizome is re-territorialized.

This multi-sited ethnography explores anarchist networks that cross Québec, the United States and Mexico to demonstrate how anarchist practice is mired in contradiction, especially to the extent that this practice is shaped by notions of self and property (propriety) dominant in English-speaking North America. My comparative study illustrates similarities and differences among diverse anarchist scenes, throwing into relief the particular practices of university-educated Anglo American leftists, and draws on anthropological, feminist and critical race theory to show how they have preempted the black feminist challenge of “intersectionality” by recuperating its praxis within the logic of neoliberal self-making projects and property relations, a particular economy of value in which certain identities are foregrounded and others—especially that of class— are effectively concealed. Ultimately the anarchists are presented as a limit case: even within their “autonomous” everyday practices, the propertizing self prevails in what I call the game of “good politics” — the Bridge of all prestige games, and one which structures much contemporary critical academic scholarship as well.

## Résumé

Les militants anarchistes contemporains cherchent à manifester des relations sociales non hiérarchiques au sein de leur propre milieu social et à renverser les hiérarchies sociales qui caractérisent la société dominante, comme le suprémacisme blanc, le patriarcat et le capitalisme: les anarchistes observent l'importance d'une congruence entre fins et moyens et travaillent à créer «un nouveau monde dans la coquille de l'ancien». Je soutiens cependant que l'activisme anarchiste en Amérique du Nord ne subvertit

pas entièrement la logique du néolibéralisme. Les relations de propriétés coloniales, le légalisme bureaucratique et les fantasmes statistiques de l'État souverain (entre autres équations linéaires) continuent à infléchir les pratiques politiques des anarchistes et leurs projets de construction de soi: le rhizome est ainsi reterritorialisé.

Cette ethnographie multi-située explore les réseaux anarchistes qui traversent le Québec, les États-Unis et le Mexique pour démontrer comment la pratique anarchiste est embourbée en contradiction, surtout dans la mesure où cette pratique est influencée par des notions de soi et de propriété dominantes chez les anglophones en Amérique du Nord. Mon étude comparative illustre les similitudes et les différences entre divers milieux anarchistes, mettant en relief les pratiques particulières des gauchistes angloaméricains formés à l'université, et s'inspire de la *critical race theory*, la théorie anthropologique, et la théorie féministe pour montrer comment ils ont préempté le défi du féminisme noir de l' «intersectionnalité», en récupérant sa praxis dans la logique des projets de construction de soi et relations de propriétés néolibéraux, une économie de valeur particulière dans laquelle certaines identités sont mises en avant et d'autres — en particulier celles de classe — sont effectivement masquées. Enfin, les anarchistes sont ici présentés comme un cas limite: même dans leurs pratiques quotidiennes «autonomes», le propriétaire de soi-même prévaut dans ce que j'appelle le jeu de la «good politics» — un jeu de prestige qui influence les activités des théoriciens académiques autant que celles des activistes anarchistes.

## Acknowledgements

I should first like to honour all the activists with “good politics” and “bad” who participated in this project, those who shared their stories, those who helped me work through the complex political and theoretical questions of my research, those who supported me at key moments. If I begin to list names of those found within the pages of this work I risk betraying the identity of participants beyond as well. You know who you are – thank you.

Thanks then go to Dr. Kristin Norget, my PhD supervisor, for her support and guidance. It was Kristin who helped me understand that my dissertation was in fact an ethnographic study of “intersectionality” as much as one of the anarchist scene, and for her scholarly and theoretical guidance in this direction I am very grateful. As my primary reviewer and critical interlocutor, she pushed me to craft this thesis into a work greater in scope and import than I had ever imagined (and I imagined quite a bit). For her generous help during the “early years” as I prepared my first publications, I learned to write and find my voices.

I would also like to thank Dr. Catherine LeGrand, Dr. Jérôme Rousseau, and Dr. Setrag Manoukian at McGill University for their support during the PhD program. Dr. LeGrand pushed me to expand my study of 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchism to include Freemasonry and Theosophists, which was daunting, but exciting, and ultimately influenced

my dissertation and ongoing research in a profound way. Catherine also consoled me many afternoons when I felt the need to vent about less-exciting aspects of Higher Learning. Visiting Jérôme on Fridays to pick his brain about anthropological theory and mathematics was one of the most pleasant aspects of the PhD early years; his study of complexity theory was influential to my work and I hope he feels I have done our conversations justice in the end. During the latter years Setrag helped me through many institutional frustrations, read draft segments, and generously took over as my new talking partner as I proceeded to study “the self”. Completing the PhD program would have been significantly more difficult without the generous patience, technical-bureaucratic prowess, and moral support of Olga Harmazy and Connie di Giuseppe, Administrators of the McGill Anthropology Department.

Clara-Swan Kennedy, Crystal Leger, Nathalie Tran, Isabel Tames and Amber Lee Silva made me laugh, kept me company, took care of my cat, and brought me snacks when it mattered most. Whenever there was only one set of Footprints In The Sand, it’s because one of these girlz was carrying me or running to the dépanneur. Clara-Swan Kennedy also deserves an extra special mention for sending me loads of Internet links to juicy articles, blog posts, comment threads and Youtube videos that illustrated my points and made for fantastic footnotes.

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negative feelings regarding the design of their web applications, I am ever grateful for their money.

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Any and all errors, of course, remain entirely my own.

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About this Ethnography

Chapter 1 – The Anarchist World

*A Culture of Life \* Autogestión/ Self-Management, Etc. \* Sharing, Reciprocity and Faith \* Fun for Fun’s Sake \* “Subculture” \**

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Epilogue

Appendix A

*The Sixth Declaration from the Lacondon Jungle, communiqué from the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), 2006, and The Revolutionary Women’s Law, communiqué from the EZLN, 1993, in English Translation.*

Appendix B

*Interview with Glen Coulthard, author of “Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition” (2014) on No One Is Illegal Radio, CKUT News, March 5, 2015.*

Appendix C

*The Anti-Oppression Game in Play: “Poly vs. Poly”, 2015. A Facebook comment-thread argument in which activist praxes of “diversity”, “anti-oppression”, “intersectionality” and related movement mathematics are illustrated.*

Appendix D

*Anti-oppression training materials prepared by NASCO (North American Students of Cooperation): “Social Class Privilege Checklist” and “How to be a Class Ally” (2007).*

Appendix E

*List of Companies with Mining Projects in Mexico.*

Bibliography

# Adventures in *Anarcolandia*: Kankun 2010

In December 2010 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held its 16<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (the COP 16) in Cancun, Mexico. One big project on the table that year was REDD – “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation”, a carbon offsetting project that commodifies forests, attributing them financial value based on the amount of potential emissions stored inside. The REDD project was announced as a friendly environmentalist initiative that reduces incentive for “developing countries” to cut down “their” forests. Lands designated part of the REDD program of course need to be surveyed, measured and supervised by scientists with the help of military personnel. The areas in Mexico chosen first for REDD development were liberated Zapatista territories and other areas where militant indigenous people currently live and protect forests already. REDD was one of many “green capitalist” farces that thousands went to protest in Cancun that December. I wouldn’t have traveled all the way from Montreal to go, but was living in Oaxaca at the time. I almost hopped the “Che Bus” to Cancun when it passed through Oaxaca, then considered catching the caravan of buses leaving from Mexico City (herein D.F., for *Distrito Federal*), but Pablo, Esteban and Ixchel convinced me to road trip it. We had never seen the Yucatan. It would be an adventure.

## December 3<sup>rd</sup>: Trying to Find our People

We knew only that there was going to be a “massive mobilization”, and figured it wouldn’t be hard to find. We were wrong. We circled around Cancun for hours and there was no camp, no Che Bus, no Via Campesina banners<sup>1</sup>, and it was getting dark. We decided to drive back to the highway where we had passed a collection of big white tents blaring pop music, and poked our heads in. We saw glossy banners saying COP 16 and well-dressed people with well-dressed kids eating cotton candy: “Nah we were right the first time, this has gotta be some government shit”. Just then we spotted some dready guy with face piercings peering through the fence as well: “Hey bro you know where the camp of *protestors* is?”

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<sup>1</sup> Via Campesina is an enormous farmworkers’ umbrella organization; even if we didn’t know Via had been officially permitted a camp, wherever Via would be, there would be a camp.

“Apparently there’s a camp a few kilometres down there” (he pointed *away* from Cancun), “there’s mad cops parked at the turn-off, you’ll find it that way.” He was right.

As we turned past them onto the unmarked dirt road, we caught a handmade sign: “¡BIENVENIDOS ALTERMUNDISTAS!”.

“What the fuck is an *altermundista*?” said Pablo and Esteban together, “Are we in the right place?”

“Pretty sure *altermundista* means an activist against capitalist globalization... In French *altermondialiste* is a word that some activists use for themselves, but it’s mostly academics that use it. I never heard it in Spanish before either...” (in Spanish the correct term is *globalización* not *mundialización*).

“Well I never heard that shit before and this road is sketchy man...” Bordered on either side with thick brush, it really did appear to be heading nowhere good, but we continued until we saw another “ALTERMUNDISTAS !” sign attached to a gar-goyle, beyond which a miniature castle appeared, followed by a meticulously numbered parking lot, topped off by the Country Club itself.

“What the fuuuuuuck...”

“Good thing we got whitey here with us...”

“Yes Erica can be our official interpreter...”

“And I’ll be the indigenous representative!” laughed Pablo, throwing on his poncho and fussing melodramatically with the red kerchief around his neck. He reminded me of myself when I’m in some uptight bourgeois setting, and know there’s no way I can pass, so like to lay it on real thick instead.

We saunter over to the kiosk at the entrance, where a bubbly German guy greets us with a clipboard, asks us to write down our names and organizational affiliation, and explains proudly that they have WiFi and a vegan menu. He also recounts with some pride that he has been on a “consciousness raising tour” throughout Latin America to show people that they don’t need money to live: “People need to transcend the materialist mindset” he explains, “As for us, we haven’t spent a cent since we left Germany!”

“How do you eat then?”

“People feed us its great!”

“...Let’s get the *fuck* out of here” mutters Pablo.

“Yeah Erica you go in and study the *güeros* (whities) if you want, we’ll wait in the car.”

“Yeah there’s some serious *güeros* up in here, go nail ‘em would ya? We expect a full report!” My friends, two of them undergrads writing theses in anthropology of

their own, understand my ethnographic research project on “transnational solidarity activism” fairly well.<sup>2</sup>

Full report: Inside the castle walls little white Mac apples are glowing everywhere. A golf course beyond hosts sunburned Europeans grooving to a drum circle. Everyone is speaking English, French or German. People with nametags ask me which NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) I am with and invite me once again to partake of the raw gluten-free vegan buffet.



**Figure 0–1.** Beyond the castle walls.

I stand there stunned until I see a woman wearing a “Rising Tide” T-shirt and make a call: “Hey what the fuck is this place? The anarchists from D.F. are not on their way *here* are they? And where the hell is Via Campesina?”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In Mexico, a BA requires a thesis of caliber equivalent to MA theses in Canada and the United States. A version of this work was originally submitted as my Ph.D. dissertation in Anthropology at McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Rising Tide is a radical environmentalist group in the United States; someone wearing their T-shirt would probably be as unimpressed with the castle-golf-course scene as I was.

“Fuck I don’t know, but if you do find our peeps come back and let me know...There is a little crew of us back here.” She leads me to a tent enclave. Some American guys explain that according to the Web this was supposed to be the Klimaforum, which in Copenhagen last year (at COP 15) was “autonomous” and full of the “direct action crowd”. We exchange numbers — if I find the real deal I’ll let them know.

After circling Cancun some more we see a park where tents are appearing inside a temporary fence. I pressed my face up against it and yell “*Hey is this the Via camp?*” “Hey Erica!”, a familiar voice yells back – it’s Steven, an Australian activist guy

I’ve been crossing paths with for years. He originally came to Mexico under the Zapatista spell and at some point made the mistake of deciding to write a book about it just like me.

“Hey Steven! Why are you always following me around man?!”

“Haha you with Pablo there? Cool! Come around to the entrance here!” We wander in and size up the situation. Forty *güeros* are bustling around, setting up tarps, fences and chairs or doing soundchecks and installing radio equipment. They are mostly Basques and Spaniards who’ve come from San Cris (the Zapatista world pilgrimage site AKA San Cristobal, Chiapas). Pablo, Esteban, Ixchel and I help set up rows of chairs, but then we are not sure what else to do, so we go to the car for snacks and return a few minutes later. By the time we’re back, one of the San Cris women is setting up a desk at the entrance. I walk right by her, but then hear her say “Who are *you?*”

“We’ve come in from Oaxaca...we were just here a few minutes ago...”

“Are you part of an organization?” My friends exchange a quick glance and say:

“We are part of lots of organizations, but we are here just as people...” “Well if you are not part of Via Campesina you can’t be here” quips the officious *güera*. At this point I want to throw down something like “Oh look who thinks she’s hot shit! Let me guess, you once went to a Zapatista *encuentro* and spoke to Comandante Moises *personally!* Well FUCK YOU!” I manage to deliver a more diplomatic version: “Hey we are all together and I just walked in here and you didn’t ask me anything, I’m not with Via either, what’s the deal with stopping *them?*” Unfazed, the San Cris *güera* explains that they have had “security issues”, that “there are lots of infiltrators around”, and repeats that “only folks who are part of Via” can come in.

“And *you?* Are *you* part of Via?” Pablo retorts.

“No but I’m here helping, you could do the same instead of getting pissed off.”

“How are we supposed to *help* if you *won’t let us in?*”

“It was us who set up all those chairs fifteen minutes ago” added Ixchel.

“Listen, we’re just asking you to wait a while, you don’t have to freak out.” “Wait for *what?*” I say, but my friends are already heading back to the car, which is parked outside facing the fence. We proceed to watch the Via camp like a drive-in movie, Pablo, Esteban and Ixchel providing the following soundtrack:

“Look at them all busy-busy, feeling all good about themselves for ‘helping’ when they are not helping at all.”



“I can’t believe they asked us what organization we are with...like what? Being part of an organization makes you trustworthy?”

“These people don’t know shit about Mexico man.”

“At the castle the hippies asked us what organization too!”

“That German vegetarian asshole...”

“Going around the country living off people!?”

“*Oh the Mexican people are so warm and generous!*”

“Bet you the fucker has a blog full of shit like that.” (I checked. He did. It was.)

“Y’see that was the great thing about the APPO (the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*), you didn’t have to be from an organization...eventually the organizations ruined it of course...”<sup>4</sup>

“And fuckin Steven, he’s good people but he’s lost in the woods...”

“Yeah, remember how he ended up cooking for the Stalinists that day?” Pablo, Steven and I had all met in the APPO *plantón* (protest camp) in D.F. five years before. All of a sudden the sound system burst to life, the inaugurating political anthem being Victor Jara’s “*Desalambrar*” – “Tear Down the Fence”.

“No way man.....”

“No contradiction here...”

“And of course these...what are they again?”

“*Altermundistas*”

“Ah yes, the *Altermundistas*, they just *love* Latin American culture don’t they?”

“With all the Che Guevara posters and Zapata T-shirts to prove it.”

“And let’s not forget Victor Jara’s Greatest Hits!”

As we sat there listening to what did, in fact, turn out to be Victor Jara’s Greatest Hits album, the first caravan buses started rolling in...

“Hey check it out, more *güeros!*”

“*¡BIENVENIDOS ALTERMUNDISTAS!*”

“How many Mexicans are inside that fence you think?”

“Didn’t see a single one...”

“At least Erica will feel right at home.”

“Well...I don’t really feel like going in either after all this...”

“But if it weren’t for us, you’d be feeling all nice and comfy no? Catching up with Steven...?”

“Singing along with Victor Jara...?”

“Yeah fine sure, its true, me I walk right in...I’m pissed off on your account but I ain’t locked out...I know its not the same.”

“You are totally going in there tonight y’know...”

“No really, I won’t go in if you guys can’t it’s too fucked...”

“Oh *yes* you will, there’s only room for three to sleep in the car!” Oh right.

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<sup>4</sup> A recurring story, the APPO of 2006 is discussed in later chapters.

“You go on and sing tributes to Che with the *Altermundistas* and we’ll catch you in the morning...”. They were gonna raz me about this forever. I grabbed my sleeping bag and walked right by the *güera* gatekeeper without any fuss. Pablo, Esteban and Ixchel started the drive back to Oaxaca the next day, insisting I stay to “nail some *güeros*”. As they pulled away I tried to figure out whether they actually trusted me to do it or were simply being sarcastic. Usually somewhere in between.

## December 4<sup>th</sup>: The Via Camp Comes to Life

By the time my friends were gone there were 500 people in the camp, by nightfall over 1000. Flags and banners hosting acronyms of amazing length soon decorated every section of the fence: *Frentes* against Dams, *Frentes* to Protect the Water, *Frentes* Against Mining, *Asociaciones*, *Consejos*, *Sindicatos* and *Federaciones* of all kinds and of course *Indígena* and *Campesino* groups Promoting Food Security, Resisting Monsanto, Protecting Heritage Seeds, Denouncing the Patenting of Life, and particularly Denouncing REDD and Carbon Markets in general. The veggie-fueled Che Bus had also arrived overnight, and was now the “Bus Lee”: It sported a beautiful new mural of Lee Kyung Hae, the Korean farmer who spectacularly committed suicide at the demo against the World Trade Organization in Cancun in 2003.

Within a few hours the Bus Lee crew and miscellaneous other autonomist activists had gathered in a section of the park where someone had hung a big ANTI-C@P banner – the Circle-A, beyond signifying “anarchism”, made it read “Anti-CAPitalist” and “Anti-COP 16” at once.<sup>5</sup> While the contingents filling up the Via camp were largely rural people, most gathering in the Anti-C@P space were from D.F. or the *Estado de México*, although there were at least one or two people there from every state of the *República*. The high proportion of *chilangos* (people from D.F.) was partly due to the fact that the caravan met and left from there, but it’s also true that in Mexico the “anarchist” movement *per se* is largely an urban phenomenon, made up of university students and other young people. A generation gap as well as a rural/urban and class divide between the Anti-C@P crowd and the main camp was evident right away.

Word soon traveled around the Anti-C@P space that there would be a meeting, and soon 20 people were sitting under a tree. It was a private organizing meeting so I can’t detail it for you, but the basic problem was this: Are we really welcome here? Via had said they would make space for us, not just as individuals but as a group, but so far they wouldn’t let us bring the bus in, or let us build composting toilets, or allow us space to have assemblies. Originally they said we could use the mike to introduce ourselves as “Anti-C@P” and explain our project, but then they just welcomed “the Che Bus people” and didn’t let us speak. No one was impressed with Via’s bracelet security system either. “There’s been some kind of communication problem”, someone said. “Nah, it’s no communication problem, it’s a political problem”, someone replied.

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<sup>5</sup> The sign used the more traditional capital A within a circle; I use the @ to signify this Circle-A.

There was little time to find another site, and if we were to set up outside the fence, Via would feel like we were competing with them rather than supporting their struggle. Also, it might be less safe for us. On the other hand, if we stayed and ate Via's food and used their toilets – because they wouldn't let us cook or put up our own infrastructure – then we would be dependent on them and our whole deal (*línea política*) is autonomy and self-management. In any case it was clear that if we stayed we would have to make sure to be clean and tidy and responsible – otherwise they would stigmatize us as delinquents (*jovenes desmadrosos*). We decided to talk to the organizing elites of the Via camp, and within a few hours we had the bus parked in the Anti-C@P space, and Via's permission to convoke an Anti-C@P assembly the next evening, as well as permission to build things, do art projects, and screen movies.

In the main Via space, members of the contingents were setting up their blankets or building the outdoor kitchen, while others were digging trenches around the bathing area (plywood boxes equipped with buckets). San Cris volunteers were arranging the final touches on the radio set-up; cubicles to broadcast running translation were almost in place. Kiosks selling posters, stickers, zines, books, CDs, DVDs, and silk-screened Tshirts were appearing fast. More banners with more acronyms filled in any remaining gaps along all fences and walls.

On the main stage a beautiful altar of plants, corn, seeds, candles and incense marking the four directions was coming together. Women in traditional indigenous dress would soon officiate a special ritual opening. Afterwards, representatives of each organization would begin taking turns at the mike delivering speeches while contingents filled the chairs and listened – and so it was, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day for a week:

*Save the Madre Tierra! CHEER! No to the farce of 'Green Capitalism'!*  
*CHEER! Down with the COP! CHEER!*

After getting a handle on this scene, I went back to the Anti-C@P space, where anarchists were now building their own dry-composting toilets and solar-heated showers, painting banners and making puppets. Buckets of sticky wheat paste were also stirring, and a *comisión gráfica* soon left the camp with posters to announce our presence in streets. I introduced myself to a couple of American guys then living in D.F. who had come in with the caravan, but when I didn't know their two friends in Montreal – one of whom apparently used to be the violin player in Godspeed – I became immediately suspect. I decided to help build shit, and learned how to control the drainage from a solar shower with old tires. At some point the crew from Klimaforum showed up – I had texted them earlier.

“Hey! You made it!”

“Yeah so glad to find y'all! Fuckers at Klimaforum tricked us but we escaped ha! Y'know that as we were leaving one of the organizers actually freaked, saying that the whole Anti-C@P space is a 'distraction' devised by some guy called Oscar who's





**Figure 0–2.** (Top) Bolivian band and banners. Center banner is in homage to Alexis Grigoropoulos, the teenager killed by Greek police in Athens during the 2008 insurrection. (Bottom) Translation booth. Photos taken at Via Campesina camp, Cancun 2010. Note that the masks have been digitally added – I explain my use of photos and masks in the next chapter.

working for the government?! Can you believe that?!” Yes I could. The ridiculous isolation of Klimaforum only made sense if the government was involved, and nobody except an agent of the state would actually argue that a whole anarchist camp was orchestrated by one guy. Of course you never know. But I became ever more convinced that Klimaforum was not merely some misguided hippie camp but rather a kettle specifically devised by various cooperating authorities to trap as many internationals as possible 20 kilometres away from the action. Same thing with EsMex, a third camp that I never saw. We had been neatly divided in three.

“...We left anyway, folks let us borrow the Veggie Bus.” They gestured beyond the fence. They had a veggie-fuelled bus just like the Bus Lee, but this one was painted with psychedelicky leaves and plants. “What’s the plan, is there an assembly at some point?” Yes, but I wasn’t sure when. “Okay we’ll try to come back tonight, but if not tomorrow for sure!” Before heading back, the ones who spoke Spanish chatted and helped a bit; the ones who didn’t hung back and watched.

I kept my sleeping spot from the night before, under the main Via tarp, where we were each designated a foam rectangle with an extra six inches on either side. I was next to two U.S. American<sup>6</sup> women and Steven on one side, a couple of Anti-C@P women from D.F. on another, a bunch of older folks from some *sindicato* in Zacatecas on another, and the fourth side was a walkway – prime real estate. The U.S. Americans were discussing the impenetrable hierarchy of “little leader” Basques in the San Cris scene, and various annoying things these *lidercitos* had done in the past 24 hours, while Steven and I caught up since our last chance encounter, just like my friends had imagined. A French guy within earshot crawled over and joined our conversation.

“Yeah when I got to San Cris I ran into this woman who I had met at a Zapatista solidarity event in France”, he said, “And through her I made friends and got to go on a work brigade to La Garrucha (a Zapatista village) but it was pure luck I swear. It’s all chance and who you know, and really I’m a nobody, I don’t know anyone, I was part of the Clown Army in the Strausburg mobilization against NATO but that’s the first thing I ever did really...So I was lucky to get in on shit.” He was 22 years old.

“In the house where you live, are there any Mexicans living there? Or just foreigners?” asked Steven.

“We’re lucky ‘cause in our house we got a Mexican guy – and this guy is actually from a Zapatista community, his dad was in the *guerrilla!*” Everyone around laughs – a bit at him, a bit with him. “Anyway I’m here now because I know some of the folks who work with Via in San Cris and so came along as a volunteer through those guys, but the scene here is weird man...” We agreed.

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<sup>6</sup> I use U.S. American to refer to people from the United States, as their common self-designation “American” could mean anyone from the Americas – this last being the usage of “American” everywhere in the Americas except for the United States and Canada.



## December 5<sup>th</sup>: The Anti-C@P Assembly

The next evening we had 100 people, including most of the Anti-C@P crew, a few *campesinos* from the Via side, and 20 *güeros* including miscellaneous Klimaforum escapees gathered in a circle. Another circle gradually filled in behind it. The supposedly-suspicious Oscar from the Bus Lee crew and the only woman who had spoken a lot during the internal meeting the day before started us off:

“...This Anti-C@P space has been months in the making. We have been touring around in that bus there holding assemblies in Puebla, Atenco, other places, picking up people along the way, until the caravan has grown to the crowd we see here...”. The woman, whose name I learn is Mayahuel, continues:

“What we all have in common here is that we are *anti-capitalists* and understand that destruction of the environment will not stop unless there is broad systemic change. We cannot separate questions of environmental justice and social justice...As for this assembly, the idea is to brainstorm ideas and start planning actions...”. Mayahuel swept the mike around in a circle making eye contact with as many of us as possible. No one went for it, but after a brief silence a guy piped up. Afterward someone else raised his hand. When we all looked at him, nodding or holding a palm out, he began speaking. Once in a while someone held their hand up while someone else was still speaking, at which point many of us would look over for a moment. The person usually tried to catch Mayahuel’s eye in particular, who was usually paying close attention and would nod in their direction. Most of us would see this process take place, and knew that it was that person’s turn to speak next – if someone else began to speak instead, a bunch of us would say “hey!” or whistle and point to the person who had been waiting, who would press their hand to their heart in a thank-you gesture, and then speak. We would then look back to the person who had spoken out of turn and smile such that they would know that it was okay to speak when the other was done.

Mayahuel only intervened a few times, always when bros got into a back-andforth, often to say “I think the *compañera* over there had something to say...”. At one point, when people started griping about the camp scenario, Oscar apologized for speaking out of turn (i.e. as facilitator) and said: “I really don’t think we should spend too much time complaining about Via. We have different ways of organizing but I don’t think we should set ourselves up as *opposing* the people here. The leaders are annoying but the organizations that are here under Via’s banner are many of the same ones that we ourselves, in our collectives at home, work with and support, right?” He listed them while looking around the circle and people nodded.

“Yes let’s concentrate on what we *can* do, starting today, here in Cancun...” “Let’s move to concrete proposals, whether that’s crashing the summit, or putting up our *ecoteknia* installations, organizing theatre, whatever...showing by example that we *can* self-manage projects, that its possible...”.



“Yes rather than arguing with Via folks about how we are not delinquents, we will just *show* them...We know how to do things, we are not just young people out to make trouble.”

At this point a *güero* piped up: “I want to share some experience from Toronto last summer, where the G20 summit was, because it’s important to learn from past experience...There were all kinds of civil society organizations – like here – and then the *black bloc* (said in English), and all the *black bloc* did was vandalize things and turn civil society against them...” Groans and fidgeting erupted all around – many of us had heard this argument about the black bloc — AKA the “diversity of tactics” debate — a hundred times before. Another *güero* took the mike and responded in English:

“*Let’s not trash the work people did in Toronto man...*”

“*I’m just saying how it was perceived, I’m not dissing folks in Toronto*” “¡EN ESPAÑOOOOL!” A dozen people cried out, and the second *güero* immediately apologized and continued in Spanish about how the *bloque negro* in Toronto had announced their actions to the civil society organizations well in advance, was not trying to compete with them, and “props to them for having the courage to march *towards* the summit instead of *away* from it, which was the compromise the civil society folks made — good on them for not standing down!” A round of clapping and cheering settled it.

Afterwards some people who actually lived in Cancun showed up to tell us about local struggles: a fiasco involving corrupt taxi unions, corrupt public transport unions, and corrupt government agents vs. all of the drivers, which the Mexicans in the crowd appeared to understand. When we got back to concrete actions, many alternatives to marching right on the summit were proposed because, as someone pointed out, “This ain’t Toronto” and “nobody wants to die”. Among other things, the next evening a march and “*skratsh*” on the corrupt government “environmental protection” agency building was planned: Via was using Porto-Potties and shit was in ample supply.

## December 6: La Marcha Nocturna/ The Night March

The next morning I went to the flyer-making meeting. The task was supposed to take an hour but it took us three: “Let’s put anti-capitalist not anti-authoritarian...”, “This should really be a new sentence...”, “Guy this isn’t for a degree in *Letras* at the fuckin UNAM.” The girl typing eventually got fed up with the bickering men, threw her hands up and walked away. And, when we finally got the text and layout done, we handed it off to the cool American guy who knew Godspeed (and had layout software), and by the time we saw it again he had changed the whole thing anyway. But we did succeed in making a thousand copies out of pocket, brigades did go out to scout routes and flyer around the neighborhood, and although it was 6:30 instead of 5:00 p.m. when we left, we had all our shit together including make up, banners, puppets,

and a security plan. We had even gotten a chance at the Via Mike to invite everyone to participate, and beyond 300 Anti-C@P folks we had about 30 *campesinos* from the contingents in tow. As we were leaving, an American woman passed me a flyer – it was an invitation to an assembly that night. In English and Spanish, it insisted “Everyone Is Welcome”, but the assembly was in a youth hostel...I noticed just in time to call the woman back and say “Youth hostel? Half the folks here wouldn’t be let in man...also we have assemblies here, you should come.” I couldn’t say when though.

We left weaving an indirect route; an unsanctioned march has to walk in the direction opposite to traffic at all times. The Bus Lee was a sensation, and, although a third of the local residents we passed on the street looked terrified, another third smiled and waved, and the other third came up to us asking for flyers. We ran out halfway through of course. Meanwhile the *grafika* kids were running up ahead to stencil, always targeting McDonalds’ franchises or banks or OXXOs (the ubiquitous Mexican “7-11” style chainstore), and by the time they were done painting the march had always caught up to them so they could disappear inside the crowd.

By the time we reached our destination it was 9 p.m. and, as it was a government building, the surrounding area was deserted. We didn’t see the rows of riot police surrounding the PROFEPA (*el Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente*) until we turned the last corner. As soon as we did, and looked back, we saw that more rows had stepped out of the shadows on either side of the street and were now surrounding us on three sides. This plan was made less than 24 hours ago. Clearly there had been an infiltrator at the assembly the night before – how else would these extremely well-deployed robo-cops know where to be?

The march started hanging back. If we bunched up front they could close us in on all *four* sides, in the space of one long city block, which would be bad. And of course an attempt to throw shit on the building *now* would mean throwing shit on 500 super-cops with machine guns in the darkness of night with no witnesses and that didn’t seem like a good plan. Some people gathered up front, clearly working on a quick decision as to what to do; some folks in back ran up to the huddle. Some of us walked back to stand with the *campesino* guys who had themselves huddled together, and everyone else stood around looking nervous. We were worried for our own safety, and there was also the fact that we had brought these *campesinos* with us — it had been an act of trust for them to come with us against their *contingente* leaders’ advice. It was decided that the people carrying shit throw it together with some pickets in a pile in front of the cops to light it on fire as a symbolic “FUCK YOU”. This was better than carrying our bags of shit back to camp in defeat, but boy did that pile ever smell like some rankass burning shit, and we were the only ones around to smell it.

## December 7: Via Campesina's Mega-March

At 7 a.m. the whole camp plus thousands more began marching down the highway toward the *Zona Hotelera* where the summit was being held, contingents neatly organized behind their leaders and banners, Anti-C@P bringing up the rear. The Bus Lee was now carrying a massive inflatable hammer bigger than the bus itself. Some anarchist art collective in Europe had mailed it over in solidarity. We were soon joined by a crew from Klimaforum headed by their own Veggie Bus, this one covered with hippies decked out in grass skirts and fluorescent “war paint”. The Bus Lee anarchists, horrified with this inexcusable scene of racist cultural appropriation, immediately tried to drown out the reggae music blaring from the Hippie Bus with even louder punk music of their own. The medleys of “One Love” vs. “Killing in the Name Of” were a bit over the top, so I handed off my oversized black flag to some sucker who didn’t realize how heavy it was and took off.

I weaved through the march saying hello to everyone I had met during the week and a few people I hadn’t. Everyone was wondering what (the fuck) was going to happen when we actually reach the *Zona Hotelera*. A guy known as the Stimulator told me all about the ANTI-CIV movie he would be screening in the Anti-C@P space the next day. An American woman picked a fight with a guy named Israel — its not enough to be antiZionist, she explained, he should really “check his white privilege” and “do something useful” like teach local women how to make fish tacos like she had done the day before. A bicycle-powered boombox zoomed up and drowned her out. We munched on complimentary ham sandwiches prepared by the Via kitchen. Vegans of all nations complained. The *güeros* got sunburns. At one point I ran into my Zacatecas neighbors from the sleep camp, who said I should stay with them in order to be safe – “those *muchachos* back there are nothing but trouble, and if they pick a fight with police you’ll get hurt!”

Four hours later we all stopped walking. An opaque metal fence covered with razor wire blocked the highway 300 metres ahead and rows of super-cops lined both sides of the road starting from where we stood. The Via leaders hushed everyone and said we would have our rally right there. We sat down using our banners as sunshades and listened to speeches that no one heard but us. The anarchists were restless: “this is fucking stupid”. It was. But Via announced that if anyone went further they were on their own – the caravan buses were already on their way to come pick up the contingents and bring them back to camp.

An unacceptable plan. We can’t go back without doing *something*. Besides, we happen to have an enormous inflatable hammer. Obviously we will penetrate the cop barrier with the large anarchist phallus. It will get sliced up by little cop knives, dragged back over the razor wire, and look great on video. Later that year the European art collective will publish a 65-page book devoted solely to the hammer’s genesis, symbolic journeys, and eventual violation. Meanwhile back in Cancun 20 teenage anarcopunks will spraypaint a banner to say “VIA CAMPE\$INA VENDIDO\$ (\$ELLOUT\$)”, and



Figure 0-4. Punks vs. Hippies.

wave it in the Via leaders' faces as we walk past them toward the fence. Afterwards we will have to find a way to fit 150 people onto two veggie buses because Via will abandon us as promised, but the hippies come through. When we get back to camp the Via gatekeepers will refuse entry to the anarcopunk guys who made the banner (and a few that didn't). The anarcopunks will challenge them to an assembly. The anarcopunks will end up sleeping on the beach.



## December 8<sup>th</sup>: On How it Came to Pass that Anarchists were Presidential Bodyguards

The Via elite were convinced that the mouthy anarcopunks were, in fact, infiltrators. That is why they were not let back into the camp, and why concerned members of the Via *Comisión de seguridad*, top Basque *lidercitos* from San Cris, and Anti-C@P organizers were having a very serious breakfast conversation. At least 15 confirmed infiltrators had been kicked out of the camp to date, some of them armed with guns. But while the night before in the anarchist camp we all vented a variety of opinions regarding the kids' banner, Anti-C@P organizers ultimately had their back: "The kids fucked up but they are not infiltrators, they are just pissed-off, half of them from the street man...and to not let them back into the camp puts them at the mercy of the droves of PFP (federal police) outside...Is there no way we can let them back in?"

"Maybe, but tomorrow is a big day – Evo Morales is coming to the camp and Via has promised to provide security: Can the Anti-C@P folks make sure the anarcopunks don't do anything stupid? Can we volunteer to beef up Via's *Comisión de seguridad*?" This act of solidarity with Via would help to repair trust. A few volunteers were



**Figure 0–5.** Cop barrier.

promised. We brought the kids back with us from the beach later that day, at which point I tried to sleep but some *güera* from an ecovillage in Tepoztlan wouldn't let me rest: "Why are you hanging around with those delinquents?...Y'know people were talking to them and they don't even know what REDD+ is!" This was not true. I pulled a blanket over my head and lay there listening to two women on my other side having an argument:

USA: "...But all pagan cultures honoured the dead. They have been stomped out but at root it's something universal."

Mexico: "The Day of the Dead is specific to Mexican culture, it involves a mix of Aztec culture and it's not universal at all."

USA: "No it's the same, it started in Rome, and my ancestors were murdered too..."

Mexico: "It's different."

USA: "No it's the same...I mean sure each culture honours its dead in different ways...but basically it's the same holiday, I mean the trick or treat thing is huge..."

Mexico: "Yeah well for us it's not just about candy...". Before USA can reply I am inspired to play heroic anthropologist mediator and sit up to say that there is *some* shared history – they share a date due to the Catholic calendar, which was itself influenced by the pagan ritual year, for example, "but as our friend here points out the local meaning of the Day of the Dead is particular..."



Figure 0-6. Anarchist phallus.

USA: “You see it’s the same holiday!” Note that this same American woman had spent her afternoon scoffing at “cultural appropriation” perpetrated by Klimaforum hippies. In turn, I critique her. Call it the anarchist food chain.

Soon the END-CIV movie was blaring from the Anti-C@P side of the wall. I went and lay down there instead, but the Klimaforum crew found me to suggest that we call another assembly after the movie: I knew the guys doing the film screening and could probably get my hands on the mike. Meanwhile the two guys would go over to EsMex – the third activist camp — to spread the word there.

After the movie we had 100 people sitting on the bleachers, a good portion of whom were from Klimaforum and EsMex. Mayahuel started off the discussion by explaining that the idea was to try to organize something all together for the next day. Everyone agreed. The first people to speak, mostly men, spoke about the government’s strategy of dividing us into different camps far away from each other, and how it was depressing that it had largely worked: we had not managed to coordinate actions together during the week. A DJ who had proposed a street party (*Fiesta sonidera*) during our first Anti-C@P assembly brought it up again, and everyone cheered: A party was the kind of action that all the different activists with their different strengths and talents could participate in. Street theatre folks could do skits, DJs could spin cumbia, hippies could dance, punks could stencil T-shirts for free. While in the discussion that followed we focused on how it was an action conducive to mingling and sharing (“*el convivir*”) with the people of Cancun, it was also a way of manifesting solidarity with each other. We wouldn’t shut down the summit, but at least we would transcend the government’s plan to divide us.

## December 9: ¡Viva Evo! ¡Viva el Verbena Popular!

The next day a handful of anarchists donned the appropriate arm-band and stood guard for the President of Bolivia while a larger number of anarchists vacated the grounds in protest of the whole shameful affair. Some also listened tentatively to Evo’s speech and were happy to hear him say “¡No more *patria o muerte*, it’s the *planeta o muerte* now!”. Yet other anarchists bustled around preparing for the *verbena popular* that evening. I was sick, hidden in my sleeping bag strategically surrounded by Kleenex, pretending to be asleep whenever someone came by to ask me to do something. Of course I eventually found energy to go to the party.

I walked over with the last people to leave, including the two hippie guys with their bicycle-powered boom-box. I wished I had flyers on me to explain who we were, because we kept passing folks on the street who clutched their children in terror as we passed. But somehow the damn thing hadn’t even started yet and the flyers had already run out. There were a good hundred activists in the park dancing to a *batucada* (drum troupe): Anti-C@P folks had collected buckets and were playing some of the same rhythms our Zapatista collective had learned in Montreal four years earlier. People passing by were



stopping to check us out. They mostly hung back along the sidelines, but a woman dancing with scarves smiled and teased the children, and trusting mothers sent their kids out to dance with us. Once the bicycle-driven boom-box was hauled up the stairs into the park's central *kiosko* (gazebo), the *batucada* was replaced with cumbia, and the kids dancing with us were joined by men who immediately took the opportunity to ask all the *güeras* to dance. Soon a live performance by Testament, well-known anarchist hip-hop artists from Kanada. They introduced themselves with a no-bullshit speech: "Fuck human rights! We are for Human Liberation! Human Rights implies there is some power out there that can give us rights, what we want is to Take Down Power! As anarchists and anti-capitalists we are for the decentralization of power!" Etcetera. It might have served as a good quick summary of who we were and what we stood for if only someone had translated it into Spanish. The English lyrics – "*This is Turtle Island, don't you ever forget!*" – were also lost on everyone but this time it didn't matter — every single teenage boy within earshot ran over and had a blast.

Afterward something for the moms: two clowns from the street theatre crew start playing a husband and wife arguing about who to vote for. The husband is arguing for the leftist party, while the wife is saying all politicians are corrupt assholes. The husband gets fed up and moves as if to smack her, when all of a sudden they freeze-frame and the laughter in the crowd dies down: "You find this funny? You think its funny for a husband to hit his wife?" Some women on the sidelines shout "NO!", and the last snickering man shut the fuck up. The skit starts up again, and by the end of the last segment all the women watching were laughing and cheering.

When everyone had done their thing, we relied on the bike-stereo. We had rigged it so we could pedal it in place, and the local residents who had joined the party were actually lining up to try driving it. We may have scared people on the way over but that bike machine ended up being the star, and the party was a success.

## **December 10–12: The Pilgrimage Makes its Way (Back) to D.F.**

The next day I made a snap decision to hop the caravan to D.F.. As you may remember, my friends that I arrived with had left long ago. The Bus Lee was tempting, but I was truly sick and crashing out for three days in a caravan bus was my best shot at "rest" at this point. So, when I saw that one of the buses was going to be leaving with a few empty seats, I threw a sweater on one of them, sprinted back to pack my shit, and managed to get back on the bus just as it was pulling out.

I had a few familiar neighbors: Steven was there, and so were a bunch of AntiC@P folks. I was amused to see that once on the road, a third of the people on the bus started passing out questionnaires and fixing up notes – I wasn't the only one writing a thesis. Some chatted and reflected on the week's events while others scribbled, all



Figure 0-6. Flyer for the *verbená popular*.

of us peppy in our respective activities because the *campesino* guys at the back of the bus had pulled out a bag of coca leaves gifted to them by some Bolivian delegate – of course it would be dangerous to travel with something like that. As we made our way down the highway we were indeed stopped and searched by the PFP multiple times, and the poor *coordinadora* of our bus had to negotiate with them over and over, always with some guy trying to speak over her, or whispering trying to convince her that *he* should be the one to talk to the cops, or rallying everyone else on the bus to throw objects out the windows in protest. Exasperated she would turn back and remind us that “There are elderly *campesinos* on this bus and not everyone here wants to battle with the PFP right now...”.

By the time we were out of state the cops had fallen off, but the driving was slowing for another reason: It was now the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, and millions of people across the country were making the yearly pilgrimage to honour the *Virgen de Guadalupe* at her cathedral in D.F. the next day. As we got closer, not only were the roads packed with cars but with bicycles as well, not to mention all the extra-pious who had traveled on foot from hundreds of miles away carrying blankets, food, candles, blinking LED crosses and big framed pictures of the *Virgen* tied to their backs. By the time we got partway into D.F. it *was* the 12<sup>th</sup>, and the road we were driving on was the main road to the *Virgen*’s cathedral, which meant that getting out and walking was faster. We rolled up our blankets, tied them to our backs, and started plodding along with everyone else. The women handing out *tamales* to the faithful were very impressed that young punk kids with face piercings had walked so far to honour the *Virgen*. We didn’t mean to be imposters but the *tamales* were really good. We looked around wistfully, commenting on how surreal it all was: “Man...there’s millions of them...”, “Yeah...imagine if we could actually gather this many people together...”, “Our caravan was fucking pathetic next to this...”. A few people from the bus decided to walk all the way to the cathedral too. After all, they explained, *La Guadalupe* is really *Tonantzín*, the Mexica goddess whose temple the Conquistadores replaced when they built their virgin and her big cathedral.



**Figure 0–7.** Mural of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, Zapatista-style: Wearing *paliacate* or bandana, supported by angel wearing *pasamontaña* or ski mask, and *más morena*, or with darker skin than usual. (San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, 2011)

# About this Ethnography

This is a book about the anarchist world. A world where anarchism means something different to everyone but it doesn't matter, except when it does. A world where some people define anarchism and others say this is against anarchist principles. A world that overlaps with a hundred other worlds that anarchists live in and love, yet define themselves against at the same time. A world where anarchists argue all the time and yet have so much fun they want to do it all over again. Or not. A world where anarchists would rather work with people who are not anarchists. A world where we talk about cooperation and mutual aid, yet spend our days playing games of moral one-upmanship. A world where despite such games, the players are much better at collective action than their critics will ever be. A silly world, where grown-ups are allowed to have pillow-fights and play dress-up, indulge illicit desires and make mistakes. A very serious world, where the future of humanity is at stake, any one of your friends could be a CIA infiltrator, and no one is allowed to make any mistakes whatsoever. This is an enormously large world, a world-sized world, and yet a very small world after all. Two of my anarchist friends, who live in different countries, suffer entirely different problems, speak different languages and will probably never meet – *es decir*, who are, in many ways, from completely different worlds, are thinking of each other when they say that this world, our world, is a *big small tiny world*, that *nuestro mundo está chiquito pero abarca todo el planeta*. Both of them speak with a mixture of pride and regret in their voices.

This is also a book about the professional Left in the English-speaking part of the Americas. A world of university student activists, non-profit employees and NGO coordinators that reward elite white youth with phrases like “good politics” for plays of class distinction. A world where displaying a proper “analysis” to other professional Leftists in the room is an utmost priority; where representations of anti-racism and anticapitalism are confused for the real thing. A world where the challenge of “intersectionality” put forward by Black feminists and revered by many militants in my study is often pre-empted, recuperated within the neoliberal self-making projects of white elites. A world whose various contradictions are only the most glaring when the people involved say they identify with “anarchism”, as an increasing number tend to do. A world that overlaps considerably with the anarchist world I speak of, especially the anarchist world of English-speaking North America.

In these pages I often discuss these two worlds in light of one another. I work to cast elite white North American anarchist practice as “local” by throwing it into relief with anarchism as understood and practiced by activists in Mexico, and aim

to teach my readers about (neocolonial) anarchist world-making in the process. Yet the anarchists I describe here teach us about much more than “anarchism” and its worlds. In the final analysis, the anarchists constitute a limit case. The point is not that anarchists *in particular* implement “intersectionality” in disingenuous ways, for example, but that *even* self-defined anarchists, who organize autonomously from the state and its institutions, reproduce the logics of neoliberal governance in their cultural forms and relations with others. And if *even* anarchists reproduce neoliberal structures of value and self-making, we are all in serious trouble.

I decided to start with the summit in Cancun because so many of the anarchist world’s special joys, small victories and magnificent failures abound in it. It’s not an easy thing to define, the anarchist world. It has no clear boundaries, and yet at any given moment one is either “in” or “out”. More than a collection of people who can be called “anarchists” according to fixed criteria, more than the places and territories where they can be found, it is a field of meaning and a field of practice. This field does, nonetheless, appeal to certain people and not others, and finds more traction in certain places than others. The particular values, customs and rules that characterize this field also change somewhat from place to place – from Mexico to Montreal, for example – and yet sooner or later one finds one’s people. Ultimately they are easy to recognize.

As a cultural object – or, as we say in anthropology, an “ethnographic object” – the anarchist scene is very tricky. It’s hard to find. It’s somewhere in left field, playing with the Marxists, the *campesinos* and the punks, but not necessarily getting along well with any of them. The people that move in the anarchist scene end up dividing their time between one and another of these groups. One must have finesse. Anarchists themselves are very touchy. If you haven’t yet been initiated into all the codes of conduct or learned all the right words you may stumble onto the scene only to be frozen out. You almost found the anarchist scene but now it is hiding. This ethnographic object is one that is continually disappearing. Or rather, the disappearing act is part of the ethnographic object. Like Vygotsky’s (1962) rope, it is never the same thing twice, yet when beheld from a distance is tightly held together and anchored in history. In Montreal we call it the “anarchist scene”, in Mexico we call it “*el medio anarquista*” and we all know exactly what we are talking about. Until we start trying to define it, and realize we disagree. Beholding the anarchist scene requires some suspension of disbelief.

Doing ethnographic research within the anarchist scene is also very tricky. Only someone who is known to have participated in collectives and campaigns and has been around for enough time could possibly be considered *de confianza*/trustworthy as a researcher. Even with this in pocket, anarchists do not necessarily trust someone who wants to write a book about them, even if “nailing *güeros*” is the plan. In any case, my political coming-of-age story is what has gone down in history as the “alterglobalization” or “global justice” movement (I still say the “anti-globalization movement” out of habit).

I first started my affair with the anarchist scene in the year 2000, which is also the year I started my BA at Concordia University in Montreal. The so-called “Battle

of Seattle” had happened less than a year before and all the lefty university students were very excited (see e.g. Yuen, Katsiaficas and Rose 2001). The student union was making use of its infrastructure to organize against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) summit in Quebec City coming up the following April, and I was quickly drawn into the fray.<sup>1</sup> Workshops on direct action, foam-armour-building à la Ya Basta, spiral dancing à la Starhawk, and “puppy-piling” to resist arrest were all new to me, and, after a few months of acquainting myself with it all, I decided to join a street medic collective as my main project.<sup>2</sup> I’m glad I was prepared because the cops beat the shit out of us, gassed us with experimental chemicals, smoke-bombed us, shot us with rubber bullets and blasted us with water cannons (and said we had attacked *them*). For me, the summit was an intense experience; being among thousands of people all dancing and singing and fighting cops together was cathartic and inspiring. But I won’t talk much more about how the big demos of the anti-globalization movement were so much fun for young white people – it’s been covered pretty well already (see e.g. Rajah 2001; Thompson 2010). This thesis is about what has unfolded in the decade afterwards and finds, among other things, young white university students having fun and annoying people someplace else. Some of the reasons why I tired of the student activist scene will become clear in later chapters, but I should explain right away that this was partly the reason I flew to Venezuela in 2006. The trip to Venezuela set me on a course that led to my joining up with a dozen other activists in Montreal, most of them Mexican migrants, ex-pats or exchange students, in a local *La otra campaña* (The Other Campaign) collective. The Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico had made a comeback in early 2006 by touring all around Mexico running *La otra campaña*, exchanging ideas and listening to the *palabra* (word), of popular resistance movements all over the country.<sup>3</sup> Parallel to the electoral campaign that same year, the Zapatistas sought to cultivate a broad-based autonomist, anti-capitalist resistance movement “from below and to the Left” (*desde abajo y a la izquierda*). According to the latest of the Zapatistas’ seductively florid communiqués, those of us beyond the borders were invited to take up The Other Campaign as well, and thus form part of the Zezta Internacional.

I will return later to the Zapatistas and the Zezta. For now the point is simply that, by the time I was poking around Cancun as a graduate student researcher, I had paid my dues as an *adherente* and I had more or less figured out how to navigate the labyrinth of acronyms that characterize the Mexican left. I had been in the right

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<sup>1</sup> David Graeber covers the anarchist organizing against this summit in *Direct Action — An Ethnography* (2009)

<sup>2</sup> Starhawk is a witch and writer from California, matriarch of the Reclaiming tradition practiced by many feminist pagan anarchists in North America during the global justice movement (see 1979); Ya Basta was a contemporary direct action group in Italy; “puppy-piling” means lying limp together in a pile; “street medics” attend to pepper spray, tear gas and other damage suffered by protestors at demonstrations. For a discussion of direct action see Chapter 1.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the Zapatistas, see e.g. Marcos 2002, 2004, 2005; Nash 2001, Stephen 2002; Holloway 1998; Oleson 2005; Aguirre Rojas 2008; Collier with Quaratiello 1999; Khasnabish 2008; Nugent 1997. I address the Zapatista movement and *La otra campaña* at length in upcoming chapters.

protest camps (*plantones*) at the right time and made friends with the right people, and I had accumulated enough Mexican ex-boyfriends to be considered part of the family. Of course none of this will prevent people from calling you a spy if they don't like your research agenda or something else about you. The first time I was accused of having some connection to government was in 2006, and it had nothing to do with my academic research. Rather, I had criticized a well-known male activist while wearing a vagina, which is even worse. The second time however was on account of accepting a Fulbright research grant – anyone who would accept money from the State Department of the United States *must* be the enemy. Stringer's (2013) account of navigating activist security culture and the figure of the "snitch" speaks to my experience. In any case activist concerns are well-founded. To infiltrators I devote a whole chapter. Regarding academics, it's true that they cannot be trusted. I have observed that when push comes to shove, academics tend to prioritize filling out their Progress Reports and Grant Applications over doing the stuff of solidarity that their applications for funding may outline very neatly. Researchers disappear when they are done researching. Researchers write books that might divulge nasty secrets. And in truly Orwellian fashion, the Ministry of Academic Ethics teaches the graduate student that "ethics" means getting all researchees to sign little slips of paper that nullify their legal right to complain if the researcher writes something that ruins their life. The professional researcher earns her daily bread by playing along with all of this – how trustworthy can such a person really be?

Furthermore, among anarchists, known for their ruthlessly unforgiving critique of state power, research is not redeemable for its potential impact on "policy". Some ethnographers, when speaking to "informants" or other interested parties, can justify their research project saying that the resulting sophisticated report will lead to beneficial reforms. This is not the case for the anthropologist doing research with anarchists. Among anarchists the word "reformist" is a serious insult. For writing to be in any way legitimate, it must be conscientiously useless to the State, it must be accessible, legible and constructively directed to anarchists themselves, and it must not give away any information that could possibly be used to locate and persecute anyone involved. Thankfully the map is never the territory. Even if it were possible to capture the anarchist world in an infinitely detailed map, this is simply not desirable. Not only do anarchists thrive on indeterminacy in an ideological sense, but mystery is a practical imperative. The most illustrative stories with all their pedagogically interesting detail, complete with names, dates and places, simply cannot be told because they would offer details about people that authorities could use for nefarious purposes. One of the ways I have dealt with this problem is by using *myself* as an example more times than I might have otherwise. I talk about the times *I* was accused of being a spy, for example. This sort of thing is hard on the ego and runs the risk of appearing as some sort of "confessional", but ultimately it's the only responsible way to go. Not only because sharing other people's stories hands over potentially interesting info to the enemy, but because people who have been banished by some well-placed anarchist comrade for a



supposed government connection, for having “bad politics”, for sexual violence or for daring to point it out, are happy to let sleeping dogs lie. They are looking for less fame, not more.

The other tactic I have used in general, excepting certain instances where substantial public record of the story already exists, is to change everyone’s name (including my own, at times) and muddle the details in such a way that it is very hard to figure out who people are. In this vein, I have chosen my illustrative stories carefully, preferring ones such as the climate summit in Cancun even though the era of “summit hopping” which characterized the anti-globalization movement has largely come to an end. It is much harder for unsympathetic persons (whether activist rivals, ex-boyfriends, or government agents) to figure out who’s who when everyone involved is away from home. The stories about smaller, place-based anarchist collectives all refer to ones that no longer exist. I have included photographs, but in every case have hidden the identities of people who appear – sometimes faces are simply blurred, or, more playfully, covered with masks.<sup>4</sup> Whether someone was part of a collective for ten days or ten years, whether I formally interviewed them or remember a conversation we had twelve years ago, whether we are still friends or will never speak again, I have done my best to fact-check to avoid being taken for a ride – then again, sometimes the ride itself is interesting. I have passed around sections of the manuscript to activist friends asking for feedback. I have written this thesis, which is very theoretical at times, in the least boring genre I could manage so that they might actually read the whole thing, and even laugh in the process. I have translated sections of it into Spanish to pass around in Mexico for feedback, summing up the rest in verbal conversations (funding for translation would have been nice).

All this being said, sometimes it is impossible to “check back” with the people involved in a certain story, especially if one’s research project overlaps with one’s life in such a way that previous participant experience becomes converted into fieldwork retroactively (see Pink 2000). One must be careful about certain pitfalls here. Doing fieldwork has made me realize how much more is learned when one is specifically paying attention and writing everything down (our memories are not as good as we think they are). But while casual experience should not stand in for fieldwork, of course my experiences and observations concerning the anarchist scene from years before I began researching it started taking on new significance once I actually did. When I think I have noticed a pattern, and start thinking experimentally as to whether or not it holds up, I think back to *all* of the collectives, demonstrations and list-serve

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<sup>4</sup> The skull (*calavera*) and the “Anonymous” (Guy Fawkes) mask are grafted from real instances of these masks in the photos presented here, and chosen due to their symbolic importance among many of the activists in my study: the *calavera* is a powerful cultural icon in Mexico, whereas the “Anonymous” mask has become famous among activists in North America and beyond since 2010. For a full explanation of the “Anonymous” phenomenon including the mask see Coleman (2014). Many thanks to Diego for his creative and technical work in preparing the photos. All photos/drawings by author unless otherwise stated.

arguments I have known, not simply the ones I knew during the specific periods when Institutional Letterhead said I was doing research. In my case “fieldwork” is definitely disguised autobiography (see Okely 1992; Cohen 1993). To set aside everything I have learned about the anarchist scene during my other ten years’ experience would be both politically irresponsible and a poor attempt at the “pursuit of knowledge”.

Another challenging aspect of fieldwork that overlaps indistinguishably with one’s life is that one ends up with “too much information”. My friends were aware of my academic interest in the things we did together, but it always concerned me that “those who are not trained as ethnographers seldom have a fully informed appreciation of the manner in which ethnographers may monitor and mentally record conversations and casual interactions and link these to larger issues” (Dyck 2000, 44). My “informants” are, in many cases, my friends, and they spill their hearts out drunk at the bar, telling me things which I cannot in good conscience repeat. Meanwhile, I can explain to them as best I can my particular research interest and focus at any given time, but as every anthropologist should admit, this is all rather farcical because the whole point of fieldwork is that the field itself is supposed to decide this question – *the research focus itself is supposed to change*. According to disciplinary logic, then, we are supposed to decide what we are going to write about afterwards, and yet also get “consent” from people involved right at the beginning. It’s ridiculous. In any case converting my own life and social networks into a field of research has meant walking a tightrope I will be happy to leave behind, but the upshot is that the access to the long durée picture that is enabled as a result can offer insights that most PhD research, based on 18-month-long snapshots, cannot. This thesis is one that can only be written by a long-time participant who sees things unfold that will never be captured by a year’s experience.<sup>5</sup>

Carrying out research on issues related to a social struggle that one is actually involved in can offer particular insight on the levels of both practice and theory. I may not be as bad-ass as Antonio Gramsci, Franz Fanon or Audre Lorde but clearly a dual commitment to political struggle and intellectual work tends to yield challenging ideas and theoretical interventions. Charles Hale points this out in his proposal for activist research (2007), which requires a commitment to “an organized group in struggle” (97–8; see also Juris and Khasnabish 2013a, 24–27). This in many ways describes my case, as does the title “feminist participatory action research”, which works to identify participants’ own perceptions of problematics and priorities which then guide the research (Maguire 2008, 422; see also Spalter Roth and Hartmann 1996). On account of the long durée that I am working with, however, accountability to one particular collective does not make sense – many do not last that long. The ethnography based on a year’s fieldwork among contemporary anarchist collectives will be inclined to show (as the ones out there do) the collectives that exist at that given time, and are more easily

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<sup>5</sup> One might consider me a “native anthropologist”; Kim Narayan (1993) problematizes the split between “native” and “non-native” anthropologists as all have shifting multiple identities in the field and in relation to theoretical issues.

drawn in by collective members' own excitement regarding the democratic happiness of anarchists' organization. The ethnography based on fifteen years exposure sees all those collectives break up in very unhappy ways. The ethnography based on fifteen years experience knows that you will never get the whole story from the people who are (still) in the collective. By the time I finished my MA I had already decided that it would be irresponsible to make my research accountable to any particular collective – ultimately a Name, inherited by some and not others, often according to a logic that cannot be called “anarchist” in any way.<sup>6</sup>

For me it has been most important to ensure I am responsible to the real-life people involved, and to adhere to anarchists' own best principles as they are formally professed (which sometimes conflict with what any one “organized group” might want me to do). In this sense I think and “speak nearby” (Minh-ha in Chen 1992) the subjects and object of my research – I act like any other anarchist, who knows very well that all anarchists “talk the talk” better than they could possibly “walk the walk”, yet likes keeping their company because at least you can *try* to hold them to their word. This is my main game. I like the words of Uri Gordon, who writes specifically about doing research among anarchists. Studying social movements on their own terms does not mean taking “the value of activists' claims for granted; their intuitions, arguments, claims and theories should also be scrutinized. However, the fact that they need to be critically examined does not affect the main point: that the activists' intuitions, claims, and theories ought to be the starting point for a philosophy aimed at social change” (2007, 278).

Most books written from within contemporary anarchist movements so far have been efforts to explain and justify the movement in the face of widespread ignorance, trite liberal critiques, and slanderous media campaigns.<sup>7</sup> I am happy that people have written these books because that all needed to be said, but also because as a consequence I am freed up to do something slightly different. For example, the *autocrítica* that gets left aside when our primary goal is convincing liberals that we are cooler and smarter than they are. *Autocrítica* is hard. I try my best. I have tried, for example, to listen a lot instead of simply gesturing to a “global south” that First World anarchists supposedly help liberate at every turn, but I'm sure there are things I have failed to hear.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that I briefly considered collaborating with the *Collectif de recherche sur l'autonomie collective* (CRAC), which was active in researching anti-authoritarian collectives and self-management in Montreal at the time I started my Ph.D. While impressed by their commitment to publishing in the public domain and their belief that knowledge “should be constructed and shared by the people to whom it pertains”, I could not in good conscience participate, especially since at their presentation I saw the La otra campaña collective up on their list, yet knew that it had recently shattered and that those who had kept the name were simply those who got to a computer and changed the collective email password first.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Juris (2008), Graeber (2009), Maeckelburgh (2010), Thompson (2010) Juris and Khasnabish (2013).

I have tried to maintain a certain integrity – in Mexico one would say *congruencia* – of form and content, in the very way that I frame the ethnographic object at hand. In this text, the label “anarchist” is used only to refer to people that self-identify (at least some of the time) as anarchists. When anarchists so named are persecuted and when, especially in places like Mexico, the stakes are terribly high, it seems to me problematic to attribute the label “anarchist” to Zapatistas, Magonistas and *libertari@s*, not to mention the traditional customs of assembly in Zapotec villages.<sup>8</sup> More than a cautious strategy – or convenient and arbitrary way of delimiting a tricky ethnographic object – this category decision is arguably the most congruent with anarchist values in the first place. Furthermore, inasmuch as there is a friction between “anarchist”, “*libertari@*”, “feminist”, “*magonista*”, “anti-authoritarian”, “autonomist”, and “Zapatista” as labels, paying attention to the tug-of-war that people experience when choosing between them as they go about their practical political work tells us something about “anarchism” we would not otherwise see. Glossing all egalitarianism as “anarchism” is arguably an imperialist move in and of itself. My experience in Mexico and among indigenous activists in Canada suggests that the question of whether anarchism functions as a Eurocentric ideology that recuperates non-Western ideas and forms discriminately and to its own ends is one that must be kept in mind at all times, and this is impossible to do if we call Zapatista, Haudenosaunee and Zapotec modes of social organization “anarchist” without a second thought.

By treating anarchism in this more qualified manner, I realize I part ways with scholars such as Pierre Clastres (1987), James Scott (2009), and David Graeber (2004). Given that in my experience most people who feel uneasy universalizing anarchism or treating it ahistorically are not white men, this thesis might be read as an analysis of anarchism “from below and to the left” (Fulbright award notwithstanding). I do believe that charting instances of “anarchy” throughout time and space is arguably a valid political project – if it is permissible to apply the word “democracy” to non-Western traditions then “anarchy” must be allowed as well. I am not asking readers to take a definitive stance against such a broad usage of anarchism, but simply to engage a particular thought experiment during the time it takes to read these pages: What does “anarchism” look like when we limit its reference to people who identify as such?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In Mexico and throughout the Spanish-speaking world, anarchist activists experiment with ways of making words gender-neutral; whereas a mixed gender group would traditionally be designated with the masculine-as-generic, e.g. *los libertarios* (purely female composition being *las libertarias*), the activists in my study will often use the @ (*l@s libertari@s*) or X (*lxs libertarixs*) in writing so as to not subsume the feminine within the masculine. Whenever in this work I use a Spanish group word (e.g. *libertari@s*, *extranjer@s*) I follow this usage. Note that Quebecois and other Francophone activists also similarly intervene in the (parallel) French usage to the same effect, e.g. “*des participantEs et des alliéEs*”.

<sup>9</sup> In the United States there are groups of people who self-identify as “anarchists” yet are pro-capitalist, who are not encompassed in my usage of “anarchism” and “anarchist” in this text. The cluster of values and practices commonly and currently associated with anarchism most everywhere else, including anticapitalism, is described at length in Chapter 1. While currents of individualist anarchism

Treating “anarchism” as a specific “ism” does not necessarily detract from the aforementioned political project but keeps us honest as we proceed. For all of these reasons, in pages that follow the content of anarchism is defined by what people do with it. Not by what its *supposed* to mean or *supposed* to do, not by how Kropotkin, Malatesta or Magon interpreted it, nor by what any number of less famous anarchists *say* it means, but by what people are *doing* with it *right now*. Looked at this way, sometimes “anarchism” is a word that people from different places recognize potential friends and housemates by, sometimes it’s a reference to “consensus decision-making”, sometimes it’s a reference to syndicalist organization, sometimes it’s used interchangeably with “indigenous”.

Anarchism is made to do lots of different kinds of work these days, to be sure. It reminds me of the painter’s multi-tool: An absolute must-have, built to have at least five uses, normally used for at least five more, immediately recognizable to any tradesworker (painter or not), but a mysterious and possibly dangerous looking thing to anyone who isn’t. Put another way, anarchism is nothing beyond the real-life embodied people who use it as a tool to try to build something. It does not have a life of its own. Even the best multi-tool cannot paint. So the question becomes: How do people hold this tool? Do people use it differently in different places? Where did they get it? What cool new uses have been invented for it lately? Check out all these people who don’t even have one, but are pulling off the job in half the time! Is it rusting in a box? Is someone not really using it at all, but simply displaying it on her belt as working class chic? What are they building with it? The short answer would be: Some pretty impressive stuff, but boy do they ever botch some jobs...and who’s all this shit for anyway?

The anarchist scene, or *medio anarquista*, is an ethnographic object that is hard to place. Anthropologists generally like to place things, or have things neatly placed for them, because ever since analyzing “primitives” has gone out of style the disciplinary specialty has been re-invented as the “local” and “particular” – that is, territorialized difference still remains an organizing concept. Regardless of so many critiques that insist culture is not reducible to territory (e.g. Appadurai 1998, 1992; Fog Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Gupta and Ferguson 1997), I have been encouraged, time and again, to *pick a place*. In terms of where precisely I have come to know the anarchist scene, you can already tell that most of my experience has been in Quebec and Mexico. I will also be drawing on examples from experiences I have had in New York, Austin, California, London, Caracas and Toronto. At times I considered titling this thesis “Anarchism in the Americas” rather than grandiosely referencing the “anarchist world”, but this would be problematic for a different set of reasons: Everywhere I have been I have met and worked with anarchist folks from even further afield – Barcelona, el País Vasco,

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have long existed, the exceptional nature of the U.S. American case is a fascinating subject unto itself; here we will practice some American Exceptionalism “from below and to the left” and let the *gringos* do their own homework.

France, Belgium, the Balkans, Greece, Italy, Western Canada and the list goes on — “Although doing fieldwork may place us, localize us, this does not mean that the locality is coterminous with the issues that concern us or the people that we study” (Norman 2000, 137–8). After all, even when anarchists meet each other halfway around the world, we often realize within fifteen minutes that there are only one or two degrees of separation between us – his ex-housemate is now part of her ex-girlfriend’s Clown Army collective, and so on.

Even if not, we have, at the very least, been to some of the same demonstrations and read the same books by Bookchin. No matter where we are, we know we have found our people when we hear the songs about the Black Flag, when we see everyone sit down in a circle instead of a large bloc facing a stage, when we overhear the drunken argument regarding punk vs. reggae or the more serious one about whether or not Palestinians are indigenous people and whether or not it matters. A recognizable “anarchist scene” certainly exists in patches all over the world, albeit not everywhere, and it really is a small world after all. Ultimately I am convinced that the styles of argument, frameworks of debate, and other characteristics of the scene that I present ahead will be recognized by anarchists – and the people who deal with them – pretty much everywhere. Only in Mexico, for example, do people switch between “anarchist” or “Magonista”, but in other places people experience their own version of this dilemma: Should they articulate their anti-authoritarianism within the Western anarchist tradition, or should they instead favour local anti-authoritarian histories and identities?

It is also true that anarchist scenes from place to place are different and these differences are important. A more traditional ethnography might have centered on one of these places, with the aim of describing a local and particular anarchist scene. This one rather relates “place-based, yet transnationalized, struggles to transnational networks” and “investigate[s] the ways in which...actors relate to both places and spaces as they ‘travel’ back and forth” (Escobar 2001,163). Precisely because the differences as well as similarities among various anarchist scenes are important, and precisely because the anarchist jet-set moves from one place to another without necessarily realizing this, an ethnography that stretches to behold various scenes at once is uniquely constructive. The main contrasts apparent in this thesis are between the scene in Montreal and the ones in Oaxaca and Mexico City. My exposition regarding both the points of connection and friction between these scenes-in-contact offers specific insights that will be particularly useful to activists that travel between Montreal and Mexico, but it is also meant to be read as a case. The differences between the anarchist scenes in London and Sarajevo are not the same as the ones that separate Montreal and D.F., and as we proceed I would invite readers with knowledge of different combinations of scenes to experiment by thinking about what these differences may be. This multi-sited ethnography is not one wherein multiple “local” cases are provided to represent a singular “global” phenomenon, but is rather suggestive of a conversation among diverse parties. Marcus, who suggests that multisited research be designed around “chains, paths, threads, conjunctions or juxtapositions” (1998, 90) recommends the method of

following the people, the thing, the metaphor, the story, the biography or the conflict. I have done a lot of these things, but more than anything I try to follow the conversation.

The pun is of course intended. I make it my business to follow the songs about the Black Flag, the circle-shaped meetings, the people with only one degree of separation between them, the collectives linked together by collaborative projects, but I also try my best to follow their debates, understand what they are saying and why, notice who else is listening to their *palabra*, or word, and how many times I have heard this same argument before. This too is an effort at aligning form and content, wherein the connection among “sites” defines the argument of the ethnography. The whole point of *La otra campaña*, after all, was to share and listen to each other’s *palabra*.

Anna Tsing’s concept of “friction” (2005) is clearly relevant here: the activists that participate in collaborative projects have different things to say, coming, as they do, from different places and backgrounds; they have a variety of political and personal agendas; they are each listened to more or less, depending on who they are and what it is they say, yet they all choose to speak to each other anyway, and do so specifically in the *lingua franca* of anarchism. Except for those people who get fed up and just walk out, in which case it is important to ask why. In other words, one of the goals of this ethnography is to challenge the universal pretensions of “anarchism” by grounding its intellectual production in a (small) global conversation that is itself entirely particular. As Conway (2013) writes, an ethnographic approach promises “to root transnationalism, or more precisely, the production of particular transnationalisms, in concrete practices and geographic places.”

Ultimately what lies behind every anthropologist’s anxiety about place is the concept of “culture” itself — wherein cultures always have places and places always have cultures. Culture is the object of specialization for which anthropologists get paid. Regarding anthropology and culture I have a few things to say. Many readers are likely aware of anthropology as a tool of colonial dominance. Anthropologists, for their part, often like to feel they are better than other academics on account of their supposed commitment to social justice. Anthropology likes to think of itself as fighting for the underdog, but anthropology was and still is a tool of dominance, both institutional and conceptual. Not much has changed on account of “post-modern” self-critique, and anthropologists’ talk about the need to democratize and decolonize knowledge has been basically “non-performative” – this being the academic phrase for something that doesn’t do what it says it does (Austin 1962).

I have no desire to defend anthropology, and don’t mind biting the hand that feeds me. When it comes to other academics criticizing anthropology, however, I lose patience. Anthropology would not have been able to slaughter and alienate indigenous people everywhere if it weren’t for the sociologists that helped build the prisons, the psychologists that pathologized them, the political scientists that couldn’t see politics and personhood outside of ancient Greece, the philosophers that called the “primitives” irrational and the engineers that built the weapons. The academic disciplinarians that blame racism on anthropology actually remind me of certain anthropology graduate

students and anarchist activists — the only two kinds of people I have ever met who throw “white trash parties”, wherein participants constitute themselves as relatively-virtuous by theatrically representing poor whites as culprits of racism, sexism and eating hot dogs. Sometimes both the academy and the anarchist social scene appear as simply two rooms of one big theme party thrown for the sake of making white middle class professional lefties feel good about themselves.

Despite all of this, I do think there is value in ethnographic research. Fieldwork has taught me things about myself as well as the anarchist scene that I could not have learned otherwise. And as much as I can tell my story as that of an activist who sold out to the Dark Side, I could tell another, just as true, of myself as lay ethnographer since adolescence, who could never resist psychoanalyzing my activist friends, categorizing their disputes, sketching out systems of subcultural value in the scene, and charting out anarchists’ metaphysical imaginaries – so much “observant participation” (Costa Vargas 2006) to pass the time — those activist meetings can be long. The fact is that I wanted to write a book about all of this before I actually studied anthropology, which is how I ended up as a graduate student in the first place.

Regarding the concept of “culture”, I will close with the following words. Anthropologists have supposedly gotten past their tendency to approach cultures as little bounded systems of homogenous people à la “primitive tribe”, but whenever they aren’t insisting culture is bounded by place, they are simply using it as a synonym for ethnicity, itself a code word for race. The anthropological imperatives of race and place can be heard in the first comment most anthropologists say when considering my research project on transnational anarchist networks — “Oh cool! We’ll get to see how anarchists from different cultures get along!” This is both a useful and limiting question. If this is how the problem is approached, the result will be to notice the differences – and *only* the differences – between Mexican anarchists and Canadian ones, or *mestizo* anarchists and indigenous ones, or Greek ones and British ones, or Quebecois Anglophone and Francophone ones, and so on. Likewise, the current academic obsession with “difference” in general means we will notice the oppressive power dynamics – and *only* the oppressive power dynamics – between men and women, white people and people of colour, indigenous people and their so-called “settler allies”, and so on. The final picture will inevitably be one of people treating each other like shit. This happens too often, and we should think about it, but there is more to the anarchist scene than its replication of heteropatriarchal colonialist violence and this lens will never let us see it.

The other limiting approach, albeit useful as a counterpoint to this last one, is to reframe the question to consider “anarchist” culture, which is transnational and may have regional differences, but is ultimately one thing. The concept “anarchist” culture invites us to imagine a bunch of people who glide seamlessly from the squat scene in Barcelona to Climate Camps in England, *encuentros anarquistas* in Mexico and rallies in Montreal because they share the same basic values and conceptual vocabulary. Note how many recent ethnographies of the global justice movement take this tack,



and thus involve an argument that amounts to the following: “Sure there are language barriers, and sure some people are more privileged than others, but because we all hate hierarchy and have great inclusive decision-making processes everyone basically gets along in one big happy global network! The only people who aren’t happy in our mix are nasty authoritarians and we don’t want to hang out with them anyway.”<sup>10</sup> Note how fundamentalist “difference” still informs the picture, just that here the difference is between anarchists and non-anarchists. We are still encouraged to delineate two mutually exclusive groups of people and proceed as if all group members are basically the same. All the tensions and arguments among anarchists disappear, all the completely different understandings of the word “anarchism” disappear, all the people who do not consider themselves anarchists at all and yet without whom “anarchism” as a project would cease to exist, disappear. All the friction of encounter and power dynamics mentioned above also completely disappear.

Both approaches have merit inasmuch as they each invite us to perceive things that are happening that we wouldn’t see otherwise. In the following chapters I alternately lend weight to one or the other lens for this reason, and because the ethnographic material itself invites me to bear out both ideas: Sometimes people really do get along despite so many “differences” and it’s amazing and inspires me to tell a story of diverse people getting along. Sometimes people are complete assholes and I walk away unable to find any silver lining because there isn’t any. Shifting between these two lenses also reflects something of anarchists’ own experience. Activists themselves actually tack back and forth between being inspired and motivated by so much cooperation across “difference” and being completely demoralized by the fucked-up power dynamics that ruined everything. Activists themselves continually switch back and forth between revering romanticized, timeless and perfectly different “indigenous traditions” and “communities of colour” and then discussing the role and place of these sub-species in the universal Anarchist Tradition. It’s not just anthropologists that are afflicted, in the end. Dominant ideas of “culture” underlie anarchists’ own political common sense as well, although they often don’t realize it. The bi-polar tendency to unconsciously switch between these two mutually exclusive theoretical lenses is responsible for anarchists’ mood swings and our failure to achieve the highest ideal of “cooperation” more than we realize.

When done consciously, shifting back and forth between different lenses is a great way to learn. This manuscript came together in precisely such a way, by first imagining each part in light of one imaginary whole, and then another, and vice versa. Tacking back and forth between different kinds of theoretical analysis is also the only way to go, because no one theory is going to capture all of reality – the map is never the territory. It was feminist and critical race theory that offered this insight, although precisely because it was such a good idea, history had to be re-written to attribute it to white

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<sup>10</sup> The list offered in footnote 5 generally fits into this category.

male philosophers (see e.g. Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989).<sup>11</sup> One of the virtues of anthropology is that our methodology involves starting with practice first (the “field”) and then applying theories – or developing new ones – based on what is happening, as opposed to picking a theory first and then forcing experience to fit it. In this sense, ethnographic methodology jives well with the feminist and postcolonialist critique of grand theory, as well as the anarchist disdain for the same, and actually encourages me to use various theoretical concepts, even ones that seem at odds with one another, in the same work. A little bit Marx, a little bit Bakunin, a little bit Anzaldúa, a little bit Bourdieu. The upshot is that everyone should be equally satisfied, by which I mean equally pissed off.

The breakdown is as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the transnational anarchist scene (read: “anarchist culture”) by way of an anarchist social forum in Caracas as an ethnographic departure. Organized alongside the World Social Forum (WSF) happening in the same place at the same time, this Alternative Social Forum brought together a couple of hundred anarchist activists from all over Europe and Latin America (plus many hangers-on). For those unfamiliar with the anarchist world, alongside the summit in Cancun this story serves well to introduce the particularities of anarchist politics by way of beholding the agendas, projects, desires and disappointments of anarchist organizers, the anarchists that attended, and those of the activists who moved between one forum and the other during the course of the week. The story of the Alternative Social Forum is one where anarchists from many different countries manage to get along and work collectively for eight days even though they lack a language in common – way better than we did in Cancun. What are the common rules, immediately intuited, that make this possible? Why do so many WSF attendees permanently defect to our camp when they discover it, although they never imagined they would get along with “anarchists”, and certainly wouldn’t have identified that way? Drawing on diverse experiences among other anarchist collectives, houses, and *encuentros* in various countries, I proceed to explain what is common to – and appealing about – “anarchist culture”. In later chapters I take anarchists down a few notches, so first I must build them up.

In Chapter 2 I begin to focus in on the micro-politics of anarchist collectives by analyzing the life span of a Zapatista solidarity collective based in Montreal which rose and fell between 2005 and 2007: While nominally speaking anarchists are against all forms of domination, in practice activists are interested in some forms of domination more than others, which can lead to considerable disagreement. As the chapter title “Gossip as Direct Action” may suggest, the particular form of domination that gets special play in this chapter is gender and its intersection with other systems of power. Chapter 3 follows directly from the previous, elaborating my discussion of gender and race by way of both ethnographic and historical analysis. The ethnographic depar-

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<sup>11</sup> The white male philosophers do contribute to “post-modernism” their distinct idea that the dislodging of (their) singular unified truth means there simply isn’t any truth at all. Regarding this debate within discipline of anthropology specifically, see Clifford and Marcus (1986), Visweswaran (1997), Behar and Gordon (1995).

ture remains the same Zapatista collective, which together with other local anarchist collectives organizes a speaking tour of two indigenous spokespersons for the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) throughout Quebec and Ontario in 2006. The marginalization of Magdalena's voice in favour of Juan's during this tour suggests certain key features of anarchism's historical baggage: Gendered as feminine and marked as religious, Magdalena's concerns are doubly "private" vis-à-vis the modern secular public sphere of politics. Anarchism is thus not simply a timeless political position against "all forms of domination", but rather an ideology that highlights power in some places and not others due to anarchism's genesis in overlapping masculine public spheres (the clandestine "revolutionary brotherhoods") of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. In this chapter I analyze how articulating an anti-state politics with reference to the "indigenous" permeates contemporary anarchist theory and practice. Yet what I call "settler anarchoindigenism" is not always an activist practice of pure disinterested "solidarity" as many non-indigenous anarchists maintain, but involves a selective recuperation of indigeneity to validate anarchism itself.

Whereas Chapters 2 and 3 focus in on the "node" of the anarchist collective, Chapter 4 – "The Rhizome in 3D" – zooms out to consider the "network" among them as an ethnographic object. Whereas many anarchist activists (and scholars thereof) generally praise the decentralized and non-hierarchical networking logic of anarchist social movements, an alternative analysis suggests that various social hierarchies are replicated within and via the anarchist network. Moving beyond the single collective or anarchist *encuentro* ("node") to consider the network as both cause and consequence of nodes, we see how activists with economic power, privileged passports and cultural capital become key nodes in and of themselves, and ones that wield unrecognized power. I examine both the effects of activist travel upon one's return as well as the effect of foreign activists passing through in the cities they visit, comparing the different yet similar contexts of Montreal and Oaxaca as cases in point. Beyond gender and race, here class difference and a cross-cutting North-South "axis" characterize a transnational anarchist social scene wherein some participants stay (are fixed) in place while mobile others are imagined to transcend both place and vested interest at once. With attention to anarchist activists' and scholars' common interest in Deleuze's imaginary of the "rhizome" as well as chaos and complexity theory, I discuss various linear orders and "tree shapes" within the anarchist world and how they are obscured.

In this same chapter I also turn away from the specifically anarchist collective, network and *encuentro* to consider anarchists and their political projects as they combine and overlap with other social scenes and leftist movements. Everywhere they go, and no matter what political issue they take up, anarchists have to negotiate, collaborate and compromise. The ideal of disinterested "solidarity" comes up against the purest ideals of anarchist participants in almost every project. Meanwhile, some say they can only keep working in anarchist collectives because they regularly spend time with non-anarchist friends, which may include right-wing libertarians, left-wing liber-

als, neo-pagan hippies and other “unpoliticized” people of all sorts. Anarchists are all about autonomy yet nothing in the world is autonomous, not even anarchism.

Chapter 5 continues to concentrate on the transnational network, yet focuses specifically on the encounters and networks (or lack thereof) among diverse anarchafeminist women, as well as the special attention networking-women receive within both the anarchist scene and academic research: When men are expected to submit to authority an “uncompromising stance in the face of systems of domination” is called for; when women are expected to submit to authority “respecting local culture” is called for instead. When well-intentioned anarchist men from the Global North bumble around in the Global South it is often called “solidarity”, when women do the same it is called “imperialism”. In fact, both things are true in both cases. With special attention to the theoretical concept of “intersectionality”, two different stories of transnational encounter – one concerning an anarchafeminist roundtable at an anarchist congress, one concerning an informal argument among friends at a bar – are analysed to illustrate the import of anti-colonial feminist theory to anarchist practice, but also to illustrate certain shortcomings of contemporary feminist theory itself. Whereas Chapters 2 and 3 bring intersectionality to bear on contemporary anarchist practice, Chapter 5 brings anarchism to bear on practices of intersectionality.

Chapter 6 brings everything so far to bear on the question of activist “security culture” as a complex form of exclusion. Whereas the network imaginary suggests affinity as opposed to typology, hybridity as opposed to purity, activists dealing with state surveillance (must) police the boundaries of their scene. Police infiltration and the risk of betrayal are real, and it is understandable that anarchists be exigent throughout the network, here analyzed as a moral community. While many anarchist activists today are concerned to be open and “inclusive” in their political organizing, activists must also protect sensitive information, and simply do so in a different way than the overtly pyramid-shaped brotherhoods of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The dialectic whereby anarchists develop their own “security culture” in mirror image to state practice is cause for reflection regardless, especially when anarchists’ own prejudices lead them to profile some people more than others: The triage of who is “in” vs. “out” based on “security concerns” tends to overlap with the attribution of “good” vs. “bad” politics, both being informed by value hierarchies corresponding to the informal power hierarchies of race, class and gender within the scene discussed so far.

Chapters 7 and 8 concern the diversity of anarchist worlds, and the status of “diversity” among anarchist activists. Whereas some of the previous chapters highlight the similarities among diverse anarchist scenes, these chapters bring our attention to place-based cultural differences that inflect them in particular ways. My specific ethnographic focus in this section is the activist culture of university student anarchists in North America – being largely white and middle class, these are the activists within my study most inclined to forget that they hail from a particular place, have particular cultural baggage, and inflect “anarchism” with particular value biases as a consequence. It is here that we really begin to draw out the local and particular culture of profes-

sional middle class Leftists in North America. Mexicans and indigenous activists among “others” continue to appear in these chapters, but the eye is toward those “others” inhabiting North American anarchist places, such as the paperless refugees and graduate students of the La Otra collective. While in earlier chapters I illustrate the friction of transnational collaboration taking place in Mexico, here I present the rather different dynamics of Mexicans and Quebecois getting along (or not) when everyone is north of the borders.

Chapter 7 analyses the ongoing movement debate around “consensus process” as a case in point: while North American university student activists propose specific forms of formalized consensus process as “anarchist”, to others these same practices are best described as “white” or “elitist” and not anarchist at all. With attention to shifting definitions of “consensus decision-making” among activists, as well as to the (arguably more extensive) practices and knowledge of “consensus decision-making” among people who are not white elites, I suggest that “consensus decision-making” itself has no ultimate racial or class belonging but that the contemporary North American student activist version of it does, and proceed to explain precisely how. In this exercise, movement critiques on the part of Mexican activists, those of local activists of colour, and those of white working class people on the borders of the movement are all positioned as foils that throw into relief the particular culture of the North American anarchist intelligentsia. The result is a certain intervention into anarchist activist debates around power and consensus process, whereas my analytical discussion of race and class invited by the particular ethnographic problem has broader import and suggests, among other things, both the limits and unrecognized potential of “intersectionality” as it is currently practiced by anarchist activists in North America

Whereas Chapter 7 is titled “The Diversity of Consensus”, Chapter 8 follows with “The Consensus on Diversity”. Most anarchist activists in North America are very preoccupied with diversity: they believe it is important to “privilege the voices of those most affected” and to “position ourselves in solidarity with struggles of front-line communities”, for example. Most are aware of the debate around “consensus process” as “exclusive” as well, and are concerned about it as they generally seek to be “inclusive”. So far the best movement response developed for including and privileging the right diverse people in anarchist spaces is what activists call an “anti-oppression approach”, yet those “most affected” are generally not impressed. In this chapter I carefully analyse “anti-oppression” to illustrate how and why it does not do what it claims – it’s “non-performative” aspect, as academics would say. Rather than ensuring the inclusion of “most affected” participants, the praxis of anti-oppression becomes articulated with the logic of neoliberalism and capital itself to produce a competitive prestige game among activists seeking the honour of “good politics”, and ultimately everyone loses. In Chapter 9 I expand on the logic of “good politics” among anarchists, now in conversation with the academic concept of “intersectionality” and other theoretical discussions presented in previous chapters. Whereas Chapter 3 involves a historical detour through early modern Europe to consider a specific imbrication of race and gender evident in

contemporary anarchist politics, Chapter 9 involves a comparable historical adventure that locates the form and content of “good politics” within the modern logic of private property and the state. The Cartesian mathematics and legal order embedded in common activist practices of “intersectionality” are dealt with at the same time, and this analysis is put into conversation with my earlier analysis of anarchists’ interest in the non-linear dynamics of contemporary life sciences: Inspired within the Hermetic tradition, modern anarchism has always involved Euclidean geometry and continues to do so despite aspirations to a more fractal approach. Chapter 9 is less ethnographic and more theoretical, and constitutes my concluding analysis. In light of it, an epilogue returns to briefly discuss the challenges of “transnational solidarity” with respect to the current war in Mexico – a war that has claimed more lives than U.S. intervention in the Middle East during the same decade, yet has received hardly any attention, either in the mainstream media or among the solidarity activists in my study.

# Chapter 1 – The Anarchist World

The first time I met Oscar of the “Bus Lee” was in Caracas, Venezuela, four years earlier. I remember he was introduced by his nickname of the week — “Beach First!” Everyone got the joke, a play on “Earth First!”, an environmentalist direct action network based in the United States but well-known by anarchists as far away as Venezuela. Beach First! and his *güero* company had made the mistake of arriving late at the Alternative Social Forum because they went to the beach first, and they weren’t going to live it down. Those hippies.

The Alternative Social Forum – herein FSA, for *Foro Social Alternativo* – drew a motley crew. There were old guard anarchists from Cuba, even Spain, and a matriarch from Argentina who had participated in the womb strike back in the day. There were young anarcopunks from Chile, anarcafeminists from France, Mexican anarchists who support armed struggle, Colombian anarchists less enthused, Brazilian activists unimpressed with Lula, *magonistas* from D.F., Antifa Euro-Boys hardened from street-fighting Nazis, hippies who had never been in a street-fight in their lives, and a few Indymedia journalists from the U.S., including Brad Will who would be killed by paramilitaries in Oaxaca nine months later. Despite so many differences among them, the people who showed up shared a world in common. Organized to coincide precisely with the World Social Forum in January 2006, the *Foro Social Alternativo* attracted all the autonomists – *los libertarios* – that, as I had been trying to explain to my MA committee, would never be caught dead at the Chavez-sponsored WSF. All the anarchists who had no more affection for Hugo Chavez than they had for Bush and who, three years later, wouldn’t have any affection for Obama either. As the organizers of the FSA continually pointed out, the only thing that changed with Chavez was *who* the country was being sold to – instead of Yankee capitalists now it was Chinese and Brazilian CEOs that were raking it in.

What about Chavez’s support for the unions? What about his health care system? What about all the new social services? It was all being paid for, the Caracas anarchists explained, by vastly accelerated resource extraction. The socialist government of Venezuela was financing a welfare state by selling mining concessions to multinationals and ramping up oil-drilling to increase the revenue of the nationalized petroleum company, all this at the expense of the indigenous peoples who live in resource rich areas. “Do you see any panels by Venezuelan indigenous peoples’ organizations on the program of the WSF?” I did not. “Of course not! Because anyone who has a grievance against Chavez’s government is not welcome there. This is why we organized the FSA, so that real autonomous social movements would have a place to speak and be heard.

We have organized an event where indigenous leaders will discuss coal mining in Zulia this week, you should come, it is in one of the campus buildings being used for the WSF, we are hoping to draw some of the people over from the...Hey you speak English and French too right? Take these flyers and go to the WSF and tell as many people as you can!”

## A Culture of Life

“...And if they build those coal mines higher up the watershed, the whole Amazon basin will suffer. As it stands now, the Guasare river is already contaminated and Maracaibo only has drinking water three days a week. The new *Constitución Bolivariana* says that indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination and control of their ancestral lands but the mining law gives priority to the state to extract resources underground, so in practice it doesn’t mean anything! The Venezuelan revolution is being financed with the blood of our people and the blood of the earth!”

I had walked in a few moments late, and only caught the end of Luis’s introduction. He was now wiping his forehead with one hand and waving the microphones over to his companion with the other. The crew of independent media reporters, armed with many digital voice recorders and one video camera held together with elastic bands, now directed their machines toward Marcela. One of the FSA organizers took a moment to explain to latecomers that whisper translation to English was happening in one corner and whisper translation to French in the other, at which point the English translator said he was burning out, and someone else from the audience offered to take over. We all shifted, flipping pages in notebooks and shuffling our chairs so that everyone could hear the language they needed. When Marcela stood up, the room hushed.

“*Compañeros y compañeras* of the world, first I bring you greetings in Wayuu, our indigenous language.” Everyone listened transfixed to the greeting they didn’t understand. Then in Spanish: “Brothers and sisters (*hermanos*) of the world, the Earth is life! The Earth is the first thing, coming before any other, she is our Mother. Mother Earth (*la Madretierra*) gives us life, gives us soil, beans, corn and yucca. We are her children, we must take care of her, never abuse her. We must be grateful for life and tread lightly. We Wayuu and the other peoples (*pueblos*) of Zulia and Maracaibo are fighting against the devastation of the Earth (*Tierra*) and fighting to keep our land (*tierra*) from the coal companies because they are our ancestral lands but also for humanity, for the children of the world (*tierra*). And the government calls us terrorists! These accusations offend us deeply. So many people — the people of the corporations — have turned their backs on Mother Earth, they treat her like something you can take and use, and don’t give back anything. They treat her like something you buy and sell to make a profit, and poison her. Her milk has become poisoned, like the milk of the women in Zulia, so toxic they cannot feed their own children. And like the women she



is sad, sad because she wants to care for her children, wants to feed them and flow in fresh waters but she cannot because she has been ruined. You do not sell off your own mother, your life, for profit, because you will die too, with her. Capitalism is a culture of death and it falls to us, the indigenous (*los indígenas*), to fight for the culture of life. We are few now. The governments have been killing us off for hundreds of years and so we are few, but we are not gone. We will continue to resist as we always have, with our indigenous brothers and sisters (*hermanos*) around the world, and fight for land, water and dignity to continue our culture of life, our culture of life in harmony with the Earth. The government says that the mines are “development”, that they are good for life, but they are only good for the rich who do not live here, they do not help us, we do not eat coal!”



The room had filled up. Marcela’s voice booming down the hallway had drawn a crowd, just as the FSA organizers had hoped. When the event was over, all the newcomers were curious to know who we were, and why they hadn’t heard anything about these problems anywhere else all week. One FSA organizer explained that “the WSF has been co-opted by the state for its own ends — it is just a huge advertisement



**Figure 1–1.** (left) Luis with radio people; (right) Marcela with mask that doesn't match outfit.

attesting to the progressiveness of the Venezuelan government. The rhetoric about it being a free space for networking among social movements is a lie!”

“What about the CLPPs (*Consejos locales de planificación pública*, or Local Councils of Public Planning)? Why don’t the Wayuu take their grievances there?” asked one of the U.S. Americans in the audience, while other English-speakers nodded their heads, equally confused. One of the bilingual anarchists from the FSA repeated the question in Spanish, and then installed himself between the FSA organizers and the curious *güeros*, bracing himself for an interesting exchange.

“The participatory democracy that supposedly exists now in Venezuela is a farce! The state revolution in Venezuela has not addressed the needs of the most impoverished, and meanwhile it has co-opted existing social movements into the state bureaucracy, with the effect of undermining civil society. Before there were all sorts of social movements working together in this country – the miners, the *indígenas*, the unions, the anarchists, the *campesinos*, the sex-workers...We were all on the same side! Now we are divided. The government created all these reformist programs and grants, attracting activists to work within the bureaucracy for the sake of funding, and now everyone wastes their time on government ritual proceedings rather than organizing. They spend all their time preparing for state-run assemblies and don’t get heard anyways!”

“But I thought that the whole point of the CLPPs was to bring decision-making power to the community level, isn’t that the whole point?”

“It’s all a waste of breath though, because the decisions made there aren’t *binding*! It’s all just suggestions, legally the government doesn’t have to respect the decision of the assembly, just ‘take it into account’, which in practice means...the whole thing is a farce, really, the whole thing is a terrific spectacle...”

“I see, well...what do the people of the social movements say about it?”

“There *are* no more autonomous social movements! Just recently a sex-worker was attacked, raped and beaten really badly, and beforehand there would have been all sorts of women’s groups and popular organizations demonstrating in front of the courthouse when they set the asshole free, but not now. Now they are all thoroughly distracted by paper-pushing and enthusiasm for the next ‘state initiative’. That day in front of the courthouse there were only 35 people, with me being one of only three men.”

“Right...there are still some movements though? I mean what about these folks here from Zulia we just heard from?”

“Sure, yes, exactly, there are a few, but as she was saying, they are criminalized for it! Because the government is supposedly so revolutionary, there is no more room for critique from the Left – if you are organizing independently of the state programs you are automatically suspect as a counterrevolutionary, accused of being an imperialist or worse. Like the case of Marcela and them, they were accused of being terrorists, and also ‘green mafia’ supposedly hired by transnational corporations that are competing against one another! And as for Luis, Chavez publicly denounced him as a CIA agent working against the revolution...Of course no one really believes it, except for Chavez and the army...”

“The ones with the guns...”

“Exactly.”

The FSA organizers’ tactic was working. Everyday a group of us would leave the FSA for the WSF to attend events such as the one above, where we would complicate the international attendees’ ideas about the Venezuelan government and lure a few over to the FSA. The FSA organizers, which included the editorial committee of *El libertario*, a local anarchist newspaper, had printed a paper called the *Alterforo* that explained the FSA and elaborated upon the problems discussed above, and we always went with as many as we could carry. One day we also went around the city posterizing advertisements for the FSA. At home in Montreal we always do this in pairs – one to wheatpaste, one to watch for cops – but the Caracas anarchists advised us to only do this in large groups, and by the end of the day I understood why: as a right-wing anti-Chavez protest marched by, dozens of people stopped and surrounded us to accuse us of wasting their tax dollars (obviously the foreigners in our midst were only here because Chavez had bought our plane tickets). Then, as a *pro*-Chavez march passed by, we were surrounded by dozens of matching red-shirts and accused of being counterrevolutionaries paid for by the CIA. Then as we passed by another right-wing rally, dozens of people came up to us grabbing for stacks of *Alterforos* while Caracas anarchists physically fought them off. Afterwards the anarchists explained that “These fuckers are *fascists!* Of course they are interested in anything that is against Chavez...having these people handing out our newspaper would be the worst thing ever, we are so often accused of lending weight to the conservatives by critiquing Chavez, you see, it’s very delicate, and we must be vigilant about not playing into the fascists’ hands like that...”.

I had already been told there was no space for autonomous initiatives and leftist critique of Chavez, but it wasn’t until we were mauled by left and right alike that day that I started to get the picture. The point was further driven home one morning when all the anarchists and a delegation of Wayuu — who were in full ceremonial dress and looking very serious – met to march together against the coal-mines in Zulia. The plaza was full of banners laid out on the ground and people milling about. Many had come for the Zulia march but many others were WSF participants who were just hanging around with their banners ready for another march, any march. We distributed more *Alterforos* while a couple of the local anarchist organizers ran around panicking: “they brought them *ham sandwiches*, they don’t eat *ham sandwiches*, I can’t *believe* this, we go through all this and then we can’t even...anyway, fuck, I need to go get...”. Pedro walked off muttering to himself, presumably looking for something more like Wayuu food. When we finally took off down the boulevard, the miscellaneous WSF participants joined in. The FSA organizers signaled wildly to each other trying to keep the Wayuu and their banner at the front of the march. Otherwise the whole message would be lost in a cacophony of “Stop Bush!”, “Free Tibet!”, “Close Guantanamo!”, “Free Palestine!”, “Long live Fidel!”, “Legalize Abortion!”, “Free Mumia!”, and just about every other injustice one could possibly think of. When the sound truck, banner and Wayuu in fancy dress were finally in place, however, we were suddenly surrounded – we had been

intercepted by a mob of red-shirted Chavistas and commercial network reporters. The red-shirts arranged themselves at the front of the march and started yelling “¡Viva la revolución Bolivariana!” and the reporters targeted all the white foreigners, sticking microphones in our faces – “¿Un saludo para el Presidente?” Greetings to the President? A salute? At first I thought we had simply crossed another march, but it soon became clear that it was no accident – there was no other march, just the red shirts, who zoned in on the anarchists walking alongside the Wayuu and harassed them as *imperialistas*. José, a teenage punk, ran up to me saying that some guy had just accused him of working for the CIA, “How ridiculous is *that*?” he asked. “...Anyway the guy wanted to fight me man, then they all started surrounding me and I had to run up here.” Things were falling apart. The redshirts had effectively trapped the anarchists and Wayuu, who had now fallen back in the march. Dozens of Venezuelan flags had appeared, and the WSF people with their mixed bag of causes had overtaken us, oblivious to the whole charade. Now the banner in front said “Stop Terrorism” with a big picture of George W. Bush next to it. The old Cuban anarchists sighed and shook their heads – “Oldest trick in the book...”.

We may have been unpopular in the streets of Caracas – as far as I know, no locals showed up at the FSA because they had seen our posters – but we were becoming increasingly popular at the WSF. By the end of the week, dozens of WSF defectors were spending their days at FSA events, and as many as could fit moved their backpacks and sleeping bags over to spend the nights with us in our main building. It was partly because of speeches like Marcela’s and video documentaries the anarchists screened about the brainless babies born throughout the Venezuelan oil fields, but concern for the indigenous people of Maracaibo was not the only factor. As one prisoner-justice activist from California put it, the WSF perpetuated the “culture of death” whereas at the FSA we were cultivating a “culture of life”. The “culture of life” that the California girl was talking about is not the same as Marcela’s “culture of life”, or is it? Before we can attend to how anarchist life and indigenous life articulate it helps to understand what this anarchist “culture of life” is in the first place, the one that the FSA anarchists shared in common despite hailing from 10 different countries, the one that the WSF defectors were drawn to, the one that we were teaching by example.

## **Autogestión/ Self-Management, Etc.**

The day before the FSA started there were already fourteen foreigners including myself camped out in the main building, which was a three-story cement labyrinth — half house, half art gallery – that an anarchist friend had lent for the occasion. Most of us were hanging out in the open-air kitchen on the roof when someone suggested that all of us who would be living there for the next ten days should have a meeting downstairs. When? How about now? We ran up and down the stairs a few times collecting everyone,

and within a half an hour all 21 people in the building – the fourteen foreigners plus seven local organizers — were all sitting in a plastic-chair circle in the salon.

Most of us were meeting for the first time. We hugged and kissed, exchanged names and fumbled around with the chairs for a little while, arranging our seating by language – the French that didn't speak Spanish sat next to the French that did, and so on. Carmen, the only woman FSA organizer in the house, suggested we introduce ourselves and welcome each other first, and began with herself. The persons on her right and left then smiled questioningly at each other until one said "I'll go!", and we went around the circle in that direction. Evelia was an Argentinian woman in her 50s and delegate of the *Federación Libertaria de Argentina* (FLA), which she described to us briefly, noting proudly that it had been functioning since 1935. Jean and Caro went next. They were from France but had been living in Caracas for some time, and worked with the *Cruz Negra Venezuela* (the Anarchist Black Cross works to support anarchist political prisoners, and has collectives all over the world). Celine was a friend of theirs, visiting from France to attend the FSA — earlier that afternoon we had discovered we were both in the riot that exploded over Benjamin Netanyahu's invitation to speak at Concordia University in Montreal four years earlier – "big small tiny world".

Oscar went next, and said that back home in the United States he worked with Earth First! (which elicited another friendly round of "Beach First!" digs), and also that he had been working with the FSA organizers in Caracas for months now. Daniel, another attendee of our parents' generation, explained he was a sociologist and writer from Uruguay, and had been involved in the *movimiento libertario* since 1967. Clara was an Indymedia journalist and film-maker from Arizona, and had found out about the FSA through Oscar. She came down from the United States to give a workshop on activist film-making and video-editing. Carlos, Leo and Frank were Cuban – Carlos lived in California, where he worked with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whereas Leo was living in Mexico City — both were part of the *Movimiento Libertario Cubano* (MLC). Frank, the oldest guy there, was also part of the MLC and had been part of the anarchist movement in Cuba before Castro took over, at which point anarchists became "enemies of the revolution" and had to escape along with the landed elite – he was now living in Miami.<sup>1</sup> The aforementioned California girl worked with the National Lawyers Guild. Enrique came down from Mexico City, where he worked with a Magonista collective. Julie, a woman from Quebec whom I had never met, had come down to work with the youth camp of the WSF. At home she had worked with the *Campement Jeunesse du Québec*, a yearly youth camp that was autonomous and self-managed. When she arrived to find out that the WSF youth camp was a "bureaucratic organ", she left before it even began – Julie was our first defector. As for the locals, almost all the Venezuelan organizers were part of the collective that publishes *El Libertario* or the *Comisión de relaciones anarquistas* (CRA), which had made the original call-out to organize the FSA months before – various people from

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Fernandez is the author of *Cuban Anarchism: The History of a Movement* (2001).

other groups, such as the Venezuelan Black Cross, had responded and gotten involved in the project, but most people in the FSA organizing committee were part of these two overlapping collectives.

When the circle closed, Carmen said “Should we make an agenda?” and we all shouted out topics until we had covered all aspects of the *autogestión* (self-management) of the space for the upcoming week — cooking, cleaning, sleeping arrangements, workshop support, tech, media, and more.

The food had already been bought, donated or otherwise scavenged, and two *señoras* had been hired to bottom-line the cooking of three daily meals (including a vegetarian option), but we still needed cooking and clean-up support teams — Evelia grabbed a piece of cardboard and a marker and started drawing up a calendar. Same thing for general cleaning: one of the French women suggested dividing the space into seven sections (downstairs bathroom, main hall, patio, etc.) and then drew up a calendar with spaces to sign up for each of the seven chores on each of the seven days. Both calendars were then posted on the wall so that everyone would know who was responsible for each task at any given time, and one of the U.S. Americans added a sign above it that said “Washing your dishes is revolutionary too!”. We ended the conversation saying that no one here is going to supervise, nag or boss anyone around because the idea is that we are learning to cooperate and do things in an egalitarian way, which means unlearning the “culture of coercion” and taking initiative. One of the local CRA guys followed up by saying “Remember everyone, there’s no use talking about grandiose revolutions and autonomy unless we start learning how to be autonomous and cooperative in these basic ways.”

“Next item then?” asked Carmen, “Here it says translation, maybe whoever who suggested this item could go ahead...”

“Sure, I was just wondering if we should organize translation at the events, either whisper translation or running translation depending.”

“I think whisper translation would be the best”, someone chimed in, “because some people need English, others French or German, who knows...”

“Rather than decide in advance, we should see how it goes, maybe in some cases there will be just a few people that need translation and then we can whisper, but if many people in the room could use an English translation we could do it out loud, I don’t know...”

“Sure, exactly, we can ask the audience to see what’s most appropriate.”

“I have an idea, how about those of us who can do translation all write our names down with the languages we can translate and then we can see...”

“Even better, let’s just see a show of hands now for English...Ok that’s lots!” “How about French?”

“At least four, that’s good too...” And so on.

“So now we know who we are, and in a few days we will all know each other even better, I say we just remember who’s around and, if we need translation, we arrange it on the fly...”

“Does anyone mind being on call like that?”

“Fine with me.”

“Me too.”

“I’ll be at the main centre here the whole time ‘cause I’m supposed to help hold down the fort, you can grab me for any event that’s happening here.”

“In my case I don’t mind doing whisper translation on the spot but doing running translation on a moment’s notice? Depends on the crowd and the topic y’know?”

“Right, of course, and of course no one is obligated, only if you feel comfortable.”

“Yeah totally.”

“I think we’ll be fine.” Everyone looked around and nodded at each other. And we were indeed fine – we all took turns translating events such as Marcela and Luis’s talk described above, switching off whenever someone got tired, without any further conversation.

We went through the whole list of topics on the agenda in this way, until we got to the last item – “computer room”.

“Yeah I was wondering about the room with all the computers in it, is it just for the FSA crew doing media work or is it open to the rest of us? Like, can we check our email?”

“Well, media has to be the priority I think, we’re going to want to upload photos and articles about the days’ events as they happen – we could also use translation help with this too by the way...” The multilingual people looked up and nodded.

“Maybe we could make it like there’s certain hours when the computers are free for email and stuff, later on at night or something?”

“And...I mean...I’m all for sharing resources and everything, and it would be cool if the people who are staying here could check their email, but it shouldn’t just be a free-for-all...”

“Yeah we don’t know how many people are going to show up, it could be tons!”

“Yeah and all the equipment is in there...”

“How about treating it like one of the off-limits spaces, like Oscar’s bedroom and the area in back” (Oscar was the one who lent us the house, with these few provisos), “...and those of us who are here at this meeting know that if we want to do email it’s ok, as long as its discreet and later on when there aren’t tons of people around?” “Sounds good.” Nods all around.

“At night then?”

“Yeah, say starting at 9?”

“Do we have consensus on 9 o’clock?” More nods.

“But I think that if we say at night then we should also say that we don’t use the computers after 1 am.”

“Do we really need rules like that?”

“Well, if we don’t put a limit on it then people will stay up late and they won’t be rested, they won’t participate in the morning’s activities...”

“Umm...dude, don’t you think that’s a little paternalistic?”



“If people can’t get up that’s their problem no? We’re not here to be mommy and daddy, the whole point is to...”

“Doing things this way means having faith in people...”

“Sometimes they let you down, sure...”

“But the point is to practice being responsible for our own actions...”

“So that we don’t *need* rules like that.”

“It’s like expecting failure.”

“Anyways fuck rules.”

“Yeah whatcha gonna do if we break curfew, give us a spanking?”

“¡Mamacita!”

“Anyway you think people will sleep in late because of *email*? Wait till we whip out the *aguardiente*, that’ll really mess up their morning!” And as if on cue, out came the guitars and the liquor. New people had started showing up during our meeting, and were now milling about in the big room next door. We carried our plastic chairs over and arranged ourselves in a now-larger circle, and sat down to drink and sing. The bottle of *aguardiente* and a small shot glass traveled around the circle until it was empty and replaced by a new one. We sang for hours, getting better with each bottle of course. The Venezuelans knew the Cuban revolutionary songs and the Cubans knew the ones from Argentina. The Yankees sang *Solidarity Forever* and everyone knew the chorus, same thing in reverse for *A Las Barricadas*. The Italians who had just arrived sang *Bella Ciao* and most of us knew the lyrics in Spanish. The French sang the *Internationale* and the rest were drunk enough to fake it.

Anarchists everywhere mean pretty much the same thing when they use the phrase *autogestión*, or self-management. And not only can we all repeat more or less the same definition – self-management means co-operating and organizing autonomously from the state — but our meeting structures are similar, the topics to be discussed are similar, and we make decisions in a similar fashion, enough so that when the above meeting was called we all understood what it was going to be about, how to act, when to speak, when to laugh, what to say, and how to say it. The U.S. Americans commented later that “it was weird there was no speakers list, I’m not used to people interrupting each other like that” and the Mexicans made fun of the French guy who suggested a curfew, but with relatively few missteps we all knew exactly how to go about that meeting. What’s more, we actually did all the stuff we promised we would throughout the week. The only exception was that the men flaked on their cleaning duties more than the women, but then again, that’s true of anarchist scenes pretty much everywhere too. It is also true that my male anarchist roommates everywhere have always washed more dishes than their non-anarchist equivalents. And like broken records, point this out whenever they seek to justify being lazy deadbeats.

What distinguishes the anarchists, then, is not simply that they are more reliable dishwashers – and sometimes only marginally. Rather, it is the shared ideal that everyone has in the back of their minds – “Washing dishes is revolutionary too!” A hand-written sign saying the same was tacked up in the kitchen of my collective house



Figure 1–2. Work and play.

in Montreal, and I have looked up to see the exact same Crimethinc. poster (fig. 1–3) – the one that schematizes Marxists, nationalists, anarchists, capitalists (and so on) based on their approach to washing dishes – tacked up over at least eight sinks in six anarchist houses in three different countries, sometimes even when nobody who lives there reads English. Everybody gets the idea. Of course in some ways the number of signs just goes to show how messy everyone really is. What is important to notice here is that while people everywhere try to avoid doing dishes, only in the anarchist scene does not washing up mean that, beyond being lazy, you are *not a true anarchist* and therefore at risk of being made an outsider to the anarchists’ tight-knit moral community. No one wants a bad reputation. In this sense, self-management also implies a certain management of the self. When one of the Venezuelan anarchists said we must “unlearn the culture of coercion” at the FSA meeting, he was evoking this management-of-the-self aspect of self-management. We must always be watching ourselves — “checking ourselves”, as English-speaking anarchists in North America say, to make sure we are acting in line with our ideals. In Mexico one rather says that one must *cuestionarse* – “question oneself” (with a touch of “challenge oneself”), whereas the common activist critique that someone has no *consciencia* gets at the same issue, especially since *consciencia* means both conscience and consciousness.

# WASH YOUR OWN DISHES

“If you can’t wash, it’s not my revolution” *Dilemma Goldman*

<p><b>DEMOCRACY</b> Even as a dishwasher, you deserve a say in which politician is best suited to protect the economy that keeps you in the kitchen</p> <p><b>NATIONALISM</b> Forget about those dishes for a second—you’re a citizen of the proudest nation on earth!</p> <p><b>LIBERTARIANISM</b> You wash the dishes, the owners profit even more</p> <p><b>FASCISM</b> The Mexicans who washed the dishes are deported, the Jews who owned the place are imprisoned, and everyone else is conscripted for military service</p> <p><b>UNEMPLOYMENT</b> The only thing worse than being trapped in a dishroom is being trapped outside one</p>	<p><b>CAPITALISM:</b> You wash the dishes, the ones who own them profit.</p> <p><b>NEOLIBERALISM (AKA “Free Trade”)</b> The dishes are shipped overseas to be washed and you’re free to develop your own combination of Unemployment and Nationalism</p> <p><b>REFORM</b> Smaller stacks, warmer water, longer breaks—same dishes!</p> <p><b>SOCIALISM</b> Dishwashers’ wages increase just enough to afford higher taxes</p> <p><b>COMMUNISM</b> From each according to his means, to each according to his need—as determined outside the dishroom</p>	<p><b>ANARCHISM:</b> We all share in the dishwashing.</p> <p><b>MARXISM</b> Between shifts, the dishwasher studies the intricacies of dialectical materialism. It turns out that thanks to his efforts, the dirty dishes have been accumulating value for his boss to invest in more dishes. The stuff about the dictatorship of the proletariat is more perplexing, but the party theorists reassure him that it makes perfect sense to them. Under their direction, he joins his fellow dishwashers in a risky coup d’état. Afterwards, he is distraught to find himself still in the kitchen, washing dishes for party bureaucrats. The bureaucrats reassure him that they will eventually wither away.</p>	<p><b>SYNDICALISM</b> The dishwashers join labor syndicates that send representatives to a council, at which it is decided which dishes are to be washed and when</p> <p><b>ANARCHA-FEMINISM</b> You wash dishes for the boss—who washes the dishes at home?</p> <p><b>ANARCHO-PRIMITIVISM</b> Down with dishes!</p> <p><b>ANARCHO-PUNK</b> Down with washing!</p> <p><b>INSURRECTIONARY ANARCHISM</b> A quixotic attempt to distill a political theory from the practice of smashing dishes</p>
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Fig. 1–3. The ubiquitous crimethinc. poster (cropped).

All this being said, we lose sight of what is particular about anarchists’ selfmanagement if we render it as simply another instance of self-cultivation along the lines

drawn by Foucault (1988). In later chapters I specifically address the anarchist performance of self and maintenance of self-image, and we see how anarchist scenes and “self-discipline” are not simply free of coercion – knowing what happens to anarchists with bad reputations is often coercive enough. For now what is important to notice is that while all of Foucault’s subjects are concerned to have properly cultivated selves, what the anarchists consider proper is rather unique. Compare, for example, anarchist selfmanagement with the self-management of the graduate student: When the printer stopped working in our shared office on campus, someone suggested chipping in and buying a new one for 80 dollars, but immediately someone else said that we should ask permission from the faculty first. Someone else said that we should get the money from the student association. No one wanted to front eighty dollars, saying that “No one will reimburse me anything” or “I don’t have time to go shopping” and “How do we make sure that people chip in an equal amount?” Then someone actually proposed applying for a grant to pay for it. The graduate student is concerned to stay on good terms with faculty and student association representatives (authorities) more than he is concerned to co-operate effectively with other students (peers), and considers her time better spent filling out grant paperwork than passing by colleagues’ offices to say hello and pass the hat for a printer. The graduate students do not trust a “show of hands” or accept to be “on call” to provide whisper translation “on the fly”, but prefer a bureaucratically-organized role more amenable to a valuable entry in the “committees” section of one’s academic CV (whether or not any translation was actually accomplished). The graduate students in my department are very much concerned with cultivating themselves, but what they are cultivating is in direct opposition to anarchist self-management.

Anarchists pretty much everywhere recognize “self-management” to be part of a set. It comes together with the overlapping values of autonomism, egalitarianism, decentralism, direct action, and the congruence of political means and ends.<sup>2</sup> In English, this last is often referred to as “prefigurative politics”, whereas in Mexican, anarchists simply refer to “*congruencia política*”.<sup>3</sup> Prefigurative politics, decentralism, direct action, egalitarianism and self-management may be seen as different facets of a broadly shared anarchist paradigm that insists that political activity should provide ways for people to get in touch with their own powers and capacities to solve problems instead of forming lobby groups or arranging spectacles to gain the favour of authorities. When the project at hand is living collectively for a week or starting a new anarchist soup kitchen, the phrase used is usually “self-management”; when the project is to shut down

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<sup>2</sup> These ideals also overlap in the written work of diverse autonomists, whose work overlaps as well; see e.g. Ackelsburg (1991), Esteva (2007), Aguirre Rojas (2008), Graeber (2009), Zibechi (2010), Juris and Khasnabish (2013).

<sup>3</sup> The term “prefigurative politics” was originally coined by Boggs (1997) in reference to Marxism, but is now used primarily in the self-description of anarchist activists as well as/in dialectic with descriptions of ethnographers that study them (e.g. Graeber 2009). Neither is *congruencia política* a phrase used uniquely by anarchists, but they arguably invoke it more so than others on the left.

a G8 summit or prevent the building of an oil pipeline by chaining yourself to a fence, the phrase used is usually “direct action”, but they are used somewhat interchangeably and each phrase simply highlights two different aspects of the same thing: “Direct action” highlights the fact that we would never ask or expect authorities to make the changes we want, and so we are making the change the directly; “self-management” highlights the fact that we are making this direct change all by ourselves, without any help from these same authorities.

Of course if you ask any given anarchist to define “direct action” you will get a variety of different formulations, even among those from the same city and of the same age.<sup>4</sup> Still, when the Chilean guy gave his FSA workshop on “Conscientious Objection and Anti-Militarism”, beginning with a statement that the War Resisters International (WRI) has a “direct action approach” and then inviting us to brainstorm ideas, we all knew what fit in that category. After dividing up the military-industrial complex into at least four sectors (arms and war technology manufacturers, banks and financial agencies, arms fairs, communications and media), and coming up with some examples (Locke and Martin, Boyd, Halliburton, Caterpillar, Sodexo, Fox News, the Axa Group, etc.), workshop participants listed the following potential direct actions:

“We could shut down job fairs in universities when they come to recruit more drones.”

“What about boycotts in general?”

“Direct action against banks and businesses, like blockades or property destruction.”

“I’m from Belgium and there we did this campaign against this fascist bank by picketing and postering – ‘Buy a House, Build a Bomb!’ and it actually worked, they stopped investing in arms...”

“Picketing banks is, well, I’m not saying we shouldn’t do it – like you say, in some cases it works, but generally, I mean, you can’t count on banks to respond to public opinion or whatever, I wouldn’t call it direct action anyway...”

“The same probably goes for this, but I would also put shareholder campaigns on the list – it’s direct action in the sense that you are targeting real people as opposed to ‘the bank’, and trying to get them involved, to get them to see the hypocrisy and contradictions in their own lives.”

“Oh hey, we forgot a sector earlier – all those chemical companies, like Monsanto and those guys who make all the pesticides for Plan Colombia...”

“Yeah, totally....One strategy in general could be to pick one or two corporations that are particularly bad – like Halliburton and Monsanto, for example – and organize a concerted international mobilization and denunciation of their activities. Lots of people are against genetically modified food and terminator seed technology as well

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<sup>4</sup> Thompson (2010) suggests that the (necessary) ambiguity around direct action among contemporary anarchist activists relates to the idealism and prerogatives of white middle class anxiety. In later chapters I reinforce Thompson’s concern that “direct action” and “solidarity” are mistaken for representations thereof, wherein what an action is understood to *mean* has greater import than what it *does*.

as...well, war, but who links it with those corporations? Not enough people...This needs to be politicized.”

For my part I explained that “we had this soup kitchen at our university called ‘The Peoples’ Potato’ and fed everybody for free everyday with dumpstered and donated food. Above all the idea was to feed people, but it was also a conscious action against Sodexo’s exclusivity contract on campus – no one is allowed to *sell* food but since you can give it away for free...”. The facilitator from WRI was scribbling all of this down on the marker board – it all fit the bill of “direct action”. Even when it might not, it was pointed out, and no one needed further explanation. Note that the guy who suggested ‘shareholder campaigns’ knew exactly how to articulate the campaign so that we would, in fact, recognize it as direct action. Not a single person present suggested we organize a petition, stage a march, write letters to local politicians, or – heaven forbid – get involved with an oppositional political party.

The key term “decentralization” overlaps with those of self-management and direct action in the sense that working to be accountable to any over-arching institution – or central power – is necessarily contradictory to *self*-management or responding *directly* to situations of injustice in our own lives. In other words, social revolution is understood to spring from direct actions that address the concrete problems of peoples’ everyday lives, the self-management of those actions also being appropriate to the particularities of their situations, and centralizing power could only be done at the expense of properly addressing such diverse scenarios. As with direct action, not only can all anarchists spout some version of this definition, but their actual organizational practice is similarly decentralized no matter where you go. When I attended the last FSA organizing assembly a few days before the FSA began, I could follow what was happening even though I had never been to an assembly in Venezuela before. As I mentioned earlier, the organizers were from a variety of different local collectives – the collective that publishes *El libertario*, the *Cruz Negra*, the *Comisión de Relaciones Anarquistas* and so on, but the FSA organizing committee was autonomous from these collectives. Someone unfamiliar with anarchist organizing might have sat at the meeting confused, and ask – as we have heard so many times before – “Wait, who’s running this thing? What is the group that organized it?” But there was no one group that the FSA organizing committee was responsible to — once it was formed, it was responsible only to itself, and would dissolve when its goal, an event, is over. This was self-evident to everyone that showed up, no matter where they came from. Anarchist organizing everywhere tends to be projectoriented, and there is never any permanent central committee that anarchist groups have to report to.

There are, on the other hand, always “*comisiones*”, “*comités*”, or “working groups” that form in order to accomplish the various tasks related to any given project, and these *do* have to report back to the main assembly. In this last FSA assembly, for example, Pablo said “Okay, so let’s start with the report-backs”, and one by one people from various *comisiones* gave an account of what they had done since the last meeting, what they still had left to do, and asked the group questions about how to proceed. Again,

I immediately understood what was going on, because anarchist groups at home do things in a similar way. The FSA organizers had obviously gone over the tasks required months ago and the participants had organized themselves into *comisiones* accordingly. Here as there, the *comisión de propaganda* will cover the layout and printing of flyers, for example. When they come across a major glitch (e.g. “The print shop that was giving us a deal has imploded – we have no more resources.”), they bring it up at the next assembly. If it’s something small (“Oh shit the image file we chose is corrupted.”), they can just go find a similar one themselves. The working groups or *comisiones* are generally empowered to make decisions outside the assembly, just not “political” ones. Of course there is always some room for maneuvering here, and while it is important to note that the *comité* may be somewhat standard, the definition of the “political” itself and the what, why and how of this inevitable maneuvering is always locally specific. In any case one cannot argue that the FSA assembly is a “central committee”, because assemblies always have to do with specific events, campaigns, and projects, and disappear after they are finished.

The idea behind this structure is that there be no permanent leaders, and that no one person gets to make decisions unilaterally. This organizing structure is meant to be conducive to egalitarianism, which, among anarchists, is referenced somewhat interchangeably with “non-domination” or “a stance against all hierarchy”. In actual fact, there appears to be a hierarchy of hierarchies in anarchists’ politics – their practice suggests they find some hierarchies worse than others, but we will deal with that later. For now it is significant that anarchists everywhere strive towards egalitarian relations in a most general sense, and it is for this reason that they are concerned to organize in a “decentralized” manner. It is understood that egalitarian relations are neither manifested in the small-scale present, nor will be achieved in the broad-scale future, by way of hierarchical organizing strategies, those pyramid schemes that “central” committees always crown.

Anarchists’ idea of egalitarianism is practically integrated with those of selfmanagement, direct action, autonomy, and so on. Six years after the FSA, when I was in Oaxaca helping out at a (self-managed) carpentry shop run by an ex-pat of the Barcelona squat scene, a bunch of local *magonistas* and miscellaneous foreign volunteers, my Catalan carpenter friend once summed up the conjuncture: “The indigenous youth come to live there for a few months to learn carpentry”, he said, “but it ends up being so much more. When it’s time to cook lunch the guys never volunteer, they say they don’t know how...So now we pair people up so they learn. Here we do things cooperatively, this is a self-managed shop after all. Besides, it’s not fair if only the women cook all the time, or if I’m the *only* guy that does, it should be more egalitarian...So, they are not just learning to cook as well build shit, they are learning this idea...In the end its not just a carpentry workshop, it’s a workshop in life (*taller de vida*).” That anarchist “life” again, this time clearly distinct from indigenous “life”.

The value of egalitarianism also similarly informs anarchist meeting structures everywhere as anarchists generally eschew the majority vote as a way of making decisions.



**Figure 1–3.** John Holloway, Zapatista-inspired autonomist Marxist scholar (Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico) and author of *Changing the World Without Taking Power* (2005), was a special guest at the Foro Social Alternativo in Caracas, Venezuela.



This may not be the case by definition – anarchists that vote at meetings are not unheard of, nor complete paradoxes the way anarchist presidents would arguably be – but self-identifying as an anarchist and thinking the majority vote is bad tend to go together these days; this is fairly consistent in the Americas if not globally speaking. In other words, anarchists do not simply protest the electoral vote that serves to justify state power, but consider the majority vote itself inherently authoritarian — the majority gets to impose on the minority. Note how this position regarding the vote is an example of aligning means and ends in and of itself. The anarchist counterproposal — and counterpractice — is to make decisions by consensus. As with fully egalitarian relations, perfect consensus doesn't necessarily play out in real life. As we see later on, what consensus actually looks like differs from place to place, and there is actually no standing consensus about what consensus is; here the significant point is that the ideal is so widely held that anarchists can show up from eight different countries knowing that consensus is the ideal outcome of any meeting, generally speaking, planned or impromptu. Just as no one mentioned “petitions” while listing direct actions against the military-industrial complex, no one at our FSA meetings ever suggested cutting short a thorny debate by voting. Anyone who presumes the common-sense definition of anarchists as being “against order” should reflect on this at length. Despite very different customs of consensus, notions of courtesy, habits of speaking and assembly technologies (despite the U.S. American woman's anxiety at the lack of a speakers list, for example) the idea that everyone be heard, and that no decision be final until everyone basically agrees, is found throughout the anarchist world.

All of these shared values and practices, taken together, are what allowed dozens of anarchists from an eventual fourteen countries, most of whom had never met before, to immediately integrate and cooperate in running a seven-day long forum together.

Moreover, all of these practices, taken together, are what the defectors from the World Social Forum were appreciating when they sat on the roof of the FSA saying things like: “What I love about this place is that it's not just a show, it's not just like switching the channel to The Revolutionary Network, like you're still this passive drone except now you're absorbing information on environmental collapse!”

“Yeah I found it really alienating, everyone is just wandering around waiting for something to happen, no one knows what's going on or where anything is...”

“I tried to go to this panel on women in Colombia but I couldn't find it. I *did* end up going to one on gene modification, nanotechnology and the patenting of life, it was absolutely terrifying!”

“Well that's the thing, you go, hear some terrifying shit, and then everyone walks away alone more miserable than they were before...”

“I guess the idea is that you do whatever organizing *later*, like with whoever it is you normally work with...”

“Sure, but we can do that all the time, we are *all here now* and, I mean, I thought the idea was to actually organize not just collect information on depressing shit. If we are here in the first place, it's because we are already aware of all the depressing shit...”

“And it’s true it’s hard to find things, I had the same experience.”

“It’s like they changed the venues last minute and now the catalogue is useless!”

“Well what do you expect from bureaucracy!”

“The way I see it, like, I think it’s easier for the people who came in big groups. Big NGOs that have whole delegations and their own tour bus to get around! And guides, and translators as well — they are doing okay...But if you are alone it’s impossible to orient yourself, participate and stuff.

“Hey that’s interesting, pretty ironic no?”

“Yeah like if you are located in a bureaucratic structure yourself then it’s easier to integrate into the system!”

“Meanwhile the idea is that it’s supposed to be a grassroots thing, ha!”

“Yeah they are playing it up as a place for organizing, but it’s more like a university, a radical university but...yeah.”

“Yeah and people play it up like this is *grassroots*, I mean actually act like the anti-globalization movement is depending on *this*, when in fact this shit is just distracting energy and people *away* from the *actual* organizing they were doing before, which is what made up the anti-globalization movement in the first place!” (This is the stance I had been trying to explain to my professors before I left for Caracas.)

“They are totally co-opting our shit man.”

“There you just go watch things, like the sister said before – the Revolutionary Network!”

“Then wander away feeling like ‘how could I possibly do anything to change all this?’ right?”

“Some lonely spectator, a consumer of information, with no venue for action.”

“As isolated as you were before.”

“But here, well, I met you guys at least!”

“Yeah, I feel like here we learn useful practical shit, and can do some real networking...”

“It’s partly just because it’s smaller...”

“Sure, that’s what everyone always says, that self-management only works on a small scale – well fine! Then we should do shit on smaller scales, there’s no point in doing something on a large scale if it’s not going to help anyway.”

“And it’s *not* just that it’s smaller, there are little sections of the big forum that are similar size, like the youth camp or whatever, but the dynamic is totally different, everyone is just waiting around, not involved...you ask ‘Can I help?’ and nobody even knows what’s going on enough to make use of the offer...Here you can ask anyone what’s up and someone can tell you, everyone knows the schedule and what’s going to happen and doesn’t act like you are being annoying if you offer to help!”

“Because we organized it ourselves in the first place...”

“And here it’s like people trust each other, and we are actually building real relationships, like I only met these people four days ago and they asked me just now to

take the key and watch the door to let people in, it's like a vote of confidence and it makes me want to, I don't know, do a good job y'know?"

"And on the flipside, the other day I couldn't do my cooking because I was sick from something, and people were totally cool about it, someone brought me a tea and a pillow and I felt, like, cared for..."

"And look – we are all wearing somebody else's clothes – none of us brought the right clothes and somehow we have all switched and lent each other stuff and I don't even know whose this is!" (she picks up her skirt) "But I figure we leave it all in a pile over there when we are done with it and y'know what? I bet you no one will steal anything..."

People ditched the World Social Forum for the FSA because there were opportunities for practical organizing on a human scale, but also because of the feeling they had when there of being needed, trusted, and cared for – which many people involved will insist are two sides of the same coin, even if they don't always come through. In academic terms, and to foreshadow a later discussion, one might say that for anarchists (and the friends they win over) the revolution must be "affective" in order to be "effective".<sup>5</sup>

## Sharing, Reciprocity and Faith

As far as I know, everyone did get their clothes back at the end of the week. And despite so many cameras, cell phones, laptops, backpacks, clothing and books lying around all week, nothing was stolen except for one bottle of *aguardiente* from Oscar's private stash. This was such a big deal that we spent twenty minutes discussing the transgression at our closing meeting, during which time we passed a hat around and collected enough money to replace the bottle. When one of the French guys suggested we find the people who took it and make *them* pay for the whole thing, everyone groaned and hushed him. It was important to replace Oscar's bottle as quickly as possible. It was important to focus on a solution that favored group solidarity, as opposed to a divisive blaming search. It was important to remember that while one or two people grabbed the bottle, we all probably took a swig out of it at some point. It was important to protect the reputation of the illicit *aguardiente* provider, because no one deserves to be tarnished for such a small transgression – we figured that the people who took it probably figured themselves that we'd all be happy to chip in the next day for a bottle of *aguardiente* we had so much enjoyed, albeit unknowingly, the night before. It was important to protect the *aguardiente* provider because next time it could be us.

Next time it could be us. This is also the sentiment behind lending strangers clothing and bringing a sick person tea and a pillow when they are supposed to be mopping

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<sup>5</sup> See also Precarias a la Deriva (2006) and essay by Shukaitis (2011).

the kitchen floor. What is most interesting here is that “next time” none of the same people will be around. One does not lend a sweater to another because next time that person will return the favour, they do it because they know that at another moment a completely different activist will lend them a sweater when they themselves need one. The question of reputation does enter in – one does not want to be known as someone who is stingy with their sweaters – but when it comes to small things like sweaters, realistically-speaking, in a few months time in a different country no one will know that they were the one who hoarded a sweater or lifted a bottle of *aguardiente*. Rather, anarchists try to practice what anthropologists call “generalized reciprocity” on principle – they share their stuff in general because they have faith that other anarchists will also share their stuff in general. This assessment is often based somewhat on past experience, but in the first instance, and even among those who have past experience to rely on, anarchists take a leap of faith in each other, and ultimately it is the faith in reciprocity that actually brings the reciprocity into being.

This reciprocity, and faith in it, is not unique to the anarchist scene – anthropologists only make up categories like “generalized reciprocity” when many instances have been found. Within the discipline the phrase is often applied to small scale societies, but the concept is also recognized to apply in some measure throughout all social formations (see e.g. Sahlins 1972; Graeber 2011). Even in the centre of Empire some generalized reciprocity can be found; the individualistic bourgeois teenager might say “I invited him to crash on the floor for a week, so many people have taken me in when I was traveling that I figure hey...”. In some ways my anarchist roommates and I constantly sharing our collective house in Oaxaca was not that special, except that anarchists never need websites like Couchsurfing.com (or need to rely on comment thread reviews) because word of mouth suffices and because anarchists, who profess “mutual aid” as sacred doctrine, tend to be pretty decent guests. Over thirty people crashed at our house in Oaxaca that year, many of whom we hadn’t met before but had been vouched for by someone we had. Everyone was given a house key, washed their dishes, bought us mescal and bouquets of flowers for the kitchen table, and no one stole anything. Meanwhile, everything in the house was used in common – as my roommate once explained to a newbie, “Stop asking if you can use something or eat, in the house there is no private property!” As I will later argue, the logic of private property inflects the anarchist scene in subtle ways, which is disturbing precisely because they take their stance against private property very seriously: As Proudhon said, “property is theft” (1970 [1840]) and it’s hard to find an anarchist alive who disagrees with the principle. In the anarchist world, you can’t reasonably prevent someone from using something they need, yet you can’t reasonably steal something either because that, also, is refusing to share. What makes property private is that one can prevent others from using it. So, when we were on the beach in Cancun and one of the activists from D.F. was cold, I gave her my *keffiyeh* (that checkered scarf activists associate with Palestine, to the extent that in Mexico it is called a “*Palestina*”). I didn’t know her name or where she was staying and we got separated later that day, but thirty-six hours later I found

my keffiyeh shoved inside my sleeping bag. Graduate students who borrow my books generally don't act like that. Returning to this comparison, it is instructive to point out that the reason the graduate students were unable to self-manage the purchase of an eighty-dollar printer was precisely because they had no faith that anyone else would chip in or return the favour in a similar way at some other time. They were also ascertaining the situation correctly – when no one has faith in generalized reciprocity, it simply doesn't exist.

It feels great when someone has faith in you. As the woman who relished the “vote of confidence” in her to take care of the front door key said, it makes you want to “do a good job”. When people “trust each other” like this they are “actually building real relationships”. Here I would expand only to say that by “real relationships” she is referring to the way people act when they are invested in each other instead of when they are invested in pleasing superiors (such as graduate students who prefer to practice “vertical reciprocity”), or when they are encountering each other as individuals mediated by a bureaucracy (such as the isolated individuals wandering around the World Social Forum complaining).<sup>6</sup> The FSA was indeed a small-scale event and brief as well, but even just a few days of being trusted made participants want to trust others and be worthy of trust. This might seem banal, but for so many WSF participants who were used to people only doing dishes or showing up on time due to fear of punishment – the “culture of coercion” – the FSA was inspiring because instead of more talking about how bad capitalism is, they experienced a glimpse of what it might be like to live and work otherwise.

## Fun for Fun's Sake

Anarchists tend to be silly. After all, the whole point of getting rid of capitalism, exploitation, patriarchy, colonialism and the police is so that we can all have more fun. We cannot play out our desires if we are working all the time or squirming trapped with someone's boot on our neck. Desire here can mean just about anything, but sexual desire definitely counts. The extent to which anarchists' ideal of “free love” plays out, and how, is very different in Montreal and Mexico City for example, but again, a certain nominal ideal of “polyamory” means that one can (try to) get away with pretty much anything.<sup>7</sup> The American guy and the Quebecois woman who hooked up at the FSA and proceeded to spend most of the week making out in the dormitory upstairs caught a couple of disparaging remarks – they were not arriving at the morning's activities on

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<sup>6</sup> See Lebra (1975) for further discussion of “vertical reciprocity”.

<sup>7</sup> Anarchist discourses and praxes of “polyamory” are diverse, complex and not dealt with in full detail in this particular work; the Facebook argument in Appendix C, regarding whether it is racist to use the shortened phrase “poly” to refer to “polyamory” as it should arguably belong to Polynesians instead, is included as an example of the “anti-oppression game” in play (see Chapter 8), yet also serves well to introduce the unfamiliar reader to the concept of polyamory and its political meanings as understood among the activists in my study.

time! — but no one was really going to rain on their parade. In their own way, they were also prefiguring the world in which we all want to live. And when we walked in on two people having sex on the kitchen counter and we knew the guy was cheating on his wife, we didn't say anything, and neither did anyone else. Next time it could be us. We are also allowed to dance funny, dress up in costumes, sing really loud out of key, and get as drunk as we want (there are always a few "straight-edge" vegans around who don't drink, but they know they have to put up with the rest of us). It is true that the ways anarchists act at parties is significantly different from place to place, which can cause friction and misunderstanding – I take up this issue later on. It remains the case, however, that even though Mexican anarchists don't play dress-up as much as Catalan anarchists do, Quebecois anarchists need to be drunker than Mexican ones to start dancing, and Cubans know more songs off by heart than U.S. Americans, anarchists everywhere tend to dance, sing and wear funny hats more than their non-anarchist equivalents. Needless to say, people who defected from the WSF and preferred hanging out with us liked our parties even more than our workshops.

Why "needless to say"? Because, with all due respect to various sophisticated anthropological critiques of human universals, the simple truth is that people everywhere like to party. The hats and songs may change, but the out-of-life aspect of all good parties is seductive everywhere. The "liminal" state and its corresponding "communitas", wherein social hierarchies are reversed or temporarily dissolved and the future feels open – "Anything could happen!" – is itself seductive.<sup>8</sup> Of course anarchists take this as far as it can go because dissolving all social hierarchies all the time is the main anarchist idea. It is no coincidence that anarchists' main fundraising strategy tends to involve throwing dance parties for which they can sell tickets, food and beer, and it is no coincidence that these parties are good. In this sense the anarchists are generally very good at what Bakhtin called the carnivalesque (1984), something that Graeber (2009) has also pointed out in connection with their propensity for giant puppets. Later, we will also follow Stallybrass and White (1986) to see how anarchists otherwise inhabit Bakhtin's "classical body", wherein carnivalesque departures provide exciting transgression.<sup>9</sup> In any case anarchists can also be very serious, especially at

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<sup>8</sup> This sentence is merely a fancier version of the one before – "liminality" is the "in-between" state that corresponds to a person's social status in a ritual space, perhaps that of a rite of passage, wherein no role currently applies; this would be the "out-of-life" aspect of parties that I evoke. Victor Turner (1967, 1969) popularized the concept of liminality (see Van Gennep 1963) and introduced the concept of "communitas" into anthropology, which refers specifically to (fleeting) moments (liminal or otherwise) in which feelings of social unity or solidarity supersede those of rank; see also Mary Douglas (1984), Edith Turner (2012). For an accessible review of these concepts, including that of Bakhtin's "carnivalesque" discussed below, see Ehrenreich (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Stallybrass and White (1986) recuperate Bakhtin's (universalist) analysis of early modern Europe in the mode of symbolic anthropology to comment on the particular neuroses of the developing bourgeoisie, wherein the European popular "grotesque" and elite "classical body" are understood to be historically particular and develop in relation to one another; the bourgeois neurosis around the "grotesque" is something we return to.

meetings, and in this sense their parties are quite ordinary, arguably providing a sanctioned release rather than amping up the revolution. Parties can protect the status quo in this way and challenge the existing order at once.<sup>10</sup>

Parties provide space to ignore one's obligations to others, but also help build friendships and foster reciprocity. After all, people bring gifts of food and drink to share at parties, gifts that at some point should be returned in kind. Or perhaps a few people provide the food and drink for everyone — we are indebted to this person who throws the good party, and may volunteer to throw the next one. Furthermore, generally one does not throw a party alone — parties encourage us to form teams to decorate and cook and clean up afterwards. Parties both consecrate existing social relations and inaugurate new ones. Although styles of parties differ enormously, this particular aspect of partying is also arguably a universal phenomenon. In Oaxaca, a well-known philosophy called *comunalidad*, based on indigenous custom and advanced by Mixe anthropologist Floriberto Díaz (2007), identifies four key components to indigenous collectivism: collectively shared territory, shared work, the rotating system of *cargos* that constitute municipal power, and the big communal parties that people in the *pueblo* take turns throwing year after year (see also Luna 2010). Of course just as the anarchist “culture of life” and the indigenous “culture of life” may overlap without being the same, the same goes for the anarchist party and the indigenous party. The comparison is nonetheless made. Anarchists in Mexico love talking about *comunalidad* — they may not have territory, work or *cargos* but parties are something they can get a grip on.

## “Subculture”

Anarchists from different places don't only get along because they have the same meeting formats and drink too much *aguardiente*. They also tend to have similar tastes, and bond on this basis. As always, taste defines an out-group from an in-group, and following Bourdieu (1984) one has to ask if this process of “distinction” is not, in fact, a primary motive among those involved, however misrecognized it may be.

At the FSA as in Cancun, anarchist punks from different countries made fun of all jewelry-making hippies we passed by in our marches and poster missions. Some anarchist tastes are more local. In Mexico or Venezuela, anarchists might also tease someone for liking reggae, whereas in the United States, because reggae is more clearly marked “black”, no white anarchist would dare criticize it (in front of other white

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<sup>10</sup> Stallybrass and White (1986) well capture the Marxist debate around Bakhtin: Do carnival and the carnivalesque constitute class consciousness or do they constitute a form of social control? See also Gluckman (1965), Eagleton (1981), Sales (1983), Limón 1989; Cummings (1991); da Matta (1991), Lancaster (1989), Goldstein (2003); Graeber (2007).

anarchists, or people they perceive as black anyway).<sup>11</sup> Still, while the borders of the anarchist world are drawn in slightly different places wherever you go, generally speaking an anarchist can show up from pretty much anywhere knowing that he or she will be recognized as a comrade by dropping a few solid names, wearing the right T-shirt and DJing the right music, whereas a newcomer doesn't realize that all of these are "passwords" and might — heaven forbid — suggest listening to the Grateful Dead. Later on I engage the question of (sub)cultural capital and its relation to dominant forms of capital in more detail; for now all we need to know is that a Deadhead who needs a sweater might not get one. In other words, while anarchist events like the FSA are often immediately appealing and inviting to the newcomers who discover them, an important counterpoint is that subcultural insularity mitigates feelings of immediate connectedness to a significant extent.

Anarchists everywhere also tend to pass the time by recounting battle stories of holding barricades and surviving suffocating tear gas, and airing such accomplishments does not necessarily serve well to attract and integrate newcomers either. The line between insisting that participants have "anarchist politics" (the conjuncture of values described earlier), and shunning someone because they don't have enough face piercings and shrug at the name "Malatesta", can be rather blurry. Of course, just as the lines around "anarchist politics" and the "anarchist scene" tend to blur together everywhere, anarchists everywhere tend to argue about where those lines are, or should be. Of course the topic came up at the final meeting of the FSA. As soon as we settled the question of the stolen *aguardiente* someone said: "I think we should talk about how there are some people here who are taking this seriously, and others who are just *anarcoturistas* and, like, taking advantage..."

"People who aren't even involved in political work!"

"Like all those people who showed up from the WSF and just started staying here because they thought it was cool, and they don't really have any idea of what we are trying to do!"

"Well, wasn't the whole point to divert attention from the WSF?"

"Yeah, well, no..."

"The point was to make room for the local ecologists and indigenous peoples movements."

"Anyway I think we should go around the circle and see what comes of it." Everyone nodded. I think we all recognized the strategy. In Montreal, in any case, suggesting that we all speak in order around the circle is a common way to calm down an argument (as

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<sup>11</sup> Hebdige's landmark study "Subculture – The Meaning of Style" (1979) focuses at length on a certain triangular dialectic between punk and reggae subcultures and each/both with the dominant order, noting how the various inversions and partial semiotic repetitions involved in these subcultural aesthetics constitute subaltern critiques of class and white supremacy. The various assemblages of punk and reggae, together and separately, in present-day Montreal and Mexico City are somewhat different than the dynamics Hebdige finds in 1970s London, yet ultimately this supports his logic and suggests the utility (fun) of a parallel analysis.



well as a common way to start a meeting or introduce ourselves as described above). It has a name – a “go-around” in English, “*una ronda*” in Spanish “I’ll go first. I’m Evelia from Argentina. Above all I would like to thank our hosts here, and also say that I thought the whole thing has been a truly impressive act of coordination, the *autogestionamiento* of an event like this isn’t easy. I am just so delighted to see so many young people involving themselves, I really feel that we have entered a new period of organizing in recent years. The events and workshops were very successful. What I have also seen, of tremendous importance, is the sharing of experiences and learning going on between people of different generations, and different countries...In this sense I think it is positive that there have been so many people here at Oscar’s house, at the FSA – if people want to be here it’s because we are doing something right! And building a movement means inviting people to join and making it possible to participate and share. If this is a new experience for some then that’s good, hopefully it has been inspiring!” Everyone smiled and nodded, including the people who had been complaining earlier.

“Ok my turn. Well my name is Paulo and I too am just *so* happy that the turn-out has been so good and that all the events – well all except one – happened, and mostly on time. Some workshops were so successful that people spontaneously decided to have them again the next day, that was impressive! The direct-action workshop was also a great success, we actually formed an affinity group in the process and pulled off a direct action the next day, some invisible theatre. I would say that the sharing of the house went pretty well. There were some problems – we know what they are – but considering the amount of people that have come in and out of here, I mean *fucking A!*” “Me too I think that overall it went well, but some things could have been better. Since this is a space for self-critique (*autocritica*), I, well, first of all the vending fell on my shoulders the whole time. That was bad. We could have sold more of the silkscreening and CDs if we had only tried. I mean nobody really likes it, who wants to deal with money? But if we *are* self-financing (*autofinanciando*) this event then we have to...well, do what it takes. That’s all. But in general I would say that it was an awesome success and I have met so many cool people here this week – I’m inspired for months to come. That’s the other thing that’s important about things like this, the human element. Like Evelia was saying. Oh yeah, and about people not being involved, I wanted to say that sometimes its not obvious *how* to get involved, especially if you don’t know everybody. That’s all.”

“Well”, said Antonio, one of the Spanish Civil War vets who had been around all week. “My heart is truly touched by the young people taking up the struggle and by everything I have seen here this week. I could go on but I won’t speak too much here today, just offer one idea I had. I think the most wonderful outcome would be to examine all the critiques that we make here today and consider them a learning experience. And, then, we should have a meeting with the entire community, including *all* the people who were involved in *all* the different ways, and have a self-organized session of public critique. This would be an act of real strength. That’s all.”

“I agree with you Antonio”, said Frank, the Cuban exile and other elder in the room, “and neither will I speak for very long today. I just want to caution everyone here about insularity in the movement. In order to build a movement you *can't have insularity*. The only other thing I want to say is a huge Bravo! to the organizers for keeping it together all week, everything was smooth, no serious problems to speak of, and I think everyone has had a wonderful time.” He started clapping and everyone joined in. Carmen was smiling through tears, touched at the sentiment. We kept going, and as we went farther around the circle everyone became more comfortable and opened up more, so much so that when we got to the end we all decided to go around again. We will come back to insularity — it is a recurring theme. Whereas the pleasures of autonomy and the carnivalesque are everywhere part of what makes up the anarchist world, the pleasures of distinction are part of what makes it so tiny. I suppose I agree with Frank — if we really want to “build a movement” further *autocrítica* in this area is warranted. In this sense it may be helpful to consider the history of anarchism, by which I mean studying “anarchism” itself as a historical object. In the process I take up certain lines of questioning that have already suggested themselves, such as: Why should anarchist tastes be what they are? Why should the only exception in the self-management of the FSA be the hiring of two *señoras* to bottom-line cooking? Why are anarchists so interested in indigenous people, their “life”, their politics? None of these questions can be properly answered without attention to history.

## Chapter 2 — Gossip as Direct Action

“*Hocicono, repelona, chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women – I’ve never heard them applied to men.” – Gloria Anzaldúa (1987)

If the last Saturday of the *Foro Social Alternativo* was devoted to the microcosm of anarchy, then Sunday was about the macrocosm. The *Espacio libertario* scheduled for that day was a place to discuss the wider struggles out there in the world, a place for each of us to share a word on the political work of our collectives, and a place to propose ways of organizing together on into the future. In Spanish, “libertarian” (*libertario*) is a broad umbrella term for all anti-capitalist anti-authoritarians including anarchists, and is more commonly used than “anarchism”, a term mired in misunderstanding. Over 50 people attended this meeting – the first go-around took two hours. The latter half of the day was devoted to collectively drafting a declaration. The men dominated the discussion more than usual. They argued about whether to include Castro’s name in the declaration for what seemed to be a disproportionate amount of time. Meanwhile, on the fringes of this show, dozens of people exchanged emails and schemed about how to integrate their projects across the world. The *Declaración libertaria de Caracas* itself can be found online.<sup>1</sup> The sketch we made at the *espacio libertario*, from which the *Declaración* was drafted, is what you see on this marker-board (Figure 2–1).

While the anarchist stance is against “all forms of domination”, some kinds of domination appear to cause more concern than others. For example, on our markerboard *patriarcado* is squeezed in at the bottom as an afterthought and sub-topic of antimilitarism. As I suggested earlier, anarchists respect a hierarchy of hierarchies. This chapter is primarily concerned with the status of gender domination in this hierarchy, and illustrates how the modern political notion of a private domestic sphere versus a public sphere of politics comes to depoliticize gender, both conceptually and in practice, even among anarchists who ostensibly reject the state – public sphere *par excellence*. In this chapter I analyse the year and a half life span of our *La otra campaña* collective (2006–7) as well as a speaking tour of two indigenous activists from Oaxaca that our collective helped organize, to present gossip as a form of direct action. In the next

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<sup>1</sup> See English translation of Declaration at: <http://www.ainfos.ca/06/feb/ainfos00061.html>

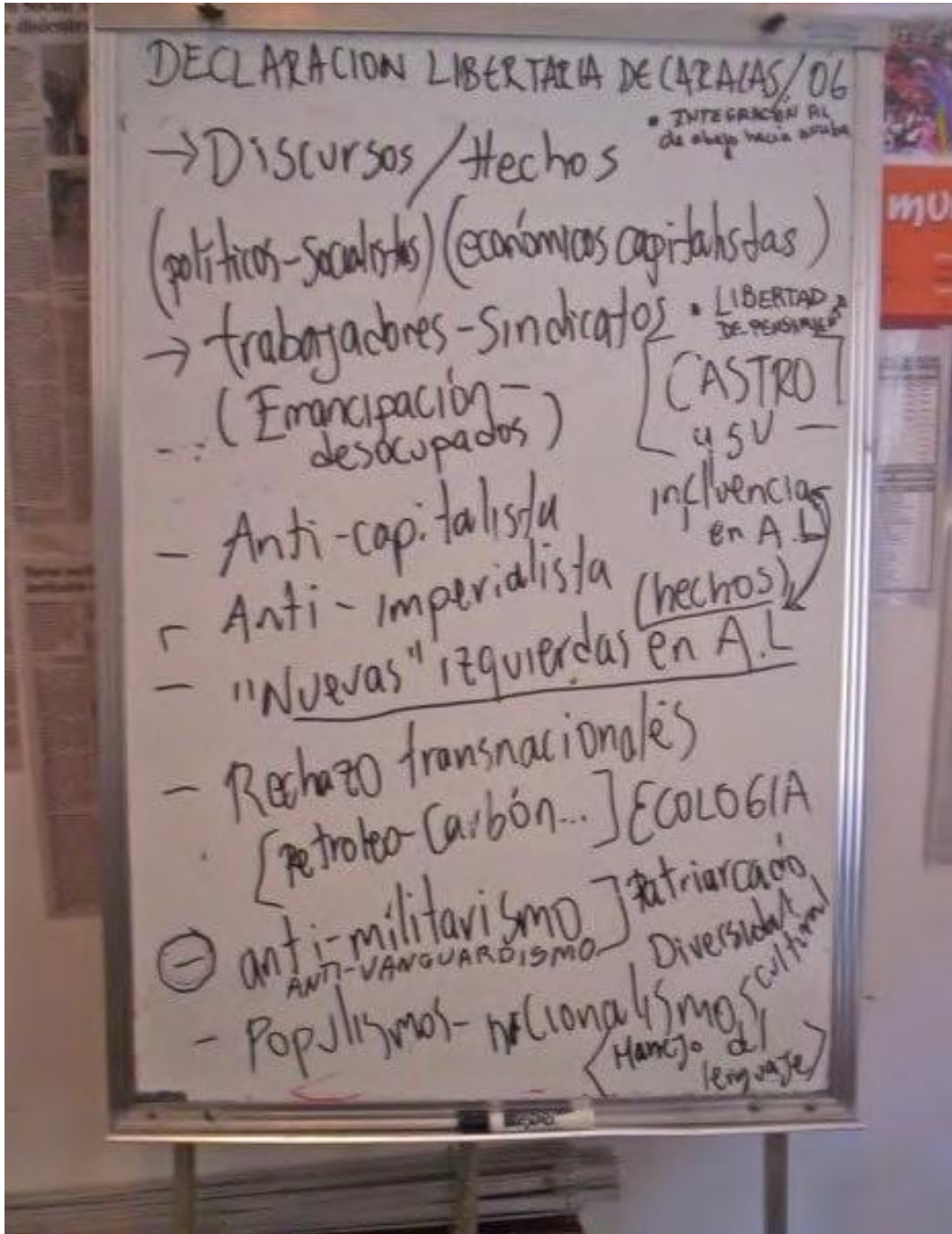


Figure 2-1. Notes to craft the Declaración; Caracas, Venezuela; January 2006.

chapter, I further analyze this same speaking tour to explore the intersection of gender and the secular in anarchist politics: the public/private divide as applied to both gender and religion versus politics proper is one and the same, both gender and religion are always racialized, and anarchist “solidarity” with indigenous peoples movements is not as disinterested as it may seem.

## La Otra Campaña – From Mexico to Montreal

The year 2006 was a big one in Mexico. It was an electoral year. The Zapatistas, who had first arrived on scene with their 1994 revolt in Chiapas coinciding with inauguration of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), had been lying low for a while, but came out of the woodwork that year to run *La otra campaña* – “The Other Campaign” — alongside the inevitable hooplah of electoral politics. *La otra campaña* consisted of a Zapatista delegation traveling all over the country to meet with leaders of social movements and anyone else who cared to show up and share ideas and strategies of resistance, all to build a broad national resistance movement “from below and to the left” (*desde abajo y a la izquierda*). Meanwhile, as I mentioned in my introduction, the first Zapatista communiqué in a long while invited those of us beyond the borders to form part of the *Zeza Internacional*, the transnational equivalent of *La otra campaña*.<sup>2</sup> The *Zeza* was to support *La otra campaña* in Mexico, but beyond that we were invited to engage an equivalent project in the regions where we lived – we were invited to listen to the *palabra* — “word” — of all the discontented people around us, be they organized in social movements or not, and thus begin to build a strong network of resistance organizing against neoliberal capitalism. *Zeza* was a reference to *Sexta* (the communiqué in question was the “Sixth” Declaration from the Lacondon Jungle) and the other word — *Internacional* – spoke to the fact that everyone in the world was invited, but was perhaps also a gesture, at once flippant and with all due respect, to the anarchist and Marxist Internationals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Stalin is a hard act to follow so let’s just skip the Fourth and Fifth Internationals; besides, *our* leaders lead by obeying and trudge through the *sierra* asking questions instead of ordering people around, and as a consequence they are way ahead of everybody.

Whether or not this was the intended meaning, this was the structure of feeling among many of those who were inspired to join the *Zeza*: “lead by obeying” or *mandar obedeciendo* had been a Zapatista slogan for some time; to “walk asking questions” or *caminar preguntando* was newer, to coincide with *La otra campaña*, and was picked up across borders right away. The Zapatistas were already world-renowned among Lefties for their synthesis of Marxist anticapitalism, feminism and indigenous self-determination, or, in academic terms, a certain reconciliation of “old” class-based

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<sup>2</sup> This communiqué, “The Sixth Declaration from the Lacondon Jungle”, is attached (in the original Spanish as well as in English translation) as Appendix A, and can also be found online in six languages at <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2005/11/13/sexta-declaracion-de-la-selva-lacandona/>

politics and “new” identity politics (see e.g. Day 2005; Graeber 2009; Khasnabish 2008). Following their initial uprising in 1994, the Zapatistas’ use of Internet media to call for a global mobilization against neoliberalism resonated strongly among diverse activist groups all over the world (Khasnabish 2008). The Zapatistas’ autonomist approach was particularly interesting to anarchists. As opposed to the “old” anticapitalists who sought a dictatorship of the proletariat, the Zapatistas had organized themselves into decentralized democratic councils, and, in the words of John Holloway, keynote speaker of the FSA in Caracas, intended to “change the world without taking power” (see Holloway 2005). For all these reasons, when the Zapatistas organized the Second International *Encuentro* (Gathering) for Humanity and against Neoliberalism in Barcelona in 1998, more than three thousand activists from fifty countries arrived, a significant portion of whom identified as autonomist or anarchist (Juris 2008). At this Zapatista *encuentro* the activists present syncretized these ideals with those of the Zapatista movement when they organized the People’s Global Action (PGA) network, which proliferated into the many regional direct action networks that coordinated the series of large-scale mobilizations beginning with the “Battle of Seattle” in 1999.<sup>3</sup> It was the regional PGA network in Montreal, for example, that cultivated the mobilization against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in Québec City, which is how I first met the anarchists myself.

I will not speak more about the history of Zapatismo before 2006 – precisely on account of how inspiring the Zapatistas were for Lefties during this period it has been covered *ad nauseum*.<sup>4</sup> I do offer a rough summary of their influence above, however, for the sake of contextualizing the Zetzta and the widespread response to it: Within months of the Sixth Communiqué, Zetzta and La otra campaña collectives cropped up in many different countries. A few months after I returned from Caracas I received an email invitation to the first organizing assembly of La otra campaña in Montreal.

## Ici la otra — Summer 2006

The first assembly was large – as first assemblies tend to be. Many including myself did not return to the following meetings immediately after, but I kept receiving updates and invitations to meetings and events on the *La otra campaña* listserv that I had joined that first day, and in April of 2006 I started attending meetings regularly. The assembly, originally convened by a few individuals hailing from various other collectives (much like the FSA organizing assembly), had settled into a collective of approximately 15 people, which was meeting every week, and had named itself *Ici la otra* — as *ici* means “here” in French, *Ici la otra* meant “The Other (Campaign) Here

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding the “Battle of Seattle” see e.g. Yuen, Katsiaficas and Rose (2001).

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Collier and Quaratiello (1994); Nugent (1997); Harvey (1998); Holloway (1998); Cleaver (1998); Nash (2001); Stephen (2002); Rus, Hernández Castillo and Mattiace (2003); Otero (2004); Oleson (2005); Day (2005); Lynd and Grubacic (2008).

(in Montreal)”. Although some members had histories of involvement in anarchist activism and identified as anarchists at times, we did not announce our collective itself as “anarchist” but rather as “Zapatista”, and for pragmatic reasons our pamphlets simply said we were anti-authoritarian, or, in Spanish, “*libertario*”.

Right after I joined the collective, the *La Otra Campaña* down in Mexico was dealt a blow in Atenco. The *La otra* delegation, along with a group of Atenco residents, had been living in an protest camp (*plantón*) in the flower market to prevent it being destroyed to build a Walmart instead, and in the wee hours of the morning they were all suddenly and brutally attacked by police. Widespread reports of rape and other prisoner abuse were immediately reported, and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) down in Chiapas immediately called out for actions in solidarity with the activists of Atenco.<sup>5</sup> Collectives like ours responded. The demonstrations the *Ici La Otra* collective organized that month really impressed me. The actions we organized were artistic and colourful, involving flowers, music and puppets, and the preparatory art sessions were as much fun as the actions themselves. I was grateful that the other collective members were patient with my rusty Spanish – everyone was Mexican except for three of us – because I was happy to be part of this group of activists who were all friendly with each other and carried out their collective work seriously but with a healthy dose of humour. The informality of our collective meetings was more like the activist culture in Mexico than Montreal (we laughed more and never managed a “speakers list”, for example) and compared to the culture of the Anglophone anarchist scene in Montreal I found it refreshing.

So much happened that summer in Mexico that we had no shortage of projects: As soon as the whirlwind around Atenco started to settle down, the police attacked another protest camp (*plantón*) in the main plaza of Oaxaca, this one organized by striking teachers. In this case, instead of everyone dispersing in fear, the whole town came out to fight with the teachers against the police, drove the cops away, barricaded the entire town, and called for the immediate resignation of the Governor of the state of Oaxaca. While the town was free of politicians and police, the residents formed a peoples’ assembly to run the town called the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (*Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*, or the APPO). The residents of Oaxaca also occupied local radio stations and used them to discuss the social issues that had led them to rise up and denounce the Governor, as well as to orchestrate resistance in practical terms (to disburse medical aid to various barricades, to warn people of impending police attacks, to announce locations of free outdoor soup kitchens to eat, and so on).

All of this was very exciting. The Zapatistas, for their part, were rather silent about what was happening in Oaxaca, concerned as they were with their *otra campaña* (and they were chastised for this when they finally did show up), but in Montreal our *Ici*

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<sup>5</sup> See the EZLN call for action at <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2006/05/03/urgente-acciones-en-apoyoa-companeros/nggallery/page/2> (Accessed July 23, 2015)

*la otra* collective immediately picked up the cause. Besides, other anarchist groups in town wanted us to fill them in — the influx of independent media reporting had anarchists everywhere intrigued by the “Commune of Oaxaca”. Meanwhile, just a few weeks later, the presidential election was met with a vociferous outcry of fraud. The right-wing *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) had “won” over the left-wing *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD). Most people in Mexico don’t believe any election, but this time the opposition leader was making a real fuss — López Obrador, the PRD leader, was rallying everyone to battle and it seemed to be working. While no one could have imagined precisely the extent of the bloodshed about to be unleashed by the PAN’s “war on drugs” that was about to begin, everyone with a social conscience in Mexico knew that President Calderón was going to be bad news, and tensions were high.



Our collective was busy. Over the course of the summer we arranged political art installations all over town, participated in No One Is Illegal demonstrations, and planned a speaking tour of two activists from Oaxaca for the coming fall. We also organized film screenings and workshops on Zapatismo and parties to fundraise for political prisoners, some of which were facilitated by the fact that I lived in a big housing collective





**Figure 2–2.** Piñata and pickets made by Ici la otra (2006). The piñata is of Ulises Ruiz Ortíz, then Governor of Oaxaca; the pickets are from our demonstration in solidarity with Atenco.

at the time, complete with seventeen anarcho-hippie roommates and a common room large enough to host a small rave.



I was originally supposed to be studying the anarcho-hippies – they do come up time and again – but I didn’t enjoy spending time with them as much as I did with the *Ici la otra* collective. I was still a trades-worker at the time, the university student hippies were destroying my tools (plaster knives used as scrapers, etc.), and when I had pointed out that they were reducing my income by \$200 per month in this way they called me “materialist”. The anarcho-hippie roommates also had an unpleasant habit of bypassing perfectly good crates of dumpstered food to eat the half-rotten ones. It didn’t make any sense, until the day I saw some roomies pass over a decent crate of apricots to make a pie out of rancid grapefruit pulp that had already been through a juicer, and what was going on suddenly hit me: “The Rotten Grapefruit Class Power Cleanse”, wherein the worse one’s food tastes the less thieving-bourgeois one has to feel. So, I hung out with my Mexican friends all the time instead, became better friends with the people in our collective, and got together with one of the men as well. We never made much headway in terms of listening to the *palabra* of so many ordinary discontented people around us – the Mexicans did not feel comfortable wandering around white working



**Figure 2–3.** (top) March in Montreal in solidarity with the APPO, including my favourite picket: “A [horse] is smarter than you Ulises”. (November 2006). (bottom) *Batucada* (drum troupe) formed by Ici la otra members and anarcho-hippie roommates, at march protesting the war in Iraq (March, 2007). Note that the *lucha libre* mask is real (left) whereas the others are digitally added.

class neighborhoods decorated with Nazi symbols, quite understandably, and the two other white people in the collective were convinced that “it’s useless, poor people here just want fat rims for their SUVs and don’t give a shit” (personally I never met a poor person with an SUV, but I didn’t argue). We did go visit the Mexican migrant labourers corralled on the farms nearby, even if most of the time all we had to offer was cake and local knowledge about when, where, and how to charge up cell phones.

During the summer a few women collective members stopped coming around. One woman, Elizabeth, confronted Carlo about patronizing women in the collective and treating them like sex objects, at which point Carlo accused her of being a racist white feminist. Elizabeth left in tears, and the other collective members, both men and women, attributed the dispute to a “crush” Elizabeth had on Carlo. Whatever had led up to this crisis had happened before I was on scene, so I stayed silent. Being conscious of my own status as one of the few white women in the collective, I did not want to be called a “racist white feminist” either. Also, from what I could see so far, the collective did not operate in a particularly sexist manner. I was not clued into the fact that I was being treated with respect largely on account of being attached to one of the Mexican men. Over the course of the year, however, I was forced to admit to myself that there was a gendered division of labour in the collective whereby women performed the operational tasks without equal power in decision-making. These tasks included minute-taking at meetings, email communication, translation, layout of flyers and posters, and the social labour of facilitating meetings, mediating conflict, and welcoming new members. New women members were especially keen to take on such responsibilities in order to gain the respect of the group.

I remember the day when all of this collapsed on my consciousness. The three main guy members of the collective and myself were in Six Nations accompanying the speaking tour of Oaxacans when three people involved in the APPO were killed by paramilitaries. One of them was American Indymedia journalist Brad Will who I had met in Caracas, the names of the others arrived later. It was October 27<sup>th</sup>, a few days before the Day of the Dead in Mexico. We decided it would be powerful to organize a demonstration in front of the Mexican consulate to coincide with the holiday. But that did not leave us much time to organize – we had to start that very night. As I had done twelve hours of driving that day I went to sleep while the three men stayed up to mobilize the event over email and borrowed telephones. In the morning I found out that instead of getting in touch with the women collective members who were still in Montreal according to the “telephone tree” we had established, they called other activist men, a group of Venezuelan Chavistas. At other moments the men in the collective — like all good autonomists (“*banda libertaria*”) — had made fun of these Chavistas for being “authoritarian socialists” and so I had to ask: Why had the guys called the Chavistas, instead of the other collective members back at home? “Because we are all here!” they replied. Meanwhile, the women collective members back in Montreal had also heard the news from Oaxaca. They tried to get in touch with us but couldn’t. Competent as they were, they began organizing a demonstration on the Day of the

Dead on their own, having had the very same idea. It didn't take them long to hear that the Chavistas had announced a Oaxaca solidarity demonstration they were organizing "in cooperation with Ici la otra". Of course they confronted the Chavistas about adding Ici la otra to their flyers without our permission, at which point they realized that Carlo, Ricardo and Stephane had contacted the Chavistas instead of them.



**Figure 2–4.** *Ofrenda/Altar* and demonstration in front of Mexican consulate in Montreal, Day of the Dead 2006 (I am the person in the orange hat).

## Reality Check – Autumn 2006

The sexism involved here was pretty hard to ignore. I started reviewing the year in my mind. I remembered the dispute between Carlo and Elizabeth. I thought back to times during the summer when I suggested that we collaborate with other collectives on various projects but men in the collective said that some women in these groups were *hembristas* (an inverse of *machista*, the operative meaning being something like “manhating separatist feminists”). Carlo in particular was concerned about women exmembers who had “personal” grievances against him and had maliciously “conspired”

to spread “gossip” (*chismes*) about him in the past. At one point he called one of these women a *manzana de discordia*, or “apple of discord”.<sup>6</sup> At other times the men in the group referred to local feminist activists as “racists that hate Mexicans” or “lesbians that hate men” or some combination of the two. Racist man-hating lesbians were so ubiquitous that our group had to eschew contact with almost every other collective in the city. I had somehow managed to bracket all of this.

I considered how some women in the group had participated in insulting these other women, and wondered if they actually knew them or if they were taking the men at their word. I made a few tentative inquiries. Some women in the group had indeed had negative experiences interacting with local anarchists; both anarchist men and anarcafeminist women had put off at least one Mexican woman in our collective by patronizing her on account of her feminine gender presentation (many women in the anarchist scene adopt an androgynous style). Most collective members didn’t know any of these women, however, and didn’t know what had transpired between them and the men in our collective. Neither did I, but I began to think that there might be something to all this “gossip” given our recent experience.

I also wondered whether the men were purposely pre-empting contact between current and past collective members by casting them in a negative light, an activity facilitated by language barriers: At least half the collective were monolingual Spanish speakers, most others were Mexicans who spoke French as well as Spanish, whereas most of the rejected women were English speakers who spoke some Spanish and/or French. Perhaps this dividing line did indicate a series of schisms defined by racism or cultural differences, perhaps not. Either way, language divides overlapped almost exactly with racial divides and made characterizing past conflicts as due to race, separatist lesbianism or personal hatred very easy indeed, as it was unlikely that new collective members would find out otherwise. I was the only trilingual Anglophone in the collective at the time and knew a lot of the rejected women from past experience in the anarchist scene. I realized I was in a unique position to investigate the situation but was nervous. I decided to wait and see if other women in the collective felt that there was a problem with the gender dynamics in our collective.

## Negotiating the *Agenda de Resistencia* – Winter 2006–7

I didn’t have to wait long. In early December 2006 we met to discuss amendments to the Zapatista *agenda de resistencia*, including the proposition to add “patriarchy” to its list of priorities. All Zapatista collectives in Mexico and beyond were to discuss this

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<sup>6</sup> At the time I thought this was a reference to Eve being the cause of humanity’s suffering, which is the interpretation published in Lagalisse (2012). Later on I read that the phrase refers to the Greek goddess Eris who commits a disruptive prank that leads to conflict among other gods, which meant that this woman had “created a huge fuss out of nothing”.

proposal and weigh in, either in person or by email, during the upcoming Zapatista *encuentro* in Chiapas that winter, the *Primer encuentro de los pueblos Zapatistas con los pueblos del mundo*, which roughly translates as the “First Meeting of the Zapatistas with the Peoples of the World”. We discussed all the other pre-*encuentro* questions for discussion first: How can we learn from the successes and failures of the People’s Global Action network? Can one be a pothead and a Zapatista at the same time? What does it mean to be a leftist? Valeria, one of the only self-identified feminists in the collective who was Mexican (and therefore partially shielded from attacks of “white feminism”) finally said: “The other proposal is that patriarchy be included as an axis of struggle.” And so it began.

Some women in our collective insisted a critique of patriarchy should definitely be integrated. The men generally disagreed. One man called it “a first world issue”, the concern of “imperialist *hembristas*”, and referenced the egalitarian nature of indigenous communities. Some women then countered that indigenous women also experience male domination and critique gender relations in their communities. At this point a different man countered that “patriarchy existed before capitalism so it’s a separate issue”, completely contradicting the first man, yet successfully putting the women back on the defensive. Some women, including myself, then attempted to explain how the dispossession of women figures in “primitive accumulation”, how neoliberalism relies on racialized women’s underpaid labor, how profit is created in the domestic sphere. We were back at square-one: “You see? The problem is capitalism not patriarchy”.

Valeria and I — both of us being graduate students in Anthropology — then took turns trying to explain that “neither capitalism nor patriarchy can be seen as first cause”; that “male domination often emerges in non-capitalist societies, although not necessarily”; that “regardless of the initial gender system, capitalist colonialism has most often resulted in increasing male dominance due the gendered organization of capitalist economies and the Judeo-Christian culture of the colonizers themselves”. A man then redirected the conversation to concentrate on feminism as imperialist: He did not want to be “part of a social movement that supported rich white women just so they could have poor indigenous women working for them”. Some men suggested a phrasing whereby capitalism “preys on the marginalized” (who was marginalized in the first place, and why, would be left unspoken). Some women, however, continued to argue that women are oppressed “in a particular way”, this time making specific reference to the triple burdens of poor indigenous women. “Yes, but that’s because they are *indigenous*” was the response. At this point we were all quite exhausted. No one seemed to remember the earlier argument that indigenous communities are egalitarian and harmonious, or, if they did, they weren’t prepared to argue about it anymore. We went back and forth a few minutes longer, and managed to settle on the phrase “patriarchy is a form of exploitation within capitalism and it is urgent that we recognize it” – not bad, considering. I was nominated to read off our response to this and other questions at the *encuentro* in Chiapas later that month, and we never broached the subject ever again.

After our tense meeting that night we went to a restaurant to relax and hang out. The women started talking about one collective member's abusive ex-boyfriend. Rather than the men sitting quietly and listening to our conversation (which is what we women usually did when the men talked about stuff that did not enormously interest us), the four men started their own conversation and declared shortly afterward that they were bored and leaving. This stirred us all to get up – we had finished our food after all. Three women including myself went back to Valeria's house, where we started going over our meeting. I paraphrase our conversation, which was originally much longer:

"It's so delicate, I mean you never want to fight with your collective, or with your partner for that matter, not with anyone you are close to...So you end up not saying anything! And then what? If it takes a two hour meeting just to establish that patriarchy is a problem then we obviously have a lot of work to do!"

"Yeah, it's so hard just to mention the fucking problem, imagine trying to actually *organize* around it?"

"Yeah, every time I mention gender they complain about *hembristas* in D.F."

"What really enraged me was when I had to justify that the oppression of women exists by using the example of indigenous women."

"No shit!"

"Yeah and then they just say 'yeah, but its because they're *indigenous*' after all."

"Yeah and it makes it hard, y'know, if within your own group you can't even talk about the things that are so real in your life. If its not even accepted by the group, what are you supposed to do? Have a separate group where you have to deal with women's stuff? And have twice the work?!"

"If *La otra* is about solidarity and being "from below and to the left"...there's no fucking way that we should have to organize around patriarchy *outside* of *La Otra*. The whole point is that its supposed to be inclusive of everyone and about a convergence of struggles. We even said that earlier, we defined the Left as *convergencias* and *pluralidad*."

"Yes we say we want to have our politics and our daily lives match up, meanwhile in our relationships there's all this abuse and men are continually taking up more space and never admitting that..."

"Stephane calling the Chavistas instead of you Valeria...that was *bad*. You were there Erica, how did *that* happen?"

"I was sleeping at the time, and when I found out the next day I was really not impressed and I told Carlo and Ricardo so. They said it was all Stephane, that it was he who made the call, and said "Oh man *las viejas* ("old ladies", the operative meaning being something like "the broads") are going to kill us, they gotta know it wasn't our fault!"

"*Las viejas?*"

"Yeah I know, but at least they seemed to notice it was wrong...But then I suggested that we talk to Stephane about it and they started finding all sorts of reasons not to!"



“Sometimes they say how it should be one guy and one girl to do some task, and that’s something but its not enough. Just because there is a woman there, doesn’t mean there is no power imbalance at play.”

“Like how they recruited us to their soccer team for the anarchist soccer tournament cause the team had to be gender equal, but then wouldn’t let us on the field!”

“And you saw how proud they were of themselves that they invited a *compañero* and a *compañera* from Oaxaca? Because at first it was just two *compañeros*...”

“And then they think that they have done their good deed or whatever and pay no attention to what actually unfolds during the tour!”

“Y’know once we were leaving an event, and I was talking about where to park the car, and Juan proceeded to repeat everything for Magdalena as if she hadn’t understood! And she was obviously getting fed up with him at times, she even asked to stay in a different house from him at one point, remember?”

“Yeah, and yet when we try to talk to the guys about it, they say...”

“Yeah they don’t give a shit (*les vale madre*).”

“And they think they treat her with such respect...”

“But the kind you give a fragile little flower. They all fuss over her, and get delighted when she laughs and plays in the snow...”

“Totally infantilizing her! When in reality she’s...”

“...Tougher than all of us put together!”

Towards the end of the conversation, I decided to mention that I suspected many of the women activists in the city who the guys tend to complain about had experienced similar frustrations — perhaps their “malicious gossip” was no more than complaining like we are now? And maybe they had reason to? Perhaps, they said. In any case, this evening of “gossip” marked a turning point of sorts. Up until that point, the men had always been the core group of friends, with most women connected through their mutual friendships with the men.

That winter Valeria, Carlo and I went to Mexico City for a while before we went to the Zapatista *encuentro* together. Carlo and Valeria went to visit their friends and families for Christmas, whereas I hung out at the APPO *plantón* full of displaced Oaxacans that filled up Tacuba street downtown.

While I was at the *plantón*, I discovered that some of our collaborators’ agendas and our own were possibly at cross-purposes. Among other details, I heard that the organization that sent us the *compañero* and *compañera* for the speaking tour, during which we had raised over \$10,000 dollars “for the APPO”, were from an organization that had been kicked out of the APPO months before. I couldn’t be sure it was true, but felt it was my responsibility to share this news with the collective, so I emailed them the information, acknowledging that it was hearsay and leaving it in their hands. They would decide by consensus what to do, if anything. It remained the case that the speaking tour had been organized with this organization in particular, and that the plan had always been to give them the money raised at speaking events. It was also true that the only reason we had managed to collect the whopping sum of \$10





**Figure 2–4.** APPO *plantón* on Tacuba street, D.F. (2006). The *acopio* collects and distributes donated goods and feeds a collective camp kitchen; the sign explains that they need milk, eggs, tomato paste, soap, tuna, sardines, plates, cups, charcoal, grills, toilet paper, diapers, Nescafe, sugar, beans, chiles (thank you).

000 was because the APPO had happened in the meantime, and the touring Oaxacans presented themselves as APPO members. I thought that all of this was something other collective members might want to reflect on – a little *autocrítica* seemed in order.

Before the collective had a chance to meet however, Stephane, who was the *enlace* (literally “link”, equivalent of “contact person” in English activist lingo) with the organization in question, forwarded my email directly to people in the organization, including the exile I mentioned in my introduction, who was about to become very angry. I can only imagine that Stephane felt threatened, worried that this development would reflect negatively on his own integrity (although there was no way he could have known any of this beforehand). In any case, the battle-lines had been drawn: An Internet war ensued from London to Argentina, during which time the angry exile accused me of being a spy working for the Mexican government.

During this time the women in the collective and one man – my partner, Damian – pointed out that if it had been one of the men who sent back such information, he would have been seen as fulfilling his responsibility as a member of the collective, rather than charged with spreading “calumnious gossip”, as I had been accused of doing. Furthermore, various angry emails had suggested that a reference in my email to “domestic abuse” (on the part of the angry exile) was what made it unacceptable “gossip” – I had mentioned in my email that a variety of different people I had met in the past month were convinced that the exile had left the country partially because his ex-wife’s brother (not the police) wanted to smash his face in, also acknowledging this as hearsay, but likewise worthy of reflection. The women collective members pointed out that the fact that *this* aspect of my email constituted major ammunition in the Internet war showed how sexist it was.

As my inbox filled up with escalating listserv arguments, Carlo, Valeria and I made our way to Chiapas to the *Primer encuentro de los pueblos Zapatistas con los pueblos del mundo*. Valeria and I shared a tent at the *encuentro*, and chatted constantly in between the plenaries and the many, many dances. We discussed our collective, how our Masters’ theses were shaping up, and shared many personal stories. Our friendship was further strengthened when we got into a bus accident on the way home that almost sent us over a cliff. We were stranded on the federal highway building bonfires as flares all night long, a perilous experience we still joke about today. Valeria and I were particularly inspired by the women’s plenary session (*Mesa de Mujeres*) – the first of its kind. A dozen Zapatista women emphasized that there was much work that remains to be done, but that the organization of women within the EZLN, thanks to a few original women militants, has inspired unprecedented advances. During the question and answer period, one question in particular caused Valeria and me to look at each other and smile: “Do you think it would be good to have a meeting with all the Zapatista women with other women of the world, without men? Or do you not think it necessary?” Two Zapatista women answered. The first said “I think it’s necessary to have a meeting with all the women to raise ideas and strategies of resistance, to go forth organizing all together. That’s all. *Gracias compañeras.*” The second followed up

by saying “I think it’s very important, women *compañeras*, to make a meeting among all the women because there are women *compañeras* who don’t speak up, who don’t get up and participate (*que no se animen*) in the presence of the men *compañeros*. Among women, more ideas would come forth about how to strengthen and widen the struggle.”

## “La otra otra” – Spring 2007

When the collective reconvened in Montreal in February, the group was different. Whether due to conflicts the previous autumn, the polarizing effect of the listserve drama, Valeria’s and my own reflection on the Zapatista *encuentro*, new friendships among women in the collective, the fact that my partner had been served deportation papers and was drinking and yelling at me all the time, or indeed all the above, certain things began to change. Women members began to meet separately in order to plan events about Zapatista and APPO activist women while also continuing to meet as *La Otra* (we never adopted a name; *La otra otra* – “The other *la otra*” — is my twist).

The first time we met separately was leading up to March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women’s Day. Valeria had been invited to participate at an event organized by the Chavistas, and in turn invited the collective to present something together. Most members were non-committal. Some men said no because Women’s Day was not “for them”. Valeria and I decided to do the presentation together; she would take care of an introduction and I would follow by reading the Zapatista women’s speeches from the *encuentro* I had just finished transcribing. After our presentation, some women came up to us and asked if we would host a workshop at the *Centre de Femmes d’Ici et d’Ailleurs* (a community centre for women “from here and abroad”) in a month’s time. Perhaps we could discuss women’s role in the APPO? Organize some participatory activity? Valeria and I said yes. We invited the collective to participate, at which point two other women joined, making us a group of four.

We met three times leading up to the event, and organized the presentation into four parts, fifteen minutes for each of us. We would show some Youtube videos about the APPO women who occupied the national television network *Canal 9*, managing to hold it and broadcast themselves for three weeks.<sup>7</sup> After our meetings we remarked how each of us completed the tasks we took on in between each meeting, and how smooth our meetings were: We self-facilitated, took minutes, and integrated our ideas such that the workshop was truly a collective product. We noted how different this experience was from our experience in *La Otra*. The workshop itself was also a success, and the women who attended were so inspired by the women of Oaxaca that they asked us to come back in April and help them put together a radio clip of their own for CKUT, a local community radio station, to honour the Oaxacan women. A new string of preparatory meetings ensued, and the second workshop.

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<sup>7</sup> See Stephen (2007) for an account of this.



Meanwhile, an increasing animosity among certain collective members, largely but not exclusively along gender lines, was making our Ici la otra meetings tense and difficult. At some point I finally decided to speak to various women ex-members about their experiences in our collective, as well as women activists in the other collectives who had participated in organizing the speaking tour. I took advantage of many parties and social events to strike up such conversations. One woman explained to me that she and Carlo had been good friends but a rupture occurred when she confronted him about manipulating young women to do all the leg work in the collective while he acted as ideaman. He responded by accusing her of being a “white feminist”, which really pissed her off because she is not even white. She said he proceeded to “trash” her to activists in both Montreal and Mexico, effectively cutting her off from many projects. While this was all in the past, as she told the story it was clear this experience still hurt and frustrated her.

Someone apparently told Carlo I had been talking to these women, because within a week Carlo had told some collective members that I was “conspiring” against him. The week following, my partner Damian accused me of having another lover in Mexico and not telling him. Carlo had told him in January, he said. Until then I thought the only reason Damian was so angry with me all the time was because he was stressed out on account of his impending deportation. In the same conversation, he also told me



**Figure 2–5.** *Mesa de mujeres* /Women’s Plenary at Zapatista *encuentro*, and crowd in the other direction.

that my new activist women friends in other collectives were “racist *hembristas*”, and “lesbians” who only want to hang out with me “in order to seduce me”. This information also apparently came from Carlo.

I realized that I was in danger of becoming the next pariah. While I had some good friendships with some women in the collective, most men and women respected the men to such a degree that their analysis would prevail – if Carlo had it in for me, I was probably doomed, especially if Damian switched sides. The collective members would not side with me or give me the benefit of the doubt, just as I had not backed up Elizabeth ten months before. Meanwhile, *la Otra* continued to meet. Our main project at the time was to forge ties with native youth at the Montreal Native Friendship Center and fundraise to help send those interested to the *Encuentro de Pueblos Indigenas de America* the next year. At the Zapatista *encuentro* that January activists had problematized the fact that the participants were largely privileged middle-class students rather than people from indigenous communities that had most in common with the Zapatistas themselves. This *Encuentro Indigena* was then convened and we decided to mobilize resources to facilitate others’ travel instead of our own.

After shooting pool at the Native Friendship Center for a few weeks, we were invited to bring a movie about the Zapatistas and do an informal workshop about the struggle of indigenous peoples in Mexico. When the day arrived, Carlo, who had taken on the task of bringing the video, was nowhere to be found. A phone call to Carlo yielded the information that, in his memory, this had not been his responsibility. We thus had no movie on hand and our collective came off looking pretty incompetent as a consequence.

This “misunderstanding” appeared disingenuous to me. Carlo liked to be the nexus of our contact with other groups. Most of the possible links provided by other members were rejected or dropped. All would nod in agreement at the ideas, related tasks would be jotted down in the minutes, but then follow-up tasks would not be completed. If these initiatives ever did come to fruition (helping out with the drive to unionize Mexican migrant workers, giving a presentation on International Women’s Day, etc.), it was because the people who suggested the idea in the first place ended up doing it by themselves. The only projects we would take on as a “collective” were projects that Carlo either suggested or strongly supported. Some attempts to point this out earlier were scoffed at not only by Carlo but by other male members of the collective. In other words, while Carlo appeared to be a particularly problematic personality, in fact it was male solidarity that enabled the dynamic. It was a difficult problem to prove; the phenomenon was subtle. Each time a project was not followed through, another explanation was easily found. A look at the big picture clearly evinced a pattern, but very few members at any given time had the big picture at their disposal. The women members who had tried to point this problem out a few months before had since left the collective and new members had joined. Only a few of us retained an “institutional memory” of the collective during the past year. And I had not wanted to challenge the collective on this point because, as I said, I knew I was on thin ice. I did not want a



campaign against me to escalate, forcing me to break ties with the group. At the time they were my closest group of friends.

But this act of “forgetting” the movie for the Native Friendship Centre was the last straw. At the next collective meeting I challenged Carlo as to his selective memory. I suggested that perhaps he was not particularly inspired to follow through with our project with the Native Friendship Center because, unlike most other social milieus we operated in, the Native Friendship Center was an Anglophone environment, which meant that the English speakers of the collective – *of which all three were women* – would be privileged nodes in the project network. We would have unmediated contact with our collaborators, whereas his contact would be mediated by us. In other words, he would not be able to control the project. Carlo said that this was not so. In his defense he offered an alternate explanation: He had trouble socializing with indigenous people, he said, as he can’t help but see them as backward. He admitted this was a problematic prejudice, but could not seem to work through it, and so thought it best to remove himself from the situation. This comment was followed by an awkward silence, and a few, rather measured, sympathetic responses – at least he was honest, being reflective, a few people said. I did not particularly believe Carlo (at first he said he “forgot”, and now this?), and even if it were true, I thought it an unacceptable excuse. I ventured the observation that if any of the white women of the collective would say something in such a vein, he and others would spare no time in denouncing their unacceptable racism, for better or for worse.

“Are you not conscious of this double-standard?” I asked. A messy, heated discussion ensued which I cannot hope to render exactly here. Basically, the remaining women in the collective piped up about all the women who had left, and conjectured the reasons why, directing their criticism to all the men in the collective. This line of questioning was then overshadowed by a diatribe on the part of my (increasingly ex) partner who began to lay viciously into Carlo, blaming him for the litany of our collective’s problems.

Carlo, rather uncharacteristically, began to cry. Also uncharacteristically, he suggested he leave the collective as a solution. Was he showing remorse? Was he having a revelation? Or was this a devious maneuver? After all, perhaps it was easier to drop out than face the music. And he was smart enough to know that faced with the choice to either continue the collective without him or disband the collective, we would feel compelled, by either guilt or integrity (depending on how you look at it), to choose the latter. (This is, indeed, what happened.) Furthermore, Carlo was one of the few collective members with enough contacts and “cred” in the activist scene to be able to collect a new collective later, so this could be simply a way of getting rid of us. But maybe he was being sincere. It was impossible to tell, and I don’t think I will ever know for sure.

The collective never met again. La Otra Otra continued to organize the events at the women’s centre, but once we no longer had this immediate purpose, we too stopped meeting. During the summer of 2007, some former collective members left the country

for Mexico or elsewhere. Some didn't, and I heard through mutual friends that some considered me a divisive white feminist who also had some sort of grudge against Carlo and that I, single-handedly, broke up the collective to "get at him". The people saying these things were mostly women. These outcomes depressed me, but I tried to put it out of my mind and turned my attention to writing my Masters thesis, on which this chapter is based.

## Gossip as Direct Action

Despite our group's nominal espousal of prefigurative politics and a "revolution of everyday life", a classic divide between "private" and "public" spheres continued to inform a triage of what was considered political, and as always, this dichotomy hinged on gender. "Consensus" was fetishized in a system of formal procedures that governed (public) meetings, while outside of meetings ("in private") informal hierarchies governed relations. Relations of power based on gender were not considered political. This was true with regard to male violence directed against activist women (in "personal relationships"), as well as the steps women took to challenge this violence. It was also true with regard to the lack of voice women suffered within the collective, and their related grievances being dismissed.

Furthermore, activists' comments that suggested communication regarding internal dynamics of the collective should only take place within official collective meetings reflects activists' construction of the meeting as *the* public space — the (only) legitimate sphere of dissent. When men complained of "gossip", although the grievance was clearly inspired by its *content*, the strategy of criticism centered on its *form*: "conspiring" (in private). Given that collective meetings were often hostile to gender concerns, and given that this appears to be, in large measure, why women members aired their thoughts and feelings in women-only spaces, such a citation of the "public" must be seen as serving specifically to de-legitimate discussion of gender.

One challenge to solidarity among women in our collective was our own relatively uncritical acceptance of discourses of public and private. Women themselves tended to dismiss women's concerns about male violence as a problem of "personal relationships", though not as often as the men. Also, women often participated in the criticism of "gossip". As noted above, "gossip" was often criticized in terms of its form (communication "behind someone's back"), rather than content, notwithstanding the fact that if the content had been anything but gendered grievances, it would not have been marked as "gossip" but simply a "conversation". In fact, not only was it gendered content that marked the communication as gossip, but the simple fact that women were the ones communicating — when men discussed my alleged sexual adventures in Mexico, or maligned my communication about "domestic abuse" behind my back, no one ventured to call *their* speech gossip. Women in our collective largely failed to notice this.

Indeed the word “gossip” has a gendered valence more broadly. In English it is rarely used to refer to talk among men, which is usually rendered instead as “shop talk”, “shooting the breeze” etc., and if they are said to be gossiping, it carries the connotation – a derogatory one at that – that they were acting like women (Rysman 1977). The adjective used in Spanish may be rendered masculine as well as feminine (*chismoso/a*) but its usage with reference to men is a relatively rare occurrence. Based on its use in context it is clear that “*chisme*” carries some of the same gendered baggage of “gossip” in English. Why should women’s talk be maligned as “gossip”, whether in the collective or the world at large? In English the etymology of the word and the history of its changing meaning suggest an increasing sanction against communication and friendship among women that is related to the consolidation of collective male power (ibid., see also Federici 2004). Indeed the story of our collective shows precisely how talking among women can challenge and mediate male power (see also e.g. Fonseca 2003).

It is important to note that in our own collective, insofar as a strategy of displacement (content/gender ! form/private) was efficacious, it was due to the fact that women collective members, myself included, agreed with the principle that criticism should be “to one’s face” versus “behind one’s back”. Of course, if our activist praxis matched our ideals, then there would be no problem with upholding this virtuous principle also. However, given that our meetings did not, in fact, exemplify a democratic, anti-authoritarian space, “autonomous direct action” became necessary. When we did not act autonomously we merely buttressed the existing gendered power hierarchy within the collective. The failure of the women, including myself, to effectively analyse this pattern, reconcile our need to communicate “privately” with our political values, and collectively articulate and defend that need, worked to divide us.

Beyond not “talking behind one’s back”, the other shared collective value that appeared to define “gossip” was the principle that one not repeat second-hand information, or “hearsay”. One can see how in many cases this principle serves a good end, but the double standard applied to Carlo’s speech and my own raises important questions here. After all, whereas my “hearsay” regarding domestic abuse in connection with the angry exile was “gossip”, Carlo’s “hearsay” regarding my sexual behaviour was not. Consider, furthermore, the implications of this principle against “hearsay” in terms of how the political divide between “public” and “private” collides with the logistical realities of public and private space: When information concerns comportment in intimate relationships, especially regarding sexual activity, it is often the case that there simply are no “witnesses”; this comportment is “private” practically speaking – any rule against hearsay thus becomes a rule against discussing a large swath of women’s problems. When these problems are discussed, however, they are made “public”, both practically speaking as well as in terms of making them “political”. Meanwhile, Carlo’s right to repeat hearsay regarding unwitnessed sexual activity vs. the huge amount of flack I received for the same demonstrates just how little most activist men want this to happen. Disproportionate calls to not repeat hearsay lines up rather perfectly with the impera-

tive to protect the “private” sphere as an unpoliticized space, whereas the spreading of “gossip” constitutes the “publicizing” of the information as well as the *space* where the information took place. In other words, when women (or anyone) discuss the private sphere, subversion resides in both the form and content of the discussion.

In my experience anarchist men can be marvelously disingenuous when it comes to their commitment to “direct action”: As soon as it may apply to male authority, they turn into proper politicians. Our male collective members’ suggestion that women’s only legitimate course of action is to bring up our grievances for discussion in the “public sphere” of the formal collective meeting is tantamount to the typical liberal critique of anarchists-in-general, whereby anarchists should be petitioning government authorities to respond to their various social demands instead of organizing independently from the state. Men in *Ici la otra* and various other collectives I have participated in have never understood this, and I have not seen much improvement in this regard in the eight years since I was part of *La otra*. I offer a recent anecdote lest my story appear an exception (or lest the phenomenon be blamed on “sexist Mexicans” in particular).

While writing this chapter I once took a break from the difficult memories to check my Facebook (as I too often do) only to see a shitstorm on an activist friend’s “wall” regarding some feminists who crashed the 5<sup>th</sup> Law and Disorder conference held at Portland State University.<sup>8</sup> A panel on “Informants: Types, Cases & Warning Signs” was to include a certain Kristian Williams, known for his essay “The Politics of Denunciation”<sup>9</sup>, which had angered many feminists as they considered it an attempt to silence survivors of domestic abuse. The substantive issue of this quarrel – that is, whether Kristian Williams’ essay is problematic and how, I will leave aside for now, although note that in Chapter 8 I myself put forward a critique of “call-out culture” that could arguably be brought to Williams’ defense and applied critically to the feminist detractors’ position. What is most relevant to our discussion here is the way the feminist detractors chose to *advance* their position, as well as the form of anarchist men’s response: A group of feminists warned conference organizers that they were going to crash the panel if Kristian Williams was going to be given the floor. He was and they did. They shouted over Kristian Williams preventing him from speaking. Someone called security, who then called the police, which led to everyone immediately being evacuated from the event. Anarchists calling the police to protect them from feminist critique?<sup>10</sup> The irony is a bit too much to bear. Meanwhile the episode was followed by hundreds of Facebook comments posted by anarchist men who both vociferously

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<sup>8</sup> A report on this incident, including a video segment, can be found here: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/anarchist-conference-descends-into-chaos9367277.html> The “statement on Facebook” the article refers to, followed by hundreds of comments, is what I happened across that day.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://towardfreedom.com/29-archives/activism/3455-the-politics-of-denunciation>

<sup>10</sup> The “statement” on the part of conference organizers denies that any organizer called the police. Convolutionary syntax and use of the passive voice in various statements (see e.g. the article cited in note 7) suggest that university security personnel who were “just there” called the police. No anarchist did – or ever would – admit to calling the *police*, but despite much rhetorical footwork the careful reader of

defended Williams critique of (feminist) “denunciation” and vociferously “denounced” the feminists’ strategy at once.

Within these Facebook comments the public/private divide was mobilized to critique the feminists in such formulations as “what we’ve got here are damaged individuals attempting to work through their pain via converting political events into therapy sessions.” The same commenter goes on to say that “Just as we’ve got to learn healthy ways to deal with the vanguard ‘anarchist’ frat boys in our midst, we similarly need to devise healthy techniques to deal with single issue absolutists in diverse pluralistic formations.” Male commenters also called the feminists “tactless hypocrites”: Their action was “pure authoritarianism” and/or an “authoritarian method of shutting down all democratic discussion”. And, of course, someone had to say that “radfem [radical feminism] is like any other sectarian Marxist formation that practices entrism into consensus anarchy”. Radical feminism “sees males as oppressors of women just like capitalists oppress workers. Anarchists have a more nuanced approach to a radical critique of power that is not so rigidly constructed”. Right.

I only saw one comment to the effect that the form of the feminist disruption is altogether in line with the strategy otherwise known as “direct action”: “Respectfully, I think some of you are making the same arguments that people make against disruptions of political speeches that are usually people like Karl Rove, Condi, etc. I’m not equating KW to those figures but I’m not sure disrupting speeches is that big of a deal.” Indeed, the men’s critique of the feminists’ style of “disruption” is another instance wherein discourses of gender were silenced with recourse to questions of form: it was clearly the *content* of the action and the specific authority it disrespected (Law and Order conference organizers) that bothered the anarchist men, because in every other instance the strategy of the feminists would be exalted as “direct action”. The feminists had warned university conference organizers weeks ahead of time of their critique and call to action, yet not a single person complaining on these Facebook threads picked up on a certain “tactless hypocrisy” wherein organizers, who ignored and dismissed the plea of the feminists with the full force of armed security are “democratic”, while the feminists who crash it are “authoritarian” because they failed to uphold the supreme liberal value of free speech.

Of course this is only what people were saying on Facebook, and of course most of these people were men. The two comment threads I pulled quotes from included a total of 137 comments (at the time of reading), approximately 23 of which were women (if I may gender-profile by account names and photos). One of the few women to stick her neck out on this thread said “I wish the organizers, who had many weeks notice of the plan for disruption, would have respected you and the other panelists (and conference attendees) by asking KW to sit this one out while he makes good with his community in Portland. I would have loved to hear your talk.” The man who had

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so many “statements” can only deduce that no security personnel or police would have been present if some participant had not, at some point, tipped them off.

called the feminists “sectarian Marxists” immediately rebutted her with a long angry paragraph. Facebook — the newest and most annoying “public sphere” of anarchist politics — is famously hostile to women commenters, especially women who comment about sexism and patriarchy. Of course most of us were inclined to save ourselves the grief and simply watched quietly as these comment threads proliferated. Hopefully a lot of us gossiped about it on the side.

## Chapter 3 – Occult Features of “Anarchoindigenism”

*No One Is Illegal Radio:* Glen, a final question. Often the term ‘indigenous anarchism’ or ‘indigenoanarchism’ gets referenced in reference to your writings and your talks, and others as well, and that can mean indigenous folks who are anarchists, that can mean indigenous folks who use the word ‘anarchism’ but that can mean something completely different as well and I’m just wondering if you could elaborate a bit more this relationship with anarchist practice and anarchist ideas beyond the idea of sharing an opposition to the state?

*Glen Coulthard:* Yeah (chuckles) I take the anarchoindigenous perspective has been influential. I’ve worked with people like Taiaike Alfred who like to think through that type of politics and what it might look like on the ground, and I map it out a little bit in the end of the book. It’s just kind of certain ethical commitments based on an attempt to eliminate all forms of oppression, domination and exploitation simultaneously. The thing that I would really want to stress, though, is that that’s an engagement with other radical traditions like anarchism, marxism, feminism or what have you, but it’s always done through an indigenous lens or cultural basis. So, it’s like, what does it mean to engage these other critical traditions and activist practices but still remain Weledeh Dene at the same time? That’s how I approach, not only engaging other radical traditions, but also engaging solidarity with groups who are engaged in those practices. So, that’s how I understand something like ‘anarchoindigenism’. In what ways can me as a Dene individual, who has certain ethical commitments based on that cultural basis, engage with and effectively relate to others in struggle around state power or against capital, against heterosexism and normativity and these other forms and axes of domination.

-Interview with Glen Coulthard, author of “*Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the*

*Colonial Politics of Recognition*” (2014) on No One Is Illegal Radio, CKUT News, March 5, 2015. <http://archives.ckut.ca/64/20150305.17.45-18.00.mp3>. Retrieved March 15, 2015. The full transcription of this interview is attached as Appendix B.

One of the main ways *Ici la otra* members dismissed gender as a legitimate axis of analysis was by rendering it “private” vis-à-vis the public sphere of politics, but this was not the only strategy. In almost every instance – such as during our discussion leading up to the Zapatista *encuentro* – a commitment to challenging male domination was characterized as racist. Significantly, this was true even when activists were concerned about the indigenous *compañera* from Oaxaca being silenced during the speaking tour we organized, and even when the activists who were concerned were themselves women of colour. I take up the specific issue of race trumping gender or vice versa in both activist and “radical academic” milieus in Chapter 5. In the present chapter I analyze the speaking tour co-organized by *Ici la otra* to consider the intersection of gender and race as they combine to complicate anarchist solidarities with indigenous peoples movements – and solidarity with indigenous women in particular – via the operations of atheism. While the secularization and gendered definition of modern politics are complex problems themselves, in this chapter I engage with both at once to highlight the manner in which they are articulated: the public/private divide as applied to religion and politics and to the domestic and public is one and the same (see also Lagalisse 2011a). Historical analysis throws into relief the co-emergence of both dichotomies in the context of capitalist modernity and the colonial encounter, while ethnographic analysis of presentday anarchist activism illustrates how these dichotomies continue to work together to prevent solidarity across race, culture, and gender in coalition activism.

Just as anarchist atheism is rooted in a particular history and loaded with Eurocentrism, anarchists’ interest in indigenous people – or, in 19<sup>th</sup> century parlance, “peasants” – is nothing new. While anarchists insist they “take lead” from indigenous peoples’ world views and campaigns simply because indigenous people are today “on the front lines of struggle” against neoliberal colonialism (indigenous Venezuelans being the few citizens not bought off by Chavez’s welfare state, for example), anarchists’ prior conceptual attachments to both atheism and the modern “public” sphere of politics leave this solidarity necessarily incomplete. In other words, this chapter includes an initial foray into the operations of settler “anarchoindigenism” by investigating its gendered valence and its non-performative “anti-racism” – an anti-racism that does not do what it says it does.

## Who’s Speaking in the Speaking Tour?

In October 2006, several anarchist collectives in Montreal, including our *Ici la otra* collective and the local chapter of the North Eastern Federation of Anarchist Communists (NEFAC), collaborated in organizing a speaking tour of two indigenous activists from a social organization in Oaxaca that was involved in the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca*, or the APPO. As mentioned earlier, the APPO had formed earlier that year following police repression of the *plantón* of teachers occupying the central



plaza of Oaxaca City. The month-long tour throughout Quebec and Ontario involved events at universities, community centres, union offices, and the indigenous communities – or “Reservations” – of Kahnawake, Six Nations and Kanehsatake.<sup>1</sup> At these events, Juan, the male *compañero* of the Oaxacan duo, spoke of union movements, the formation of the APPO, and the state repression of his people. He spoke in the third person, assuming the voice of a generalized, objective “other”. Magdalena, on the other hand, spoke in the first person, about specific people who were tortured and what they told her afterward. She told stories about her experience as a community health worker (*promotora*) and described how government representatives tried to persuade her to promote sterilization among indigenous women in the region. Magdalena also spoke of the need to maintain harmonious ways of life among the communities (*pueblos*) and the need to respect all of Creation, land, water, animals and people. She spoke alternately of God (*Dios*) and the Creator, synthesizing a certain indigenous “moral ecology” and popular Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> The anarchist translators largely omitted such references and tended to sum up her narratives rather than offering the word-for-word translation they granted Juan’s discourse.

In November we attended a telling of the *Gayanashagowa*, the Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois), at the community of Six Nations – this is where we were when we heard of the assassinations in Oaxaca and Stéphane called the Chavistas instead of our women collective members back home. At the telling of the Great Law, Juan and Magdalena were to be the final speakers as guests of honour – such a visit by indigenous brothers and sisters in struggle from so far away, and coming from a place that was currently a hotbed of rebellion, was special and exciting. As I was the only first-language English speaker in our collective, I sat next to Magdalena during the telling, whisper-translating the Great Law as best I could into Spanish (I translate much better in the other direction, and must admit I was summing-up as clumsily as some of the translators I just reproached). When it was coming time for Magdalena to speak, she inquired about the correctness of mentioning God, being sensitive to all the stories I had just translated for her about the religious (Catholic and Anglican) residential schools for indigenous youth in Canada and their role in cultural genocide. Stéphane jumped in and said “Fuck Jesus anyway, we’re not here to talk about religion, what’s important is the struggle (*la lucha*)!”, to which Magdalena responded, “Maybe I shouldn’t speak, let Juan go without me.” My partner and I assured her that she could express herself freely, that the audience would understand the difference between her faith and an endorsement of the institutional Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup> It was true. In this case

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<sup>1</sup> In Canada indigenous people are corralled onto semi-autonomous “Reservations” that are integrated into the State bureaucracy. Kahnawake and Kanehsatake border Montreal; Six Nations is southwest of Toronto.

<sup>2</sup> I borrow the concept of indigenous “moral ecology” from Varese (1996), who in turn is in dialogue with Scott (1976).

<sup>3</sup> In Mexico, diverse popular religious forms overlap and co-exist, all syncretic and inflected with Catholicism; “Catholic” is generally the default religious identity among Mexicans, yet popular Catholi-

the indigenous translator effectively captured the poetry of her words; the audience was transfixed, nodding encouragingly.

In the university activist settings, however, the response was quite different. The audiences, like the organizers and translators, responded much more enthusiastically to Juan: “Remember when that guy asked why the APPO is against political parties and Juan answered ‘Because we are indigenous’? Wasn’t that *awesome*?!” Magdalena inspired much less discussion. When I asked audience members about what they thought of Magdalena’s contribution, I received responses like “Oh, she’s got a lot of....spirit”, and the conversation would inevitably return to Juan. In the second week of the tour, a shift was perceptible. Whereas at the beginning of the month Juan and Magdalena were splitting speaking events equally, gradually Juan was occupying the microphone for longer periods of time. He would pass the microphone to Magdalena to introduce herself in Zapotec (her first language) and then take it back, speak for an hour, and pass it back to her to thank the crowd and say good night. While one could partially attribute this to disrespect on the part of Juan, the situation was clearly more complicated: a dialectic between Juan and the audience – including tour organizers – was encouraging his speech while marginalizing that of Magdalena.

Some women activists, both in our Ici la otra collective and the other collectives involved, noticed this and were troubled. We approached the men who were to form the next relay of accompaniment during the tour and suggested we discuss the situation. One of these men, from NEFAC, said that “Magdalena doesn’t want to talk, she’s very shy, and we have to respect cultural differences – we shouldn’t force her to do something she doesn’t want to do.” The other men from our collective then echoed the need to respect “cultural norms”, citing anti-racism as an important collective value. Yet another said it was important to keep our “white feminism” to ourselves. One of us women then responded by asking if any of them had actually asked Magdalena how she felt, including whether she would be like to be speaking more. The man from NEFAC shrugged and rolled his eyes at us while another man from Ici la otra replied, “Let’s face it, Juan has more of an analysis, he is more articulate, educated, and has more experience in politics and the union movements.”

This argument was striking for a few reasons. The man’s comment alluding to our responsibility not to intervene due to Magdalena’s cultural difference was an ironic invocation of cultural relativism given these activists’ otherwise uncompromising critique of representation in favor of participation, i.e. despite an oft-stated concern with “voice” (as in “giving voice” to “indigenous activists”), the substitution of Juan’s voice for Magdalena’s was seen as unproblematic. The second response pointing to Juan’s more extensive experience in politics and superior education was also both disturbing and revealing. These exchanges illustrate interlocking axes marginalizing Magdalena’s subjectivity and voice. On the one hand, Magdalena did not have an “analysis” since

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cism in Mexico is significantly different than Catholicism as understood in Quebec and Canada (see e.g. Norget 2006).

she situated her struggle in religious as opposed to political economic terms; on the other hand, Magdalena displayed less “experience in politics” because she had not participated in “union movements” but rather worked as a *promotora* struggling against the forced sterilization of indigenous women – a distinction based on gender. Each of these prejudices would have worked against her independently, but the overlapping effect of two public/private dichotomies – as applied to sexuality and religion – made it especially difficult for her listeners to understand her as political.

## “No Gods, no Masters”

Once my attention was drawn to the anarchists prejudice against religion during the speaking tour, I started reflecting on the systematic taboo against religion within my collective and others with which we worked. David Graeber’s ethnography of anarchist activism – based partially in Montreal – suggests that the staunch atheism of past anarchist movements has subsided somewhat, precisely because of increasing anarchist collaboration with indigenous peoples’ movements, as well as the influence of anarchafeminist paganism (2009; 220). In my own experience, the majority of anarchist activists are still devout atheists, and the feminist pagan anarchists Graeber refers to are often a butt of their jokes. I will always remember what happened at one of the “Creative Resistance” workshops I participated in during the lead-in to the FTAA summit in Quebec City in 2001: Twenty activist women were using the living room of an anarchist collective house to plan the anarchafeminist pagan “Living River” action<sup>4</sup>, when the guys from the Ya Basta collective, who were building foam weapons and armour down the hall, popped in to ask us if we could help glue stuff together since we “weren’t doing anything”. They were groaned out of the room, but I’m not sure they fully understood why.

Examples of anarchists’ critical stance against religion are endless – “No Gods No Masters!” is one of the most famous anarchist slogans, after all. As but one example, the organization that funded Juan and Magdalena’s airfare was the Christian Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (*Comité Chretien pour les Droits Humaines*

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<sup>4</sup> The “Living River” was an action organized by anarchafeminist pagans of the Reclaiming Tradition, inspired by Starhawk, who writes the following in *The Bridge At Midnight Trembles: My Story of Quebec City*: “We are the Living River: a cluster within the action that sometimes swells to a couple of hundred people, sometimes shrinks to fifty. Our core is made up of Pagans, who are here because we believe the earth is sacred and that all human beings are part of that living earth. Many of us have known each other and worked together for years: others are new, drawn together from outlying places by the internet and the organizing. One woman has brought her teenage children: our oldest member, Lea, is eighty-four. Our goal is to bring attention to issues of water, we say, although our true goal is to embody the element of water under fire. We carry the Cochabamba Declaration, which was written by a group of people in Bolivia who staged an uprising to retake their water supply after it had been privatized by Bechtel Corporation [...]” (see <http://www.well.com/~zthirdrd/starhawk.html>; accessed July 26, 2015). For an ethnographic account of the “Reclaiming community” in Montreal circa 2005–2008 see Roberts (2009).

*Amerique Latine*, or CCDHAL), yet in the speaking tour documentation the group appeared as CDHAL, without the “Christian”. This was also the case in their pamphlets provided at the 2006 and 2007 Montreal Anarchist Bookfairs: An explicitly Christian organization is not exactly welcome next to “The Hardcore Punk Guide to Christianity” and stickers quoting Bakunin’s famous phrase: “If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him”.<sup>5</sup> The parameters are somewhat different in Mexico where the *Virgen de Guadalupe* is “reclaimed” among anarchists as the Pre-Columbian goddess Tonantzín. In Mexico anarchists nominally distinguish between “subversive” indigenous cosmologies and “authoritarian” Christian ones, but the lines between them are drawn in a different place and with different colour chalk. Many laughed off Mexican Poet Javier Sicilia’s “March for Peace” in May 2011 as “religious reformist bullshit” (*un pedo reformista de religión*) but some of the same anarchists that scoffed at the pilgrims from the Cancún Caravan bus windows collected their own candles and paintings of the Virgin when we got back to their squat, and went to walk with them.

It is hard to think of an equivalent scenario in Montreal – non-indigenous anarchists in Montreal wouldn’t participate in a Christian religious ritual due to its being Christian, yet neither would they participate in an indigenous one (*sans* Christian elements) out of a certain respect for indigenous identity – one does not want to be guilty of “cultural appropriation” after all. The shiftiness of *mestizaje* in Mexico engenders a different combination of practices within “anarchoindigenism” than does the stark white/settler vs. indigenous/colonized dichotomy that overdetermines anarchist politics in Canada.<sup>6</sup> In both places, however, the gendered valence of (sometimes politicized) religious icons is clear, and one wonders why the *Virgen de las Barrikadas* – an adaptation of the *Virgen* popular among anarchist and punk youth involved in the APPO, is sometimes pictured topless while holding her machine gun.

Whatever the psychoanalytic implications may be here, it is significant that European anarchists, who often remark on this image while walking through the streets of Oaxaca, tend to be more concerned about its combination of religiosity and political militancy than the combination of women’s militancy with naked tits. And of

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<sup>5</sup> In the intervening years the organization itself appears to have dropped the “Christian” entirely, and it is possible that politics internal to the organization contributed to the lack of the extra “C” as early as the 2007 Montreal Anarchist Bookfair. In any case one wonders why the CDHAL made the change – perhaps it was because its membership was increasingly less Christian, but no doubt the distaste that many Leftists have for religious organizations played a part.

<sup>6</sup> *Mestizaje* refers to the dominant racial ideology in colonial Latin America. Early and ongoing colonial state-crafting projects in various Latin American countries, particularly Mexico and Peru, have encouraged the dominance of *mestizo*, or mixed-race, identification; *mestizaje* has always involved an ambivalent elevation of racial mixture given the parallel concept of “whitening” (or *blanqueamiento*) as a desired result (see e.g. Wade 1997; Goldberg 2009). In the current political context, *mestizo* identity can involve certain changes of valence. While 21<sup>st</sup> century indigenism may somewhat mirror the appropriative 20<sup>th</sup> century *indigenismo* of colonial nationalism in Latin America, a widely-shared and officially sanctioned identity as “partly-indigenous” does allow for different feelings and mobilization around the “indigenous” in Latin America as compared to Canada or the United States (see also Canessa 2006).



**Fig. 3–1.** Graffiti of the *Virgen de las Barrikadas* (Virgen of the Barricades) in Oaxaca, Mexico, 2011.

course the anarchists that show up in the *pueblos* of Oaxaca, always excited to meet the pure “unconquered” indigenous inhabitants, are usually disappointed when they find crucifixes involved in their rituals – “But I thought these guys weren’t colonized!” As for our Ici la otra collective in Montreal, we would often lament our lack of contact with groups beyond the “student radical scene”, but whenever we were invited to attend church picnics to share (*convivir*) with working-class or immigrant communities, heated debates would ensue about whether to compromise our anti-authoritarian ideals by thus endorsing the church, and invitations would ultimately be rejected.

The tension between anarchism *per se* and religion has a long history – while there is arguably an anarchist sensibility in many religious traditions (see e.g. Damico 1987; Christoyannopolous 2009), religiosity is rare in the “anarchist” tradition proper. Precisely because this tension bears out in the practical implications of present-day anarchist “solidarity” work, it should be worthwhile to consider the genesis of the schism: Historicizing “anarchism” itself is especially useful here inasmuch as it helps shed light on how the depoliticization of religion is intimately bound up with Western modernity/colonialism in the first place, as well as how this logical and historical connection becomes obfuscated within the “anarchist” tradition. As broadly suggested in my earlier discussion of anarchist “reciprocity and faith”, anarchism involves a certain optimism regarding humanity. Below I locate this optimism and faith within a certain metaphysical orientation that evolved during the Renaissance period in Europe, which was characterized by the discovery of various philosophical, mystical and mathematical treatises via Muslim Spain. These contributed to the development of a new imaginary grounding social resistance that can be perceived in the proliferation of heretical dialogues (“from below and to the left”) that occurred during the same time, which were later secularized, i.e. revamped as “rational” as opposed to “religious”. While the general point that modern politics embodies secularized theological concepts is nothing new (see e.g. Schmitt 1985 [1922]), anarchists less often recognize that the secularization of the modern state, which privatizes religion but continues to embody a particular theology in its structure and ideology, is paralleled by the secularization of social movements *against* the state, which thus ironically mirror the institution they denounce. Similarly, anarchists generally fail to recognize that just as state secularization proceeds by “defining religion as a matter of private conscience just as (in the sense of both similarly to and at the same time as) it privatizes matters both familial and sexual” (Scott 2009, 3), the coincidence of “public versus private” discourse as applied to both the domestic/political and religious/secular dichotomies in anarchist politics also relies on a gendered order. The disqualification of religion from the modern Left and its feminization were one and the same.

## The Occult Cosmology of Anarchism

Standard histories of modern anarchism often locate its precursors in the heretic movements (e.g. Anabaptists, Ranters and Diggers) that articulated combined critiques of Church authorities, the enclosures of private property and forced labour during the feudal/early capitalist order (see e.g. Bose 1967; Marshall 1993; Woodcock 1962). These movements often called for communal ownership in Christian idiom, e.g. by elevating “grace” over “works” (Hill 1975; Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; Bose 1967), but the form and content of these heretical social movements was different than the Christian millenarian movements that preceded them. Millenarian movements were spurred on by a charismatic individual or momentous event, whereas the heretical movements had defined organizational structures and programmes for change, leading at least one historian to call them the “first proletarian international” (Federici 2004, 33; see also Cohn 1970; Lea 1922; Lambert 1992). What happened to effect the shift? And what does it mean that anarchist historians easily recognize such movements as “anarchist” when they are located safely in the past – as “precursors” – yet as soon as modern anarchism proper is articulated, religious leveling movements are seen as backward, if not heretical to anarchism itself?

The shift from the spontaneous millenarian movement to the organized heretic one had much to do with their incorporation of non-Christian ideas and mystical doctrines that began circulating in Europe during the Crusades. Platonic philosophy, Pythagorean geometry, Islamic mathematics such as Algebra, Jewish mystical texts and Hermetic treatises were all “rediscovered” via Muslim Spain and translated into Latin during this time. It is well known that the creative re-composition of this ensemble inaugurated the Renaissance and later the “Enlightenment” on the level of high culture, but how the composite led to new leveling projects from below has received less attention. The Hermetica in particular is probably the least recognized fount of the modern Left, and yet an important thread running through it.<sup>7</sup> The Hermetic tradition beholds a unified universe of which man is a microcosm, and wherein cosmic time beholds a pulsation of emanation and return. The Hermetic cosmos is hierarchically arranged in symmetrical diachronic and synchronic bifurcations (dyads) and trifurcations (triads), but a web of hidden “correspondences” as well as forces – alternately “energy” or “light” – cut across and unify all levels; in duration everything remains internally related – “All is One!” Significantly, humanity participates in the regenera-

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<sup>7</sup> The Hermetica or Corpus Hermeticum (see Copenhaver 1992) is a collection of texts written in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D., which contain ideas that are likely much older. Legend has it that they are the work of Hermes Trismegistus – “Thrice Greatest Hermes” – and contain the mystical insights of Ancient Egypt. This is unproven, but was widely held to be true during the late-medieval period and Renaissance when the texts were translated and circulated throughout Europe — when a monk arrived in Florence from Macedonia in 1460 carrying some of the Hermetic texts, Cosimo de’Medici ordered his translator to drop Plato’s dialogues immediately and turn his attention to them. For a sense of the history of interest, see *The Emerald Tablet of Hermes – Multiple Translations* online (accessed October 12, 2014): [http://chomikuj.pl/xyzett/Filozofia\\*26Nauka/Hermes+Trismegistos/Emerald+Tablets+of+Hermes,637646359](http://chomikuj.pl/xyzett/Filozofia*26Nauka/Hermes+Trismegistos/Emerald+Tablets+of+Hermes,637646359)

tion of cosmic unity – our coming to consciousness of this divine role is a crucial step therein. God and creation thus become one and the same, with the inevitable slip that our creative power – including intellectual power – is divine. The initiate must first purge himself of false knowledge in order to be able to receive the true doctrine; at any given moment only some are ready. Hermes himself explains that he “keeps the meaning of his words concealed” from those who are not (see Copenhaver 1992; the quotation is from *Corpus Hermeticum* 16).

The Hermetica has proved adaptable to a variety of projects. Its neat metaphysical geometry, which arrived alongside algebra and the Pythagorean theorem, helped form a composite that lent itself to a massive investment in mathematical forms and understanding. Mathematics became the hidden architecture of the cosmos, the most permanent and basic truth, and revelation of these secrets certainly did permit an ability to build and create in ways never before imagined. A variety of mystical doctrines proliferated from the interaction of this composite with pre-existing natural philosophy, Alchemy being the most famous. Hermetic logic can also be discerned in a variety of other eclectic doctrines that developed during this time (e.g. Joachimism, Eckartean mysticism, Paracelsism, Spiritualism, Lullism, Mesmerism, Rosicrucianism and Vitalism), which all behold secret cosmic “correspondences” and sacred geometry, and in turn inspired the “scientific revolution” of the Enlightenment (see e.g. Westfall 1992, Yates 1964, 1966). To give just one example, calculus is arguably the *caput mortuum* of Newton’s search for the Philosopher’s Stone, his theory of aether “hermetic cosmogony in the language of science” (Vondung 1992, 138). The conceptual vocabulary of his physics (e.g. “attraction”, “repulsion”) was adopted from the hermeticist Böhme via famous alchemist Henry More (see Benz 1989). The “disenchantment tale” of the Enlightenment is just that – a tale. The persecution of “magic” and “witches” among the poor during this period is rather best understood as a disciplinary measure directed specifically at the peasantry – and at women especially – inasmuch as it served to enforce the logic of private property, wage work, and the transformation of women into producers of labour. As Federici (2004) explains, fears around a declining population (work force) and the reproductive autonomy of lower-class women (practicing birth control) was what distinguished the witch from the Renaissance magician, who demologists consistently passed over. Indeed the devilish activities of the “baby-killing” witch were often plagiarized from the High Magical repertoire.

The Hermetica was also fundamental to the emergence of new – more “modern” – social movements against systemic power, specifically Freemasonry and the revolutionary brotherhoods that proliferated during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Unlike the millenarian and heretic movements before them, these social movements consisted of literate radicals more so than peasants, and were decisively masculine public spheres. Women’s power within the peasant and heretic movements was ambiguous and never unchallenged, but women were certainly actively involved, this partially because renovated and syncretic Christian cosmologies granted them new footholds, and partially because women had the most to lose in the privatization of the commons (see Federici



2004). Freemasonry, on the other hand, is what social movements look like after the witch hunts: Just as Alchemists played at the creation of life while arresting feminine control over biological creation, speculative Masonry emerges in which elite males worship the “Grand Architect” upon the ashes of artisans’ guilds while real builders were starving. By the establishment of the Grand Lodge in London in 1717, the trade secrets of operative masons had become the spiritual secrets of speculative ones, lodge membership now thoroughly replaced by literate men lured by the ceremony, ritual, and a secret magical history supposedly dating back to the time of King Solomon and the Grand Architect of his temple, Hiram Abiff – Freemasonry itself has always involved a fantastic pastiche of Hermetic and Kabbalistic lore.<sup>8</sup>

One Hermetic aspect of the Masonic cosmology that is key for our discussion is how it held that man and society tend toward perfection. The work of Spinoza (1632–77) was also a wellspring for this project by equipping European radicals with a dynamic philosophy that both unified, divinised and animated the universe as well as honoured a deterministic vision of man and nature, providing a new religious vision and the foundation for social resistance at once, which contemporaries named “pantheism”.<sup>9</sup> A new faith in scientific progress encouraged the conception of temporal institutions as permanent, and through which fantasies of progress could be enacted: A new heaven on earth would be manifest through the works of men themselves. Masons imagined themselves the creators of a new egalitarian social order and protagonists of cosmic regeneration at once, all articulated in the language of sacred architecture. Theirs was a pyramidal initiatic society of rising degrees and reserved secrets, but one in which all men met “upon the level” (see e.g. Jacob 1981; Roberts 1972).

The Masonic leveling project was not altogether radical. It is true that Masonic lodges were frequented by elite men who instrumentalized them to further consolidate their power, and that the Masonic project was one of limited reforms, one to which Jews, women, servants and manual labourers were denied entry (see Roberts 1972, chapter 2; Valin Fernández 2005).<sup>10</sup> It is also true that the Masonic ideal of merit as the only fair distinction allowed room to critique the tension between formal ideals and actual practice, and that Masonic lodges were the first formal public association in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain to take up the cause of the “workers’ question” – albeit on a purely philanthropic level – by founding hospices, schools and assistance centers for proletarian workers (see Jacob 1981, 142; Valin Fernández 2005, 182). In pre-revolutionary France, lodges first began accepting small artisans then proletarian workers as well, lowering

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding the links made between ancient Egypt and freemasonry, see for example the minutes of *Le Conseil de l’Ordre du Grand Orient*, April 25 1887, reprinted in Lauzeray (1988); regarding Freemasonry in English see Jacob (1988, 1981) and Roberts (1972).

<sup>9</sup> See Spinoza (1963), (2000), (2007). See Jacob (1981) for a discussion of Spinoza’s influence on the early radical enlightenment, as well as regarding contemporary articulations of “pantheism”.

<sup>10</sup> In the words of one Bordeaux lodge master (1745), “*le privilege de l’Égalité deviendrait [sic] un abus bien dangereux, si sous ce prétexte on admettrait indifféremment tous les états*” (see Roberts 1972, 50–51).

fees and abolishing the literacy requirement for entrance to this end. By 1789 there were between 20,000 and 50,000 members in over 600 lodges, and it was no longer possible for participants to reasonably claim they were manifesting an egalitarian social order by merely gathering to discuss literature, science, and the cultivation of Masonic wisdom.<sup>11</sup>

Here we arrive at the question of “conspiratorial” Revolutionary Brotherhoods that has been exploited in paranoid intrigue.<sup>12</sup> On one hand, due to the utopian rhetoric developed in the Masonic “public” sphere, some members became directly involved in revolutionary activities, both in France before the Revolution, as well as throughout Europe in the years immediately following. On the other hand, it is true that many revolutionaries who were not necessarily Masons made use of the lodges’ existing infrastructure and social networks to further their cause. Yet others simply adopted Masonic iconography and organizational style, which had accrued a measure of symbolic power and legitimacy, in developing their own revolutionary associations. It is not possible in retrospect to distinguish entirely between these phenomena, the salient point being that the Revolutionary Brotherhoods which proliferated at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century derived much of their power from their association with perennial secrets and magical power, and that this imaginary and their related style of social organization were fundamental to the development of what we come to recognize as modern revolutionism (see Hobsbawm 1959; Roberts 1972, chapter 7; Valin Fernández 2005).

Adam Weishaupt (1748–1830), a young Bavarian professor who founded the Illuminati in 1776, was one of few convinced egalitarians of his day. His revolutionary agenda involved the complete dismantling of the State, Church and institution of private property, all justified by a revamped Christian millenarianism affected by readings of J.J. Rousseau and the Eleusinian mysteries, and organizationally inspired by the secret association of the Pythagoreans (see Le Forestier 1974 [1914]).<sup>13</sup> According to Weishaupt, our true “fall from grace” was our submission to the rule of government: “Do you really believe it would be useful” he asked “as long as countless barriers still remain, to preach to men a purified religion, a superior philosophy, and the art of self-government?”, “[s]hould not all these organizational vices and social ills be corrected gradually and quietly before we may hope to bring about this golden age, and wouldn’t

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<sup>11</sup> Regarding reforms in favour of proletarian workers, see Valin Fernández (2005, 183). The figures given regarding lodge membership in 1789 are from Mornet (1933) and Ligou (1964). For an overview in English see Jacob (2006).

<sup>12</sup> There is a much more written on the connection between Freemasonry and revolutionary movements in French, Spanish Italian and German vs. English. Valín Fernández (2005) offers a substantial bibliography of Spanish, French and Italian sources (173–98). Roberts (1972) offers further sources in French, Italian and German. In English one might follow Margaret Jacob (1981, 1988, 2006), but she does not concern herself with revolutionary movements on the continent. See also Israel (2010).

<sup>13</sup> For a source in English, note that Roberts (1972) refers to Le Forestier (1974[1914]). Note that the central thread of Roberts’ book is the powerful mythology that developed around the secret societies and why, rather than their history itself.

it be better, in the meanwhile, to propagate the truth by way of secret societies?...” (in Le Forestier 1974 [1914], 283).<sup>14</sup>

The turn of the century saw a proliferation of other revolutionary societies across Europe that mimicked the forms of Freemasonry and the Illuminati, including the Charbonnerie and Carbonari, the Mazzinians and le Monde, all constituting “an International of revolutionary movements which had spiritual and ideological, if not organizational, solidity” (Roberts 1972, 204). The politics of Babeuf (1760–1797), who was imprisoned as the prime agent of the “The Conspiracy of Equals” – and anticipated Proudhon’s argument that “Property is Theft” by 43 years – as well as the politics of Phillippe Buonarotti (1761–1837), who founded the Sublime Perfect Masters in 1809, likewise bear a family resemblance (see Rose 1978; Fried and Sanders 1964; Eisenstein 1959).<sup>15</sup> The pyramidal structure of all these organizations, in which each level of the pyramid would know only its immediate superiors, clearly had a practical function inasmuch as it protected revolutionaries from repression in this era of increasingly consolidated state power and surveillance. In other words, the resemblances were not necessarily due to ex-Illuminati members starting up new groups, but rather partially due to the fearful accounts thereof propagated by governments at the time, which had the ironic effect of inspiring others to try the strategy. The specific organization and ritualization of all this revolutionary activity clearly had other functions as well: the Brotherhoods affirmed and unified the aspirations of illuminated men whose purpose it was to steer mankind toward achieving perfection on (this) earth. Bakunin, 32<sup>nd</sup> degree Mason himself, appeared to feel the same calling when he founded his own secret “International Brotherhood” in Florence in 1864 that mirrored Weishaupt’s vision almost exactly one hundred years later. The main difference between them was that Bakunin’s Brotherhood was meant to infiltrate the First International and wrest it from the authoritarian socialists’ control, as opposed to infiltrate Masonic lodges in order to wrest them from Liberals’ control. This is far from the only way in which Masonry and the International Workingman’s Association (IWA) coincide.

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<sup>14</sup> Le Forestier’s French translation of the full passage from German is as follows, “Croyez-vous qu’il serait utile, tant que d’innombrables obstacles ne seront levés, de prêcher aux hommes une religion épurée, une philosophie supérieure et l’art de se gouverner soi-même?...ces vices d’organisation et ces tares sociales ne doivent-ils pas être corrigés peu à peu et sans bruit, avant qu’on puisse espérer amener cet âge d’or et ne vaut-il pas mieux, en attendant, propager la vérité par le moyen des sociétés secrètes? ...Trouvons-nous des traces d’une pareille doctrine secrète dans les écoles de sagesse les plus anciennes...? Ne remarquez-vous pas qu’une telle institution d’éducation progressive a existé depuis les temps les plus anciens?” The English translation is mine. See also Weishaupt in communiqué from “Spartacus to Cato” (Spartacus was Weishaupt’s pseudonym) quoted by John Robison (1798, 92–3).

<sup>15</sup> During his trial defense, Babeuf explained that “[t]he institution of private property is a surprise that was foisted upon the mass of simple and honest souls. The laws of this institution must necessarily bring about the existence of the fortunate and unfortunate of masters and slaves. The law of *heredity* is supremely abusive...it follows that this possession by a few is usurpation...whatever an individual hoards of the land and its fruits beyond what he needs for his own nourishment has been stolen from society”, (in Fried and Sanders 1964, 63–4).

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century many members of Masonic society had come to feel the proletarian struggle coincided with their greater cause, and the use of Masonic organizations as a cover for revolutionary activity was now a long tradition, as was the tendency to use Masonic rites, customs, and icons to emblematically symbolize the values of equality, solidarity, fraternity, and work (see e.g. Valín Fernández 2005, 181). Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a Mason who lived to see the formation of the IWA, wrote that “The Masonic God is neither Substance, Cause, Soul, Monad, Creator, Father, Logos, Love, Paraclete, Redeemer...God is the personification of universal equilibrium” (in Saña 1970).<sup>16</sup> In Proudhon’s day, the British lodges were admitting increasing numbers of proletarian members – particularly skilled and literate workers – and had come to support the workers’ struggle to the extent that the first preparatory meeting of the IWA on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1862, attended by Karl Marx among others, was held in the *Free Masons Tavern* (see Valín Fernández 2005, 182).<sup>17</sup> Many of those in attendance were “socialist Freemasons”, a phrase applied at the time to the members of the small lodges founded in 1850 and 1858 in London by exiled French republicans, and which involved many members of diverse national backgrounds – the “Memphite” lodges, named after the sacred Egyptian burial ground. The immediate objectives of the Memphite programme were twofold: The struggle against ignorance through education, and helping the proletarians in their struggle for emancipation by way of Proudhonian mutual aid associations. Louis Blanc was among the members of the Memphite lodges (the *Loge des Philadelphes* in particular) along with at least seven other official founders of the IWA. In Geneva also, the local wing of the IWA was often called the *Temple Unique* and met in the Masonic lodge of the same name (ibid. 179, 182–4). Many present at the time observed that the incipient IWA’s organizing power was so weak that if it were not for the organizing efforts of socialist Freemasons, the official founding meeting of the IWA on September 28<sup>th</sup> 1864 would never have come to pass (ibid.; see also Nettlau 1979 [1929]).

Communist and anarchist symbolism, such as the red star and the circle-A, date back to this period and also have Masonic origin. The star, which hosts an endless charge of esoteric meanings in both the Hermetic and Pythagorean traditions, had been adopted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (some say 17<sup>th</sup>) by Freemasons to symbolize the Second Degree of membership in their association – that of Comrade (*Compañero* and *Comarade* in my sources). Among socialists, it was first used by members of the Memphite lodges and then the IWA. Regarding the Circle-A, early versions like the 19<sup>th</sup> century logo of the Spanish locale of the IWA are clearly composed of the compass, level and plumbline of Masonic iconography, the only innovation being that the compass

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<sup>16</sup> It is telling of a certain bias in anarchist historiography that many English reprints of Proudhon do not include this material; for example, Edwards and Fraser (1969) includes excerpts from *Of Justice and the Revolution in the Church* (1858), from which this quote is pulled, but they cut out this part, preferring Proudhon in the following mode: “God is stupidity and cowardice; god is hypocrisy and falsehood; god is tyranny and poverty” (1846).

<sup>17</sup> Valín Fernández cites multiple sources that concur on this point.

and level are arranged to form the letter A inside of a circle, itself arguably an iconic reference to the Ourobouros, or “All is One” (see Valin Fernández 2005, 180–88).<sup>18</sup>



Figure 3–2. The seal of the *Consejo*

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<sup>18</sup> The Ourobouros is that widespread (if not archetypal) Hermetic image of the snake eating its own tail. Valin Fernández’ original intuition was that he might find the Level as symbol of egalitarianism dating back to the Levellers of the English Revolution, but neither the Levellers or the Diggers or any other preMasonic movement used these tools to symbolize their struggle and values; they are clearly taken from the Masonic repertoire. The logo of the Spanish locale of the IWA is reprinted in Valin Fernández (2005, 183).

*Federal de España de la A.I.T.* circa 1870. Image borrowed from Valin Fernández (2005, 183).

Over time these symbols have developed a new complement of meanings – many 21<sup>st</sup> century anarchists don't even know that the star used by communists, anarchists and Zapatistas alike is the pagan pentagram, and are not reminded of the mathematical perfection of cosmogony when they behold it, just as they do not necessarily realize there is a genealogical link between the (neo)pagan Mayday celebration and today's anarchist Mayday marches.<sup>19</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, these symbolic associations were well known by those involved, and their adoption reflected how much they resonated with mystical and historical weight. Even Bakunin, while he rejected the personal God of his Russian orthodox childhood, put forward a pantheistic revolutionism. In a letter to his sister (1836) he wrote, "Let religion become the basis and reality of your life and your actions, but let it be the pure and single-minded religion of divine reason and divine love...if religion and an inner life appear in us, then we become conscious of our strength, for we feel that God is within us, that same God who creates a new world, a world of absolute freedom and absolute love...that is our aim" (in Lehning 1973, 34–5).

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century the only people involved in the revolutionary scene who were consistently annoyed by this sort of mysticism were Marx and Engels. Proudhon's ramblings about God as Universal Equilibrium were the sort of thing Marx and Engels objected to and contrasted with their own brand of "scientific socialism" – "the French reject philosophy and perpetuate religion by dragging it over with themselves into the projected new state of society" (Engels in Tucker 1975, 407). Bakunin and Marx differed on this point and a number of others, the most famous being the role of the State. Whereas Marx considered a state dictatorship of the proletariat to be a necessary moment in his historical dialectic, Bakunin espoused the notion of a secret revolutionary organization that would "help the people towards self-determination, without the least interference from any sort of domination, even if it be temporary or transitional" (in Lehning 1973, 191–2). Bakunin also wrote that he saw our "only salvation in a revolutionary anarchy directed by a secret collective force" – the only sort of power that he would accept – "because it is the only one compatible with the spontaneity and the energy of the revolutionary movement"; "We must direct the people as invisible pilots, not by means of any visible power, but rather through a dictatorship without ostentation, without titles, without official right, which in not having the appearance of power will therefore be more powerful." (in Saña 1970, 106).

The "dictatorial power" of this secret organization only represents a paradox if we do not recognize the long tradition, and larger cosmology, in which Bakunin is working. Revolution may be "immanent" in the people, but the guidance of illuminated men

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<sup>19</sup> These of course commemorate the Haymarket massacre, but it is no coincidence that there was much upheaval in Chicago that day, because revolutionaries had been honouring Mayday since before the time of the Illuminati, which was also founded on this symbolic day.

working in the “occult” was necessary to guide them in the right direction. Members of his International Brotherhood were to act “as lightening rods to electrify them with the current of revolution” precisely to ensure “that this movement and this organization should never be able to constitute any authorities” (in Cutler 1985, 28).

Beyond Bakunin himself, Robert Owen (1771–1858), Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and Saint–Simon (1760–1825) are also often cited as forefathers in standard histories of anarchism (e.g. Bose 1967; Marshall 1993; Woodcock 1962). The Owenites were distinctly anticlerical, attacking all forms of “religion”, but Owen himself was a spiritualist in admiration of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), who taught the arrival of an “internal millennium”. The first Owenite communes in America were based largely on Swedenborg’s teachings (see Manuel and Manuel 1979, 585; Gabay 2005). Charles Fourier, for his part, based his political project on what he called the Law of Passional Attraction – a series of correspondences in nature that maintain harmony in the universe and could be applied to human society (see Manuel and Manuel 1979, chapter 27). Saint–Simonians aimed at reforming existing institutions, but Fourierists and Owenites rejected the existing system altogether. Rather than a mere “changing of the guard”, they advocated the creation of new forms of independent organization within the existing system; hence their “precursor” status to anarchism, perennially defined by the notion of building a new world within the shell of the old, whether via “networks”, communes or syndicates, and primarily defined by its rejection of State power.

Darwin’s treatise on evolution also lent itself to theories of social change that dovetailed with revolutionary thought – a distinction between *evolution* and *revolution* in 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian socialism would be rather forced. The insight that the natural world was characterized by evolving beings blended easily with the concept of cosmic regeneration – adaptive “process” became “progress”, a tendency toward perfection. Anarchist patriarch Piotr Kropotkin posits “Mutual Aid” as a prime “Factor of Evolution” (1955 [1914]). The theosophy of Helena Pavlova Blavatsky (1831–1891), which intrigued many anarchists, involves a teleology of divine evolution represented by successive “root races” and whose finality was cosmic union (See Blavatsky 1966). Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), a Theosophist and anarchist himself, also admired Federov (1828–1903) who wrote that the common task of humanity was to resurrect, by means of science, its dead fathers from particles scattered in cosmic dust (see Webb 1976, 157, 174–5; Rosenthal 1997a, 11, 22). Chulkov, Berdyaev and Ivanov, contemporaries of both Federov and Tolstoy during the Russian occult revival, all posited a “mystical anarchism” that equated political revolution with realignment in the cosmic sphere (see Rosenthal 1997b, 382; Webb 1976, 196). In England, union organizer and early feminist Annie Besant was convinced she was the reincarnation of Giordano Bruno (Buisine 1995), and it was Theosophy that inspired her to fight for Home Rule in India (see Van der Veer 2001, chapter 3).. Just as socialists were attracted to the occult, spiritualists and mediums of all kinds, who were overwhelmingly women, were led by their spiritual views to engage the “social question” (see e.g. Edelman 1995; Lomnitz 2014, 31–7, 271–5). Not every anarchist was a Theosophist or enamoured with the

occult. Emma Goldman, for example, wrote an entirely scathing account of Krishnamurti's arrival in America as the supposed Theosophical avatar (cited in Veysey 1973, 45–6). However, the fact that Goldman's *Mother Earth* and a variety of other anarchist periodicals bothered to criticize Theosophy at all should tell us something – nothing is forbidden unless enough people are doing it in the first place. Even the skeptics often grudgingly recognized that they were kindred spirits. As anarchist C.L. James wrote in 1902: “However ill we may think of [Swedenborgian] dogmas, their influence is not to be despised. They have insured, for one thing, a wide diffusion of tendencies ripe for Anarchistic use. Scratch a Spiritualist, and you will find an anarchist.” (James 1902). Indeed it was none other than the president of the American Association of Spiritualists that published the first English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1872 (Rosenthal 1997a, 22).

We can imagine how much this annoyed Marx. But Marx's anticipation of a Communist millennium after the overthrow of capitalism, brought about by a mixture of willful effort and inbuilt cosmic fate, isn't actually that different from the idea of the unfolding New Age. The major difference, and the one that prompted Marx and Engels' to distinguish their utopian vision as “scientific” compared to the others, was their notion of the dialectic, which preserved the form, if not content, of the Hegelian one (see Marx 1978 [1932]). Hegel's *Logic* (2010 [1812]) features an obsession with emanation and return by way of neat geometrical constructions of all kinds, while in his *Phenomenology* (1977 [1807]), the Idea issues in nature, which issues in Spirit, which returns to Idea in the form of Absolute Spirit (see Magee 2001).<sup>20</sup> While one of the main defining attributes of anarchism is its anti-Marxism, many Hermetic features of Marxist thought remain preserved (as abstract content) as well as transcended within anarchism's concrete form. Socialism and occultism co-evolved in a complementary fashion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, yet the spiritual ground of 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchists' politics is generally downplayed or treated as epiphenomenal: Just as Newton's Alchemy is largely ignored in mainstream histories of the establishment, so Fourier's Law of Passional Attraction is rewritten in mainstream histories of the Left as a vision of “a harmonious society based on the free play of passions” (Marshall 1993, 149). It was only when Marxist “scientific socialism” won out during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the theological understandings of modern revolutionism were buried from popular and academic consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Following Magee (2001): Regarding Hegel's subject/object consider *Corpus Hermeticum 14*, “for the two are all there is, what comes to be and what makes of it, and it is impossible to separate one from the other” (Copenhagen 1992, 56). With Hegel's dialectic of desire and recognition in mind, consider *Corpus Hermeticum 10*: “For God does not ignore mankind; on the contrary, he recognizes him fully and wishes to be recognized.” (ibid. 33). Meanwhile his system of logic is a triad, each further divided into three chief moments, analyzed in turn into three other constitutive moments, which are split in turn into another three (Hegel 2010 [1812]). “The dove of Spirit emerges from a God-created nature, and circles back to God” (Magee 2001, 212). Regarding Hegel's relationship with Freemasonry see Buck-Morss (2000).

<sup>21</sup> The reasons why Marxism “won out” over anarchism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century will not be played out here, yet note that contributing factors are complex, overlapping and debatable, with explana-



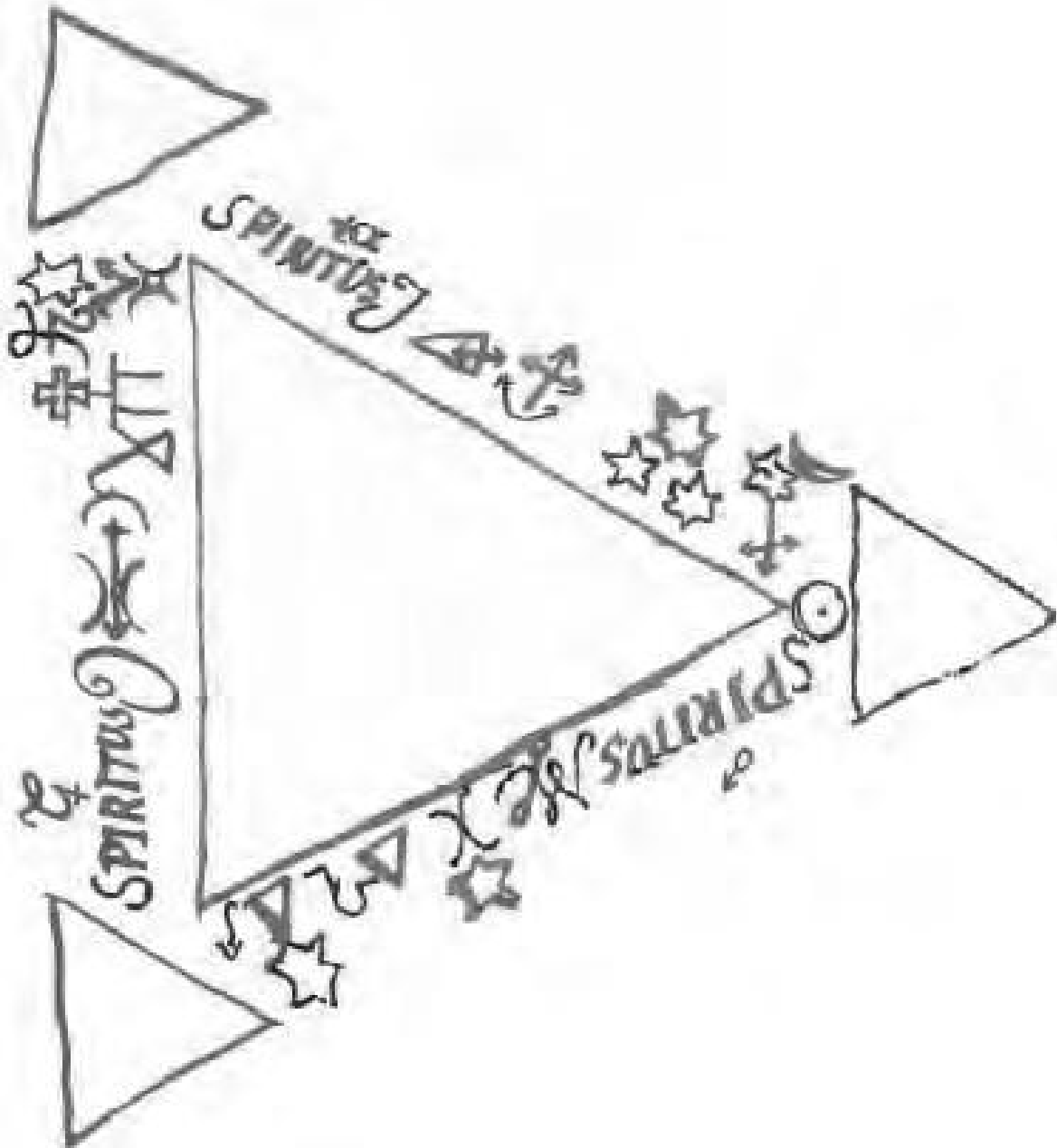


Figure 3–3. Sketch by Hegel.

“Hegel’s triangle diagram.

Reprinted by permission of Felix

Meiner Verlag, Hamburg.” (Magee 2001, 111). [Image borrowed from Magee, Glenn Alexander. 2001. *Hegel and the*

*Hermetic Tradition*. Ithica and

London: Cornell University Press.]

The fact is that all politics can be boiled down to cosmological first premises, wherein the more interesting question becomes: What *sort* of theology is at play? The pantheism discussed here influences the fantasies of fascism, the apocalypse of the dialectic, and the anarchist faith in an egalitarian social order as well. However there does seem to be at least one specific connection between anarchism and pantheism: The particular faith in men’s capacity to organize themselves in an orderly and egalitarian fashion without the Leviathan of the state. By men, we mean men. While the androcentrism of classical anarchism is often noted in reference to its movements of male proletarian wage-workers, the masculine public sphere of anarchism goes back even further and articulates with an occult cosmology that goes back further still. As anti-systemic resistance in Europe shifted from the millenarian mode to modern socialism, the biggest difference was not, in fact, that the former was “religious” and the latter wasn’t, but rather that in the latter the paradise of heaven would be manifest on the earth, and through the works of men not God – or indeed, men *as* God – and that it was the job of a chosen few who had access to “ancient spiritual wisdom” circulating in new secret male orders to inspire them to action. To simply argue now that “real” anarchism is by definition feminist as well insomuch as anarchism is “against all forms of domination” does not engage the ways in which the anarchist revolutionary person was constructed vis-à-vis a variety of exclusions from the outset, especially insomuch as these continue unmediated by a certain unacknowledged “vanguardism”: Revolution may be immanent in the people, but as any anarchist around can see, fluency in a particular vocabulary, knowing the names of certain historical figures, and being vouched for by someone in the know is all requirement for entry into the anarchist club, as is a commitment to a specific ideological constellation informed by the history of its practice, wherein men’s oppression by the state becomes the prototype for power in general.

## Settler Anarchoindigenism – Take I

The concept of “religion” is a construct of European modernity. Throughout much of history, what we may consider “sacred” beliefs and practices are not conceived as a separate sphere of life. It was in the context of the colonial encounter, where Europe

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tions ranging from Hobsbawm’s (1959) which beholds scientific Marxism progressively replacing the more “primitive” anarchism, to Graeber’s (2002, 69) which highlights how the centralizing logic of state Marxism was practical (vs. anarchism’s increasing “impracticality”) during the 20<sup>th</sup> century of global war.

discovered its own gods as part of a diverse pantheon, that Christianity granted other communities and traditions the name it had only ever given itself – religion – and reincarnated itself as “secular” (Anidjar 2006). Secularism may also be understood in its specifically capitalist as well as Christian/colonial genealogy: the naturalization of the rational, secular marketplace encouraged the idea of a mystical private sphere of religion (Fitzgerald 2007). The dichotomy of “religion” and the “secular” is thus founded in the imperial project of Western Christendom, which it thereafter served to justify (Asad 2003). By dividing “religion” from “politics” the European capitalist state mystified its Judeo-Christian cosmology.<sup>22</sup> Anarchist anti-capitalists inherit and enact the flipside. The mystification of theological precepts within both the state and anti-state philosophy, which constitute the “secularizing process” wherein we no longer recognize “anarchism involving cosmological assumptions, is part and parcel of colonial ideology. In setting off “religion” from “politics” with recourse to the logic of “public” versus “private” domains of life, anarchists both deny the cosmological premises of their own anti-state politics and reinscribe both patriarchal and colonial logic within the anarchist imaginary at once. As one Mohawk activist said to me, “Anarchists are just the newest kind of missionary”.

Anarchist activists who are concerned to both act in “solidarity” with indigenous peoples movements, and articulate an affinity between indigenous political paradigms and the Western anarchist tradition, are quite certain that they form part of a “decolonizing” project, yet these two overlapping goals within settler “anarchoindigenism” can be somewhat contradictory. As we have seen, anarchist “solidarity” with indigenous peoples movements can be all too contingent on the indigenous people in question performing proper anarchist politics as per the modern European tradition. The effort to locate anarchist politics within indigenous political paradigms includes a similar double movement.

One the one hand, there is something refreshing about anarchists locating knowledge in indigenous voices, texts and practices. After all, why should anarchists always re-inscribe Kropotkin and Bakunin as forefathers when arguments as to the history and value of cooperation in human societies can also easily be found in the work of indigenous scholars Taiaike Alfred (e.g. 1999; 2005) and Andrea Smith (e.g. 2005; 2008)?<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Anthropology helps in this project of mystification, especially inasmuch as “kinship” as a key social organizing principle within the discipline is analytically applied to all human societies *except* for those governed by the modern state. The state’s representation and manifestation of male interest is thus obfuscated, as well as why the state should have such a gendered valence (including its theological underpinnings). Clearly the modern state is a kinship structure as well, wherein male heads of household are recognized as its particular constituency and understood to legally encompass kin at once, who could arguably be said to form part of their *tapu* (see Chapter 9 of this work, Moore 1988; cf. Dumont 1970; 1986).

<sup>23</sup> In 2015 (during the final editing of this work) a public scandal (re)erupted contesting Andrea Smith’s status as an indigenous woman, which I discuss in Chapter 8 during my exposition of the “anti-oppression game”. Note that with respect to the ethnographic argument presented here, Andrea Smith’s current status according to whom is immaterial, the relevant point being that during the time

Floriberto Díaz, the Mixe scholar who first advanced the philosophy of *comunalidad* (in writing), articulated indigeneity as featuring a constant quest for “consensus”, which should intrigue anarchists, and pointed out himself that “democracy always fosters an oppressive majority and an oppressed minority” (2007, 9) years before David Graeber (2009). There is no reason that Díaz should not be considered an anarchist philosopher in his own right, as opposed to some ethnic version hopelessly bound to a particular subjective position. The political philosophy of Karl Schmitt (1985) also betrays the attendant desires and anxieties of his social position as elite white male Nazi, and yet his text has been canonized as *the* required reference for anyone writing about political theology – I cited him myself a few pages ago, just like I am supposed to. Anarchists who pay attention to the political ideas of indigenous activists and scholars are arguably more conscientious than the typical academic.

The problem is that anarchists who say they “take lead” from indigenous people and their struggles are not necessarily doing what they say. Rather than “taking lead” from real living and breathing indigenous people, which would be complicated because real-life indigenous people are diverse in their political positions and practices, settler anarchists choose to take lead specifically from the ones who articulate their culture and struggle as anarchist – or who otherwise appear “anarchist” enough to them. The man from Oaxaca who was privileged during the speaking tour falls into both categories. Among indigenous political thinkers who write books in English, it is significant that indigenous male intellectuals such as Taiiike Alfred (1999; 2005), Glen Coulthard (2014), and Gord Hill (2009) are most popular among anarchists. As Coulthard notes in his radio interview that opens this chapter, Alfred (2005) in particular seeks to combine the elements of “*indigenous*, evoking cultural and spiritual rootedness in this land and the Onkwehonwe struggle from justice and freedom, and the political philosophy and movement that is fundamentally anti-institutional, radically democratic, and committed to taking action to force change: *anarchism*.” (45).

If anarchism were fundamentally radically democratic and against all forms of domination, perhaps it should not be a problem to privilege indigenous voices that fall within its lines, especially if everyone involved were honest about what they are doing – “taking lead” from anarchism. Anarchists’ self-description as “taking lead” from indigenous people serves to mystify this opposite “lead” and the tension between the two, and their shiftiness is easily lent to the re-instantiation of the anarchist hierarchy of hierarchies. Patriarchy, for example, either “exists before capitalism” or is a “capitalist side effect” according to anarchist men’s convenience, while selective reference to the “indigenous” is brought to buttress their argument no matter what it is. We should remember here that anarchism has always relied on the indigenous (*qua* “peasant”) just as Marxism relies on the proletariat, and that Bakunin’s quarrel with Marx

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period of my study, Andrea Smith was particularly familiar to the anarchist activists in question as an “indigenous woman” intellectual. As I discuss later, it is partly her particular (dubbed excessive) fame that inspires some of her critics.

had arguably as much to do with elevating the revolutionary status of Slav peasants vs. German proletarians than anything else (see e.g. Cutler 1985, Dolgoff 1972, Levy 2004).<sup>24</sup> Just as Marx's proletariat was a romanticized unity, based only partially on the reality of working class existence and serving to justify Marxism as much as liberate real workers, anarchism's peasants and indigenous people fill a certain "savage slot" (Trouillot 1991) that has always served to justify anarchist politics whether or not real peasants or indigenous people are liberated in the process.

The fact is that anarchists take lead from anthropologists who study indigenous people as much as from indigenous people themselves. Pierre Clastres' *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology* (1987) is a staple at every anarchist book-fair across Europe and America, usually found next to Harold Barclay's *People Without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchy* (1982). Both of these anthropologists bracket gender relations entirely in their expositions of "egalitarian" societies. Meanwhile, the next table over at the same bookfair will boast "anarchoprimitivist" books and zines that suggest the solution to the world's problems lies in letting most people die off so that disgruntled white boys can play hunter-gatherer in a state of pre-civilization bliss.<sup>25</sup> As Andrea Smith points out, in reference to an Earth First! article that reads "AIDS is Gaia's solution to overpopulation", to posit the death of poor colonized peoples as "cleansing" to the earth while those with much heavier "carbon footprints" sit back and wait is nothing less than genocidal (2005, chapter 3). Anarchoprimitivists read selectively from anthropology as well as of course. Zerzan's *Against Civilization* (2005) hosts select excerpts from Sahlins (1972) and Clastres (1987) among others, to suggest that power didn't exist before agriculture. This is the sort of thing that can happen when the conceptual model for all power is the centralized state that impinges on the autonomy of patriarchal heads of household.

If anarchist activists are so concerned to "take lead" from radical indigenous thinkers, why do they not take lead from Andrea Smith? Smith advances her own critique of how "native women are commonly invited to give the opening prayer at conferences...without being asked to speak on any substantive issues" (2008, 222). Anarchists really shouldn't have to hear it from a white woman like myself who says the same thing. One would think that Andrea Smith could also easily engage anarchists, given her suggestion that we "need to think beyond the nation-state as the appropriate form

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<sup>24</sup> While Bakunin wrote of the peasantry that "They love the land? Let them take the land and throw out those landlords who live by the labour of others." (cited in Dolgoff 1972, 199), Marx famously considered peasants capable of collective action only as "much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes" (1971 [1852], 230). Bakunin wrote that the Russian people "are altogether democratic in their instincts and habits [and] have a great mission to perform in the world" (cited in Cutler 1985, 21). While Levy (2004) may go a bit far in reducing anarchist transnationalism to a function of patriotism, he makes a valuable point: "Even if anarchists and anarchism are assumed to be anti-thetical to nationalism and national movements, they, like socialists and the ideology of socialism (and even Marxism) lived in close (one could say dialectical) relationship to both nationalism and the nation state" (331).

<sup>25</sup> Note that "anarchoprimitivism" is not a recent neologism as is "anarchoindigenism", but is a relatively long-standing minority current within the anarchist tradition (see: the Internet).

of governance for the world” (2005, 184). Whereas our speaking tour organizers could somehow suggest that Magdalena lacked appropriate “education”, surely the same cannot be said in regard to Smith who is published by Duke University Press (2008).

To be fair, Smith’s books can also often be found at anarchist bookfairs, but in my experience it is largely women anarchists that read them. The anarchist men who are interested in questions of “sovereignty” prefer to peruse Agamben (1998) who, much like Schmitt (1985), brackets gender and race entirely by proceeding as if one can equate “human being” and “male citizen of Rome or France”.<sup>26</sup> As Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2014) has pointed out, one should not, like Agamben, “have to dwell exclusively in the horror of a concentration camp to see life stripped bare to cadastral form” (154). In the end, anarchists are not so different than the typical academic: Just as it is optional for the academic to cite Andrea Smith or Audra Simpson alongside Karl Schmitt or Giorgio Agamben, it is optional for the anarchist to read Andrea Smith or Audra Simpson alongside Pierre Clastres and Harold Barclay — or alongside Taiiike Alfred and Gord Hill, for that matter.

Again, it is not simply anarchists’ sexist reading habits that marginalize Smith’s work, but also the fact that Smith’s words are less easily recuperated within the European anarchist tradition, which has already decided that religion is bad and whose model of oppressive power is the state. Alfred (2005) does also insist that ceremony and ritual are not “mystical” but rather serve “real purposes in grounding is and keeping us together as persons and communities” (249), but Smith makes the stronger point that “native spirituality is the cornerstone of resistance struggles” (2005; 5; see also 2008, 268–9). Furthermore, whereas Alfred (2005) contends that (native) “sovereignty” is premised upon Western notions of the nation–state, with its monopoly on violence and agendas of domination, Smith suggests we “take lead” from indigenous women ac-

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<sup>26</sup> Agamben (1998) manages to present the inclusion/exclusion of “bare life”/sexuality as fundamental to classical-then-modern politics without any reference to gender or feminist theory, preferring to indulge de Sade along the way and with prime reference instead to Foucault. Meanwhile, the Holocaust concentration camp is presented as epitome of the “sacredness” (murderability) of Life and modern bio/thanatopolitics by extension – Aimé Césaire (1955) turns in his grave. While Agamben’s essay offers certain unique insights, its prime contribution appears to be the crafting of a certain genealogy of knowledge wherein knowledge is the sovereign domain of European male philosophers in contradistinction to feminists and black scholars of slavery, wherein both the subject/object of the latter constitute “bare life”, i.e. are definitively excluded from philosophy *qua* philosophy just as Roman/French women and slaves constitute the “bare life” definitively excluded from politics *qua* politics, which is to say the realm of the (not quite as) “bare life” of the politicized male/citizen that is included/excluded from the Sovereign, both of these gendered and racialized inclusions/exclusions being in perfect symmetry in Agamben’s text. Beyond anarchists’ scholarly interest in Agamben, note that his book *The Coming Community* (1993) was influential to The Invisible Committee’s *L’insurrection qui vient* (2005), which is currently popular among anarchist “insurrectionalists” and circulates in both English and Spanish among anarchists from Quebec to Mexico. For a feminist response to Tiqqun (which overlaps with The Invisible Committee), see e.g. “Further Materials Toward a Theory of the Manchild” by Moira Weigel and Mal Ahern online at <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/further-materials-toward-a-theory-of-the-man-child/>

tivists who rather remark “sovereignty is not a foreign concept brought by the colonizers to Indigenous America. We are born as sovereign beings. Our struggle as sovereign peoples is to live the laws of creation.” (in Smith 2008, 260–1). Among indigenous women, “sovereignty” is rather seen as “an active, living process within this knot of human, material, and spiritual relationships bound together by mutual responsibilities and obligations” (ibid.) Audra Simpson (2014), for her part, points out the “critical language game” involved in indigenous mobilizations of “sovereignty” (105); while supportive of Alfred’s (2005) analysis, she insists that “sovereignty” is useful to signal “processes and intents to others in ways that are understandable” (Simpson 2014, 105).

These remarks certainly sound different than the definitions of “sovereignty” advanced by Schmitt (1985), described by Agamben (1998) and critiqued by Alfred (2005), wherein sovereignty is always an (unmarked yet male) fantasy of absolute power via the state apparatus (and the practical project of consolidating this power as much as possible). But then again, why should Agamben and company be granted sovereign jurisdiction over the (power of) the Word? Indigenous women’s mobilizations of “sovereignty” are not necessarily rhetorical, but even when they are, this where the (performative) magic happens. Instead of presuming that Andrea Smith and the women she works with have obviously misunderstood something, we might consider the possibility that when indigenous women declare themselves “sovereign beings” they are resisting and subverting the logic of their oppressors, and that following their lead could teach us all something about “sovereignty” that Schmitt, Agamben, and their anarchist readers fail to notice: European “sovereignty” has always involved subsuming women and children as property of male citizens whereas it is male citizens that are subsumed by the sovereign (I discuss this further in Chapter 9). The male-philosophy slip between (legal) person and human being is also preserved in the anarchist response – “autonomy”. Instead of fantasies of absolute state power, “autonomy” involves a fantasy of absolute personal power that presumes a strict independence of individuals (or homogenous groups thereof), which must then be mitigated by a correlate call for “mutual aid” – the other side of the same coin. In this vein, Anna Tsing’s recent work on species interdependence (2004, 2013), which proposes “mutualism” vs. a falsely–imagined “autonomy” in nature, strikes a productive argument with the common–sense categories of anarchism without even meaning to:

I suggest that both Western “sovereignty” and “autonomy” reflect the metaphysics of 19<sup>th</sup> century natural science that, according to Tsing (2013), beheld “scalable units” that are stable and autonomous – both man and his species “evolve into themselves through their own resources; their autonomy gives them core ‘interests’ as they fight off competitors” (2). Anarchists, who followed Darwin on evolution and dabbled in Theosophy’s imagination of “root races”, follow in suit: Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid* (1955 [1914]) emphasized cooperation within species, but did not focus on mutual aid among them. Tsing’s work on mushrooms and species interdependence (2004, 2013) points out how the imagination of a species–being that is autonomously self–maintaining and constant across culture and history stems from a certain human exceptionalism: “Sci-

ence has inherited stories about human mastery from the great monotheistic religions. These stories fuel assumptions about human autonomy, and they direct questions to the human *control* of nature, on the one hand, of human *impact* on nature, on the other, rather than to species interdependence” (2004, 4). In this worldview, the most important interspecies interactions were those of predator/prey in which interaction means wiping each other out. “Mutualistic relations”, says Tsing, “were interesting anomalies, but not really necessary to understand life. Life emerges from the self-replication of each species, which faces evolutionary and environmental challenges on its own. No species needs another for its continuing vitality; it organizes itself” (2013, 6). The anarchist ideas of autonomy, self-government, and self-management arguably rely on this “self-organizing system” of modern life science, whereas it is becoming increasingly clear that if nature honours or “selects” anything, it is symbiosis or *relationships*, not individuals, genomes, or kinds.<sup>27</sup> Biology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century finds symbiosis the rule, not the exception, as do the natural science traditions of many indigenous peoples who pre-date Anna Tsing considerably, wherein “sovereignty” is a “knot of human, material, and spiritual relationships”. The anarchist person, on the other hand, is imagined as an independent, autonomous, and transcendent (sovereign) being that enters into “mutual aid” with others of its kind, much like the modern person writ large – the state. Meanwhile, just as the state characterizes itself as benevolent to its citizens, the anarchist is benevolent to the people similarly subsumed in his “autonomy” and without whom he could not survive – it should be no surprise that autonomy be characterized as deviant to anarchism when enacted by women, and no wonder that indigenous women’s imagination of sovereignty does not line up neatly with either the “sovereignty” or “autonomy” of the modern Right and Left.

If we actually “took lead” from indigenous peoples resistance struggles, wherein “spirituality is the cornerstone”, what might anarchist solidarity look like? Here we should address the pitfall of cultural appropriation. Many indigenous activists become understandably furious when non-indigenous people appropriate the trappings of indigenous spiritual practices without understanding or respecting their content. Andrea Smith makes the specific point that spiritual appropriation can *itself* be understood as a form of sexual violence and genocide, inasmuch as white appropriators enact themselves as the true cultural inheritors of a presupposed “vanishing” race, and insofar as white women’s selective use of indigenous ceremony in their own processes of healing from gendered violence ignore and thus sanction continued sexual violence faced by indigenous women (2005, chapter 6). To their credit, the anarchist activists in question are not the omnivorous white hippies that Smith appears to have in mind in her critique of the “New Age movement”. Anarchists articulate a rigorous stance against cultural appropriation and complain about hippies too. The anarchists who scoffed at the “hippie bus” in Cancun pointed directly at the white hippies dressed in grass skirts and “war

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<sup>27</sup> On symbiosis see Gilbert et. al. (2010); Zilber-Rosenberg and Rosenberg (2008); Sharon et. al. (2010).



paint” dancing on top. Anarchists generally do not wear feather headdresses on Halloween while completely ignoring the struggles of indigenous people alive today; they actually organize marches decrying the thousands of missing and murdered indigenous women in “Kanada” or on “Turtle Island”, and publicize the Idle No More movement in their independent media venues. They volunteer to dig ditches in Zapatista territory or interview indigenous ecologists in Caracas and get shot while reporting on police repression in Oaxaca. Many Earth First!ers – such as my Beach First! friend – rail against annoying anarchoprimitivists nearby and organize in support of real-life indigenous people that are fighting against mining companies. Anarchists are not the sort of environmentalist that cares more about seals than Inuit women dying on account of environmental racism – they publicize the plight of sick and sterile indigenous women from Caracas to Canada, and organize speaking tours of indigenous women from Oaxaca.

And yet Magdalena’s stories of forced sterilization and appeals to Creation were not quite as interesting as Juan’s speeches against political parties. Anarchists’ selective learning from indigenous cultures may constitute a much rarer, but equally insidious, form of appropriation inasmuch as anarchism recuperates non-Western ideas and forms discriminately and to its own ends.<sup>28</sup> Anarchists’ desire to learn from indigenous cultures appears to apply to very specific themes – ones chosen by anarchists themselves. Seen in this light, the fact that anarchists decry any other interest in other aspects of indigenous culture as “cultural appropriation” appears somewhat suspicious, and perhaps simply a different version of the selective “knowing” that Smith associates with the logic of genocide (2005, chapter 6). Perhaps “anarchoindigenism” is not so different than the *indigenismo* of Latin American statecraft after all (see fn. 6; Wade 1997; Canessa 2006). I am not suggesting that anarchists go buy smudge sticks to go along with their anti-state philosophy, but rather suggesting that anarchists critically interrogate their antistate philosophy itself based on a less selective conversation with their indigenous collaborators. Anarchists might “walk asking questions” (*caminar preguntando*) and “lead by obeying” (*mandar obedeciendo*) the way the Zapatistas suggest, instead of assuming they already know how to make a revolution based on a selective reading of Bakunin. Our Ici la otra collective was meant to be a Zapatista solidarity collective. It is well-documented that pastoral projects of the Catholic Church in the 1970s and 1980s played a key role in the mobilization of indigenous resistance in Chiapas (see e.g. Floyd 1996; Womack 1999) and that Catholic faith as well as “the ways of the ancestors” (Nash 2001, 227) contributed to the communitarian ideals that informed the 1994 Zapatista uprising (215–6). Even the Zapatista motto *mandar obedeciendo* comes originally from the catechism (Womack 1999; cited in Otero 2004, 339). Popular religion alone may not overturn the dominant order, but revolutionary activity does occur especially where modernity collides with “moral economies” that are inextricable from popular religious practices (Scott 1976, Varese 1996). This is indeed what

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<sup>28</sup> Carl Levy (2010) suggests this important question; herein would be my tentative response.

Plotino Rhodakanaty, the first “proselytizer” of anarchism in Mexico, was thinking as he drafted pamphlets titled *Neopanteísmo* while working with Julio Chávez Lopez to foment uprisings in the Chalco valley (Hart 1978, 19–20).<sup>29</sup> A few decades later Ricardo Flores Magón titled his anarchist newspaper *Regeneración* while his comrades called each other “co-religionaries” (see Lomnitz 2014, 198).<sup>30</sup> Further south, Augusto Cesar Sandino was enthralled with Theosophy and Zoroastrian, Hindu and Kabbalist lore, fusing all these together with Marxist communist ideas in such a way that he was refused entry to the Third International as a consequence – they had heard rumours he flew a seven-striped rainbow flag alongside the Red and Black (Hodges 1992, chapter 6). Rather than viewing popular religion as socially stabilizing along Marxist lines, today’s anarchists might also consider the synergistic relationship between spirituality, faith and radical political movements, whether in present-day Latin America or 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, up to and including the original “New Age movement” itself from whence modern anarchism came.

I wonder what the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe would have looked like if militants regarded culture as property the way many anarchists and indigenous people do today. Is Kropotkin’s *Mutual Aid* “culturally appropriated” because he was inspired by Japanese revolutionaries (Konishi 2007)? Perhaps because we don’t know it. Certainly the “occult” history of anarchism that I present above could be analyzed in terms of Orientalism (Said 1978), and of course the cross-cultural dialogues among heretics during the Crusades happened in the context of complex power relations. At this time, however, it was not yet clear who would emerge as the dominant party. Reading concepts like “cultural appropriation” on to the past would falsely assume that the fields of meaning and value at the time can be equated to those inflecting today’s self-making projects: During the Renaissance “difference” did not have the same currency, and people were not ascribed the same identities nor “self-identified” according to the categories in play now. It makes sense that a critique of cultural appropriation emerges in the present-day context, wherein cultural difference is fetishized and certain people may valorize themselves by accessorizing commodified attributes of those they structurally oppress (see e.g. Skeggs 2004), but we may also lose something in the process of applying the logic of property to culture, and to spirituality in particular. When entire cosmologies are reified as “proper” only to specific pre-ordained identities, we are effectively saying they are false to the extent that they do not apply across the

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<sup>29</sup> Inspired by Spinoza, Hegel, Fourier and Proudhon, Rhodakanaty called his political pantheism “pantheosophy” (see Hart 1978, 19–20; Cappelletti 1990, CLXXVIII)

<sup>30</sup> On Magón’s *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (PLM) and its relationship with syndicalist movements and transnational anarchist organizing see e.g. Lomnitz (2014), Trejo (2005), Cappelletti (1990), Torres Parés (1990), Hart (1978), Blanquel (1964). Lomnitz (2014) provides a unique ethnographic entry into the political culture and everyday life of the PLM and the *Regeneración* press; the reference to “coreligionaries” cited above is taken from a letter co-written by Ricardo Flores Magon which is itself titled “To Esteemed Friend and Correligionary”, February 11, 1904, cited in Lomnitz (198). Lomnitz also discusses Freemasonry in connection with the Mexican revolutionary movement (2014, 96–7), as well as the political influences of Theosophy and Spiritism practiced by PLM members (31–7, 271–275).

cosmos whatsoever. The sacred is thus rendered as alterity, nothing more than a cultural accoutrement in a marketplace as big as the universe. Appropriating indigenous spiritual forms without the intended content is entirely in line with the logic of capitalist colonialism, but so is marking off and containing everything considered sacred as *property* (and thus nothing more).<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the fact that anarchists are often unable to recognize the subversive potential of religious sensibilities – whether those of Magdalena or Bakunin – is disturbing beyond anarchists’ failure to respect others’ “difference” or “identity”. Decolonization rather requires a deliberate re-learning of the indivisibility of the material and the sacred, which is necessarily different than the logic of appropriation and commodification that renders the sacred inert: a property of matter and matter of property (see also Anzaldúa 1987, 68–9).<sup>32</sup> Beyond respecting Magdalena’s “difference”, activists might do better to actually listen to her – we must go beyond “theorizing primarily from the point of marginalization” (Alexander 2005, 328; see also Smith 2008, 83, 89, 222). A truly decolonized solidarity must entail taking the sacred seriously and must consider the rituals and belief structures of practitioners as having effects that are real (see Alexander 2005; Pulido 1998). The vast majority of people, including anti-capitalists, are not atheists living in an entirely disenchanting world. Even the history of the secularized modern Left suggests that Western materialism itself always involves a newly reconfigured enchantment – the world did not need to be “disenchanted” before antiauthoritarianism could occur, if anything it had to be *re*-enchanted (see also Laqueur 2006; Webb 1976; Bennett 2001). If we distill the sacred foundations from the political work undertaken by the majority of revolutionaries – that is, if we distill the content from the form – we miss crucial lessons about the radical imaginary itself.

There is a rather extensive literature categorizing women’s movements in Latin America as feminist versus feminine, strategic versus practical (e.g. Molyneux 1986), as well as many critical rejoinders to this typology (e.g. Jelin 1990). To these I would add that Magdalena and others who situate their political agency within scales both larger (the cosmos) and smaller (the family) than the modern public sphere may demonstrate particular subversive potential. With anarchism in particular in mind, perhaps women in Latin America, Magdalena included, who situate themselves as mothers and religious subjects, are in fact ahead of the game: To the extent that these women situate their

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<sup>31</sup> The recent “ontological turn” in Anthropology could be read similarly, wherein anthropologists (finally) grant the “reality” of plants that think, clouds that have agendas, and spiritual animal protectors, but only by inventing multiple realities in the process: ontology (reality) becomes the plural ontologies, wherein the white man can still enjoy his office without having to worry about the weather (see e.g. Graeber 2015; Todd 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Following Durkheim (2008 [1912]) and his lasting influence in anthropology, the sacred is by definition something “set apart”. Durkheim built his theory around the “totem”, which is both “sacred” and “set apart”, while rejoinders such as Asad’s (2003) locate the “sacred” as a specifically Judeo-Christian preoccupation. In either case, while most peoples throughout history do create categories of things, people and ideas that are set apart from the mundane in some form, I refer to the specific divisibility of the material and the sacred that occurs through processes of commodification and reification.

acts of resistance on cosmic or domestic scales or both, their disregard for the “political” dovetails with the anarchist project of decentering the nation–state as framework for analysis. Insofar as anarchism as *lingua franca* is worthwhile reforming to properly function an “engaged universal” (Tsing 2005, 8) that allows feminist, indigenous and classic anarchist concepts of reciprocity, equality and power come to terms, anarchists taking these women’s lead could foster a more robust anarchist theory of power. Andrea Smith points out that for many indigenous activists, sovereignty is a spiritual concept because it entails a vision (of living outside colonialism and capitalism) beyond what can be seen; she cites Hebrews 11:1 “Faith (or in this case sovereignty) is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Smith 2008, 268–9). The same thing goes for anarchy. Both anarchists and indigenous activists are living in hopeful cosmologies and proceed with a good dose of faith; the question that remains, and which I will leave for *Take II*, is whether they are all hoping for the same thing.

# Chapter 4 – The Rhizome in 3D

Network is a key word of my generation. Everyone is into the “network”. Anarchists themselves talk about “building networks” or “*tejer redes*” (“weaving networks/webs”) as an important practice and goal, and the movement itself is conceived as a “network”. In many ways it makes sense that ethnographers of contemporary anarchist movements use the same language (e.g. Juris 2008; Graeber 2009; Maeckelburgh 2009), thus working to honour and explain the movement’s networking logic, because pre-existing academic literature on social movements presumes otherwise. To apply the literature on “new social movements” or NSMs (see e.g. Touraine 1985; Melucci 1988; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Foweraker 1995; Escobar, Alvarez and Dagnino 1998) would involve a lot of force-fitting. For example, it makes no sense to analyze anarchist movements in terms of “opportunity structures” (see Foweraker 1995, 19) because this assumes that social movements are seeking to influence policy. And while “identity” is a key concept among anarchists, anarchist movements are not the “identity movements” that the NSM literature discusses, as anarchists do not seek rights: rights movements presume the legitimacy of the state government that disburses and protects rights, and anarchists think these state governments shouldn’t even exist (see also Maeckelburgh 2009, 19–21).<sup>1</sup> Rights movements, while ideologically, practically and discursively linked across borders, are generally struggles that take place within the borders of a given nation-state because they are oriented towards the government of that state. The same is true of many Marxist and nationalist movements – together or separately – that defined the 20<sup>th</sup> century: The category of “old social movements”, or OSMs, that the NSM literature puts forth is not applicable to anarchists either.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The “new social movements” theory was originally put forth in the 1980s by scholars concerned with the antagonisms of postindustrial society in Europe (e.g. Touraine 1985; 1988). Latin Americanists saw the theory applicable to shifts in Latin American social movements as well, especially inasmuch as these were increasingly organized around “identity” and recognized as taking place in the realm of everyday life as well as via bureaucratic structures — “new social movements” included everything from women’s neighborhood soup kitchens to indigenous elites petitioning the UN, with everyone fighting for rights in between (see e.g. Foweraker 1995; Diaz Barriga 1998; Caldeira 1990; Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998; Ramos 1992). With the onset of these “new social movements”, “an era that was characterized by the division of the political space into two clearly demarcated camps (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) is being left behind.” (Alvarez and Escobar 1992, 3) See also fn. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The “old social movements” are a category invented by the “new social movements” theorists – OSMs were characterized by “definitions of politics anchored in traditional actors who struggled for control of the state, particularly the working class and revolutionary vanguards...and by a view of society

Anarchist movements have always defied neat boundaries in geographical space. The “network” becomes a useful device for anarchists to explain what they are doing, and for observers to conceptually fathom anarchists, because the “network” opens up a new way of imagining social space that is not overdetermined by the State and its categories – e.g. “policy”, “rights”, “demographics”, “populations”, “equality”, and even “culture”, in the sense of “Canadian anarchists” versus “Mexican anarchists”. Anarchists do not respect borders in principle, and organizing across national borders is seen as a practical imperative. “Solidarity Across Borders”, for example, is the name of one collective (or, rather, a “network” of collectives) in Montreal, and if the phrase “across borders” is not found in a collective’s title it is only because the notion is taken for granted.

The network concept appears so well suited to explain anarchist phenomena that historians of classical anarchist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century are reading it retroactively onto history. Turcato (2007) for example puts forth the “network” as a methodology for anarchist historiography that is appropriate to its object: As anarchism does not propagate itself through formal institutions in which “an impersonal structure exists, with roles in which actors are mutually substitutable” (Turcato 2007, 411), we must consider anarchism in terms of a network, “a set of nodes (i.e., its militants or groups), and links between such nodes (i.e., contacts, correspondence, resource exchanges, etc.)” (414). Within this approach, the best research subject “would be the most densely and continuously connected node, whose web of links would come nearest to an image of the entire network” (415); once having identified this “specifically arbitrary node”, the researcher may then follow this node’s links (ibid). It is true that the construction of “OSMs”, similarly read back onto history, never did the classical anarchist movement any justice. It is also true that reading the “network” back onto history obscures the fact that the “network” is an imagination that becomes seductive and prevalent at a specific historical moment, and not just because anarchists are weaving them. Latour’s actor-network theory, which also suggests we “follow the actors themselves” (2005, 179) and is “local at all points” (1993, 117) similarly works against the typology/topology of “micro” vs. “macro” phenomenon invited by the state (as “scalable unit”), and is thus amenable to the anarchists’ political project as well as ethnographies about them, but Latour is not getting the idea from us. No doubt the Internet itself is an inspiration for everyone involved. There is also the fact that everyone seems to be reading the first chapter of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – “The

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as an entity composed of more or less immutable structures and class relations” (Escobar and Alvarez 1992, 3). OSMs are basically Marxists-in-retrospect. The OSM/NSM dichotomy is problematic for our purposes for a variety of reasons, including the fact that the classical anarchist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were never considered within the category “old social movements”, meanwhile some of the features of “new social movements” (e.g. direct action, self-management, a focus on everyday life) are more continuous with the history of anarchism than of Marxism (see fn. 1). Furthermore, Topp (2001) and Calhoun (1982) have pointed out that “old” social movements were likewise defined by “identities”.

Rhizome”. Anarchist activists in Montreal title their collective houses and newsletters “Le Rhizome” while scholars describe these same activists as engaged in “rhizomatic networks”.<sup>3</sup> Maeckelburgh (2009) for example adopts “horizontal” (anarchists) vs. “verticals” (Marxists and liberals) as her two main ethnographic categories, and explains that among anarchists, “communication between different actors and the construction of meaning takes place through links between people, through nodes, hubs, clusters and degrees of separation in a decentralized flow” (195); although “coalitions and networks are set up which bring many groups together, there is no singular overarching organizing committee” (84). The result is “a decentralized network structure that produces nonhierarchical relationships between the various nodes (people, groups, ideas)” (109). Ferguson (2011) likewise suggests that in “anarchist, feminist and indigenous theories and practices...one can find compelling expressions of rhizomatic, decentered, horizontal social imaginaries rather than arboreal, united, vertical ones.” (1). Simply put, anarchists are organized in de-centralized collectives linked in local webs that together make up a global web, unlike most formal political organizations of either Marxist or liberal variety whose shape rather resembles a pyramid.

Where Foucault (1990) meets Deleuze and his fans, interesting things could happen. One might wonder why the rhizome becomes such an interesting metaphor for the Left at the historical moment it does; one might inquire into so much consensus around the rhizome, and wonder what is accomplished by so much talk about it. Where Bourdieu (1984; 1986) meets Deleuze, even more interesting things can happen. One might notice that the “networking” among elites that Bourdieu pinpoints as the conversion of “cultural capital” into “social capital” (into “economic capital” and back again) may also apply to networking anarchists. Deleuze and Guattari invite us to “follow the plants”, and yet the wisdom about plants they put forth to illustrate their point is a quote from Carlos Castañeda’s *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1971), a fictionalized ethnography about a person who might not exist written by a guy who has probably never dug

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Reitan (2011) and Maeckelburgh (2009) both use the “rhizome” to describe anarchist/autonomist forms of organization (vis-à-vis marxists and liberals); Rehmman (2013) uses the “rhizome” to describe the Occupy movement; Khasnabish (2013) calls the Zapatista movement a “rhizome”. Ferguson (2011) “makes use of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ideas for ‘becoming minoritarian’ to make connections among anarchist, feminist, and Indigenous theories and practices” (1) which express “rhizomatic, decentered, horizontal social imaginaries” (ibid.).

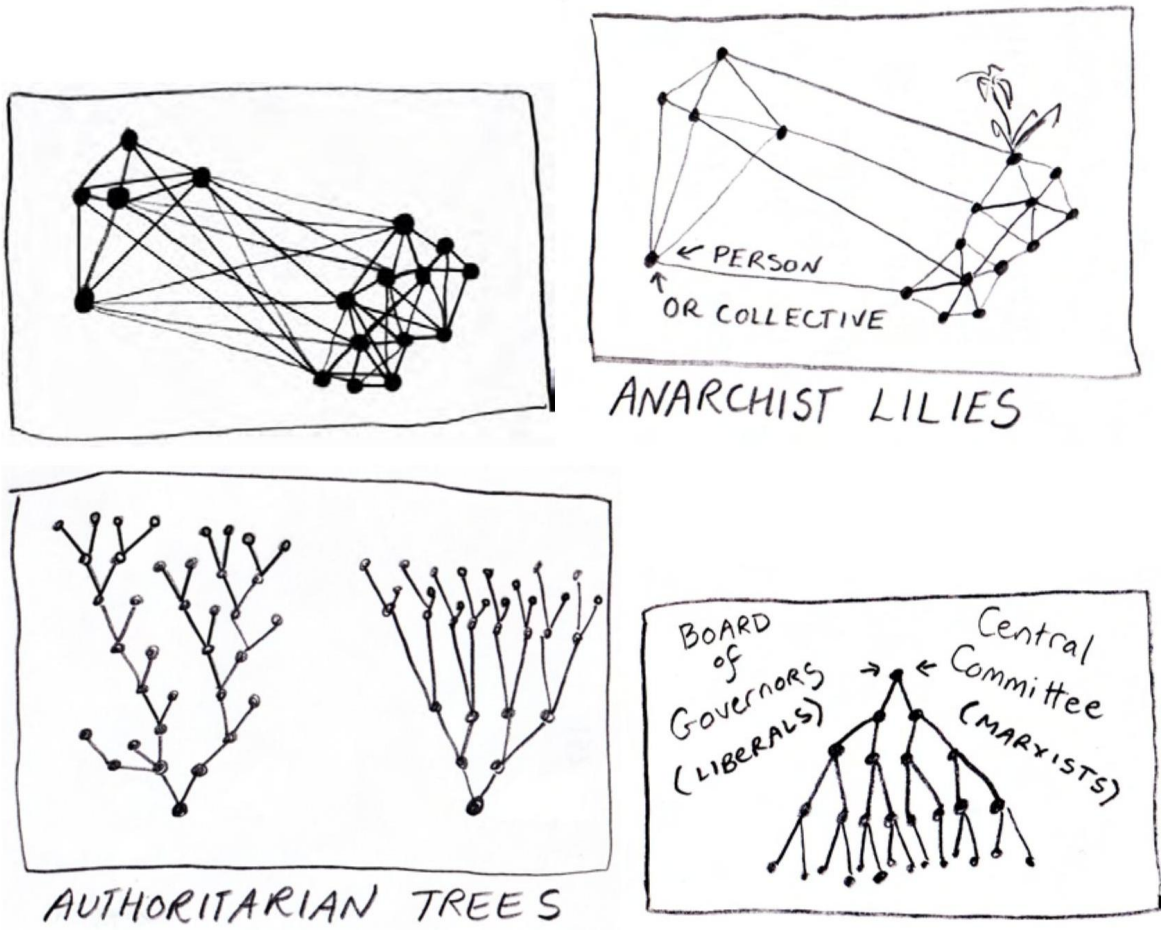


Figure 4-1. The Rhizome vs. the Tree.



up a rhizome in his life (1987, 11).<sup>4</sup> European man-philosophers can get away with this sort of thing.<sup>5</sup> In any case I will take their advice:

Personally I have transplanted many wheelbarrows full of day lilies over the years, digging up their rhizomatic root systems, tearing them apart, and planting them again, and I have noticed certain things. I have noticed that lilies can't grow just anywhere. And if they are separated, the lily that brings more nodes with it will be stronger and establish itself quickly whereas the lily with one dangling node may not survive. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that "A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines." (1987, 9). This is not necessarily true; lilies with broken rhizomes may simply die. Especially if they are left in a plastic bag sitting on a sidewalk, which anarco-hippie "guerrilla gardener" roommates have been known to do.<sup>6</sup> I have noticed that day lilies need water. I have also noticed that healthy day lilies tend to shade and crowd out most other neighboring plants. I have noticed that not all plants are day lilies, and that dandelions with taproots are much harder to kill. Did you know that day lilies like the company of certain trees? Again, the one-species fixation. Doesn't anyone else find it bizarre that so many academics and anarchists that glorify diversity in general and biodiversity in particular choose exactly one sort of plant as the overarching metaphor for everything subversive and awesome? The gardener suggests the rhizome and its philosophers come down to earth.

The anarchist network is made up of people. People that travel around; people that stay in place. Anarchist books and zines and images may travel by Internet, but even these are posted by people who travel and people who stay in place, and are received accordingly. Besides, it may be possible to find Magonista organizations on the Internet, but it is only when someone can travel to meet them, and thus develop some sort of affective tie, that things like speaking tours get organized. A hundred years ago, the anarchist network was also made of up people moving around, bringing tracts and

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<sup>4</sup> "Follow the plants: you start by delimiting a first line consisting of circles of convergence around successive singularities; then you see whether inside that line new circles of convergence establish themselves, with new points located outside the limits and in other directions [...] 'Go first to your old plant and watch carefully the watercourse made by the rain. By now the rain must have carried the seeds far away. Watch the crevices made by the runoff, and from them determine the direction of the flow. Then find the plant that is growing at the farthest point from your plant. All the devil's weed plants that are growing in between are yours. Later, you can extend the size of your territory by following the watercourse from each point along the way.'" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 11; the quote is from Castañeda 1971, 88)

<sup>5</sup> "*Corrige-moi les erreurs*" Gilles Deleuze might say with a self-assured wave of the hand – see the *Abecedaire de Gilles Deleuze* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_v1CkAdgdSw&list=PLu5xRREO5kjp8\\_Bb9hHr102k-3LEgdT](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_v1CkAdgdSw&list=PLu5xRREO5kjp8_Bb9hHr102k-3LEgdT).

<sup>6</sup> "Guerrilla Gardening" is the phrase present-day anarchist and autonomist activists in North America use to refer to sowing plants in public spaces, perhaps by throwing "seed bombs" onto sidewalks or empty lots. Given that most "seed bombs" do not take root, and, if they do, are not tended as required to produce flowers and fruit, "guerilla gardening" is arguably not "direct action" but rather resides in the realm of representation – see Thompson (2010) and chapter 7 of this work.

pamphlets and ideas from here to there, their path following massive migrations of European workers.<sup>7</sup> Today there are still workers all over who migrate and bring with them subversive ideas of all sorts, “anarchist” or not, but the upsurge in “anarchist” cultural production and proliferation of integrated direct-action networks in the past fifteen years or so is not due to workers printing pamphlets or taking over the Internet. Rather, a university-educated anarchist jet-set are the ones who move anarchism around.

This chapter, then, proceeds to consider the network in terms of this new traveling cosmopolitan elite and its “local” destinations. As we have seen, the construction of the worldly cosmopolitan leftist versus the “local” is gendered and racialized, as is the pattern of who gets to travel and where, yet in this exercise the most salient conceptual divides that present are North versus South and those of class – or, said another way, physical location and material circumstances.

Below we begin by considering the anarchist jet-set as a phenomenon in and of itself, with primary attention to where members of this jet-set are coming from, why they travel, and what happens when they get back home. Afterwards I present two popular “local” destinations to reflect on what the anarchist jet-set looks like from the ground. These two destinations – Montreal and Oaxaca – are very different, yet their activist scenes share certain characteristics by virtue of sharing the anarchist jet-set. Ultimately we return to the question of “rhizome” as an appropriate metaphor for the anarchist scene. In this chapter ethnographic examples are pulled from here and there; “local” movements, such as the Quebecois student strike of 2012, or the panorama of Oaxacan political organizations, are dealt with quickly. The anarchist network is a large object that exists a little bit everywhere and nowhere in particular, and the spotty ethnography reflects the problematic itself – activists themselves travel around knowing only bits and pieces about where they are going.

## The Anarchist Jet-Set

In 2009 I spent a couple of months in Mexico. I wasn’t directly involved in any activist collective either in Mexico or Montreal that year, but rather did the rounds visiting old friends – by 2009 I am part of the jet-set myself. I had a great visit with Valeria from our defunct *Ici la otra* collective, and had one of those “big small tiny world” experiences when I showed up at the locale of *Colectivo Libertad* to stumble across my Caracas anarchists friends and their “Beach First!” comrade – now known as “Warrior”. He hadn’t picked that one himself either, but it was an improvement on Beach First. He told me stories of Oaxaca in 2006 and how he had to go back home

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<sup>7</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century anarchism was promulgated by a variety of people including exiled writers – one thinks of Bakunin’s sojourn in Italy, for example (see Pernicone 1993), but more than anything else it was the large scale migrations of European workers, both within Europe and to Latin America, that diffused anarchist pamphlets and practices (see e.g. Munck 1987).

for a while after Brad Will died because he was so shaken. The family from Venezuela explained that they were on a vacation-cum-speaking tour of sorts and were about to host a roundtable discussion on Venezuelan politics. I told them I had drafted a book chapter based on the FSA in Caracas. They updated me on the situation down there, and gave me a stack of *El libertario* newspapers to bring back to Montreal.

After the roundtable on Venezuela, during which many men spoke for long periods of time, I chatted with the Colectivo Libertad folks. I asked after Enrique, who I had met at the FSA in Venezuela: Where was he? Wouldn't he be here, especially since at one point he was the *enlace* between the CRA and the Colectivo? The Colectivo "has had some problems lately" I was told, in that hushed regretful tone that anarchists reserve for traumatic break-ups, "...the collective has split in two, it's a long story, we'll explain later...". Right. I had written a collective email to all of them before I left Canada and rather than "replying-all", members had written me back separately – never a good sign.

I thought our *Ici la otra* break-up was bad, but this one was worse. I won't dredge it up in excruciating detail. It's dicey enough trying to represent my own collective's break-up fairly and accurately, forget trying to pick sides of a broken collective whose nasty meetings I never even attended. I will point out, however, that one of the factors that appeared to play a part in this mess was a speaking tour. Or rather two speaking tours. The first came together because Enrique had planned a trip to Europe to visit his brother, and when various comrades in Europe found out, he was invited to do a variety of speaking engagements along the way – much like the Venezuelan family I had just run into. European anarchists were interested to hear more about the resistance in Oaxaca, and while Enrique was not from Oaxaca, he was as close as the European anarchists were going to get. On account of yet another "big small tiny world" experience I happened to be at one of these speaking events – I had gone to London to investigate doing my PhD there and went to the 2007 London Anarchist Bookfair while I was there, where I spotted Enrique from across the courtyard. We eyed each other for a moment – neither of us were expecting to find the other on the other side of the Atlantic – and then hugged each other and rushed off to his speaking event which was about to start. He spoke with humility when explaining the political scenario in Oaxaca, even slight embarrassment, perhaps because *he* knew that *I* knew that *he* knew how bizarre it is for someone from DF, a *chilango*, to act as a spokesperson for Oaxaca – in Mexico that shit simply doesn't fly.

We went out for beer afterwards, and he told me about his trip so far. He was having a good time all in all, but there had been problems. The small amount of money he had with him was pick-pocketed on the subway in Madrid, and when he took detours purely on account of speaking events, during which time the activist hosts were supposed to be feeding him, he was often hungry. People apparently don't understand how uncomfortable it feels to have to ask for food, especially after they buy you so many beers. In any case, two years later I was finding out that a member of the Colectivo back home had been annoyed by Enrique's speaking tour: Why should

he get to represent the collective and the struggle in Oaxaca over in Europe? Enrique said that he had replied by explaining that “It only happened because I was going there anyway!” Maybe that made it even more annoying. A year or so later the collective had split, and a brand new speaking tour had been organized, this one paid for entirely by European anarchists, and the member who had complained was able to travel around Europe representing the collective himself.

Activists want to hear from Juan and Magdalena due to the “authenticity” of their voices, except when they are a little *too* authentic and activists do not listen as closely. Magdalena stays in place. She only crosses the border because Canadians buy her plane ticket; her ideas are likewise a bit too “local” – too grounded in the particular, and understood as “subjective”. Enrique the *chilango* university student is also sought after, and knows what the anarchists want to hear. He must decide how much to cater to their existing beliefs and when to challenge them, knowing that his dinner hangs in the balance. Enrique is much more mobile than Magdalena, but does not move entirely of his own accord.

Compare these travelers with the classy white First World youth that do lefty coming-of-age trips in places like Mexico or Palestine. With imperial passports and emergency phone numbers in tow, these middle-to-upper class twenty-somethings constitute the lion’s share of the anarchist jet-set (university professors and graduate students being second-in-line), and are usually the ones Latin American anarchists have in mind when they complain of “*anarcoturistas*”, as we heard happening at the FSA in Caracas, for example. These world-class youth go wherever they want. Their trips are often paid for at least partially by Mom or Dad, who are nervous but let the kids leave the nest because “it’s important to travel when you are young” (the proper bourgeois child later “settles down”), and because if they don’t get slaughtered in the process (“Here’s my credit card, don’t take any unnecessary risks!”), that Third World Volunteer Experience will look great on the college application.

At the very least it will impress other anarchists back home. One of my roommates at the anarco-hippie house provides a good example. The parents of this classy Canadian white boy wanted him to go to business school but “fuck that shit” he said, and went to hang around in Palestine instead, where he rubbed shoulders with some fucked-over people, posting pictures of them on Facebook as proof. He feels so secure in the world and is so oblivious of the dangers that define others’ lives that he follows up the photo exposé with a “status update” that says “JUST BROUGHT UNMARKED PACKAGE TO HEZBOLLAH”. He soon returns to Montreal, where his stint in Palestine has made him a very interesting person. Various protagonists of the local anarchist scene ask him to speak at events and do interviews for the local community radio station. He acts like he deserves the attention and praise. This is a great example of what Mahrouse (2014) is talking about when she deplors the self-serving nature of so much transnational solidarity activism with Palestine, and her analysis can be applied to Mexico as well.

This scenario is also a classic instance of the conversion of economic wealth into cultural capital à la Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 1986). His theory of the transferability of

economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital, wherein class solidarity among elites is “misrecognized” in supposedly innocent estimations of “good taste” is applicable to anarchists, wherein class power is rather laundered as “good politics” via cosmopolitan travel: Hezbollah Package Guy is not just white and male and Canadian; crucially, he also has enough cash to fly to Palestine on a whim.

For those unfamiliar with Bourdieu’s categories, note that cultural capital refers to education, knowledge, and skills *when they are used or unconsciously come to function as “cred”*. Capital, after all, is never a “thing” but a social relation. This is often forgotten, precisely because one of the most insidious aspects of capitalism is that by virtue of the way capitalist relations organize people we tend to mistake relationships for things, and things for relationships.<sup>8</sup> Money itself is not capital, but investment for profit is. Similarly, speaking many languages, playing the piano, or having a Third World Volunteer Experience are cultural capital to the extent that they a) represent inherited wealth and b) are written onto a Law school application, resumé, or are otherwise used to advance one’s career. A poor *campesino* from Oaxaca who speaks both Zapotec and Spanish doesn’t make big bucks as a translator, but a wealthy student from Mexico City who takes language classes does. Cultural capital is therefore wealth “once removed” inasmuch as only the children of the wealthy grow up playing the piano, taking exotic language classes, and exploring exotic Mexico from their native Canada or exploring exotic Oaxaca from their native Mexico City. Keeping an eye on the convenient mix-up of “things” and relations under capitalism, consider how the privileged child then enjoys the *reputation* of someone who plays the piano or volunteers in the Third World: The love of the respect (social relation) that being a piano-player brings is easily confused for love of the “thing” of the piano or the Sonata itself. The love of respect that a month’s volunteer work with indigenous people brings is easily confused with actually loving indigenous people. A capital relation is in effect every time someone shows the photograph (“thing”) of smiling indigenous people to their impressed friends and parents (while usually never even bothering to send back the photo they promised to the people in it).

Social capital refers to people as opposed to knowledge or skills. Social capital is the people one knows, especially inasmuch as they are treated carefully and with particular interest as “contacts”. Whereas the picture of smiling indigenous people is the cultural capital, the person who is impressed by it (and might hire its owner in their NGO as

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<sup>8</sup> In Marxist theory, the confusion of objects and relationships is the gear that makes capitalism tick and hides the machine at once, indeed helps it tick *by* hiding the machine. Readers unfamiliar with the Marxist concepts of alienation, objectification, or reification might consider looking to John Holloway’s *Changing the World Without Taking Power* (2005); unlike Marx’s *Das Kapital* it does not take an entire summer to read, and Holloway’s autonomist position should make him palatable to anarchist readers. (Many anarchists are not actually familiar with Marx’s theory of capital – anarchists dislike Marxists by definition, so why would they read Marx? Considering how much anarchists talk about “alienation” not to mention “capital” itself, it might be good to know what these concepts refer to and why we use them today.)

a consequence) is social capital: Cultural capital is used to get social capital and vice versa. The dynamics of social capital are often misrecognized even more than those of cultural capital: The hostess likes to think she invited so-and-so to the barbecue because “She is so nice”. Sometimes this is indeed the case – people are not always strategic operators. But whenever someone has to pick between inviting two people to the barbecue or picks a side in an argument, take note of who they pick: If they pick the one who could write them a reference letter, the one who runs that NGO in Haiti, or the wellspoken “queer” university student friend and therefore not the other who still says “gay”, the logic of capital is at play regardless of how conscious it may be.

Symbolic capital refers to some aspect of the person, usually some immutable feature, that signifies that they are the *sort* of person who is most likely to have the first two kinds of capital. Whiteness or maleness, for example, often function as symbolic capital. The white or male person, precisely on account of his gender and race, is often seen as more *likely* to be worldly and educated (cultural capital), to have more important friends and contacts (social capital), and thus as more important to suck up to – they *probably* have more power (and in fact often do).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, to qualify a previous example, the *chilango* university student who studies Zapotec is seen as more *likely* to be a competent translator by other *chilango* university students and hiring committees on account of race as well as class. Activists who discuss the unconscious aspects of “male privilege” or “white privilege”, and how one’s good intentions do not make their power go away know what I am talking about here. Conscious intention is irrelevant to the workings of cultural, social and symbolic capital in Bourdieu’s scheme. One may think he is simply spending money, or innocently sharing her love for the Moonlight Sonata, or showing pictures of himself building sustainable stoves in the Sierra Madre because the stoves were really cool, but it can all end up working as capital whether one means it to or not.

The forms of capital interact in myriad ways, and can be seen to inform both the internal dynamics of collectives and the network among them. The white Quebecois guy, Stephane, who was the *enlace* between Ici la otra and the collaborating organization in Oaxaca, held this position on account of previous travel, and enjoyed “cred” for it whether or not Magdalena was having fun. The *chilango* university student that travels to Europe has a different experience. He too is of the privileged class of people who get to travel around the world for fun; he is not the migrant dying of thirst crossing Chihuahua on foot. But precisely because a much smaller proportion of Mexi-

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<sup>9</sup> Within certain sub/cultures, symbolic capital may attach to blackness, other racialized bodies, or gendered markers differently than in the dominant regime or in an inverted fashion. Bourgois (1995) provides a classic example of Bourdieu’s categories applied to such effect (see also Goldstein 2003). Along slightly different lines, Kay Warren (1998) illustrates how in the era of the Pan-Mayan movement in Guatemala, “Mayan-ness” gains new valence as symbolic capital vis-à-vis the traditionally dominant “ladino”. Chapter 8 of this work teases apart similar symbolic capital inversions as they apply within the anarchist scene (in the anti-oppression game, a certain regime of capital attaches to those understood to be “most affected” by oppression). For now we are analyzing the dominant order.

can anarchist scenesters get to wantonly travel around compared to their First World equivalents, the *chilango*'s comrades back home are envious, resent him for it, and this partially contributes to the collective shattering into sharp pointy bits. A different *chilango* activist, Carlo, who immigrates to Montreal and stays there, faces all sorts of problems including imperialist regulation by the state and constant racism. In Mexico he was near the top of the racial hierarchy, whereas in Montreal he finds himself very near the bottom. But precisely because most people in Montreal and Europe don't imagine much social difference between a brown Mexican and a browner Mexican, both *chilangos* experience the rather shoddy compensation prize of being an important representative, particularly if they have the cultural capital (education) required to perform their identities and grievances in ways appreciated by classy First World anarchists (Carlo, Enrique, Valeria, Damian, Juan and Magdalena being willing and able to very different extents). All speaking-tour invitees who travel on others' accounts struggle with the losses vs. secondary gains of this situation, and in their case travel does not always accumulate as cultural capital the way it does for the coming-of-age *güero*: Being a Mexican who was in Montreal and is now back in Mexico doesn't necessarily get you very far. Echoing Enrique, my ex Damian says he often hides the fact that he spent time north of the border, because people either fawn over him asking questions and giving him respect he doesn't think he deserves (it feels dirty to cash in), or they shut down and act resentful.

Women, even when highly credentialed, do not get to cash in on their travel as much as the men. The gossip (yours truly) who shared unpleasant news about Ici la otra's collaborators likewise acquired such news only because she could travel down to Mexico in the first place. In this case however discussing her experience in a foreign country was characterized as immoral due to its gendered valence, and instead of acquiring "cred" for it she finds herself accused of both transgressive sexual behaviour and being a spy. Meanwhile, the classy First World woman of colour who travels to Mexico and back again will certainly never be listened to as much as her male equivalent who trashes her as a "white feminist" when he doesn't like what he hears, but neither does she die of neglect. While Andrea Smith publishes with Duke University Press, Magdalena returns from her all-expenses paid token-indigenous-woman gig to die a preventable death unattended in a clinic hallway four months later, and all any of us in Montreal did for her and the family she left behind was forward the email that announced her death to the speaking tour list-serve.

A significant contributing factor to Damian's anger once Carlo told him I was cheating was the fact that I was freely traveling around his country at the time while he was trapped in mine as a refugee. Carlo's lie was a bid to protect and consolidate male power (Carlo understood this loaded terrain very well), but it worked partially because I had more power and freedom than Damian in the first place, and the fact that I can travel so freely is legitimately infuriating regardless of whether or not I cheat while I'm at it. Similarly, it was also only on account of my own substantial activist contacts and trilingual ability that I was able to figure out the history of "gossip" around the Ici la

otra collective and intervene to the extent that I did. More than anything else, it was this social and cultural capital – not strength of character or intelligence for example – that Elizabeth did not possess ten months earlier when she challenged Carlo about the same things.

These dynamics of social and cultural capital so far go unaddressed in the movement itself, as well as in ethnographies about it. Note how Maeckelbergh (2009) freely admits that “the skills that gained me access to movement spaces and actors who otherwise would have ignored me, were my language skills” (25) and that since “access to many movement spaces is negotiated through *doing*, the more I did, the more connected I became, and the more opportunities arose to do more and become more connected.” (ibid.). Maeckelbergh also “realized quickly that by taking on the more visible tasks, like facilitating meetings or giving trainings”, she “became more recognized and connected within the wider movement network.” (ibid.). She recognizes that those who are more “connected” have more power, but since being “connected” is presented simply as a function of how much you *do* in and for the movement, the power associated with “connectivity” appears reasonable (reflective of one’s “commitment” as opposed to reflecting how much free time and cultural capital one has). Just as “skills” are not read in terms of cultural capital in Maeckelbergh’s ethnography, neither is “connectedness” analysed in terms of social capital. Meanwhile, the power of “connectivity” she recognizes in her own case and that of other “connected” activists is dismissed as irrelevant because the “major ideas underlying the autonomous sections of the antisummit mobilizations” such as “the refusal of fame, leadership and uniformity” successfully work to prevent the emergence of power relations: “the accumulation of power is undermined through refusal to acknowledge it.” (42) This is very optimistic.

The anarchist idea of “building a new world in the shell of the old” works precisely off the idea that even though the conditions under which we are operating – what anarchists might call the “white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy” for short – inevitably inform our activities in some way, there is still some room to subvert the system. That is, we may use our skills (“cultural capital”), contacts (“social capital”), and social privileges (“symbolic capital”) in ways contrary to the logic of capital — we can use our bilingualism to translate indymedia pages for free; we can use the authority of whiteness or maleness to challenge other white male people when they are acting like dicks, and so on. Not everyone ends up getting a job at a non-profit or going to law school because they capitalize on their anti-capitalist activism when they later write up their CVs.

Many do however. And whether or not the traveling anarchist who drops out of university was originally planning to mention his summer squatting in Mexico City on a school or job application, the moment he gets sick of the squat and returns home to the United States to land a job in some progressive organization that aims to serve “the immigrant community” because he can list “fluent in Spanish” in that section of his CV (even if his Spanish is barely conversational), the logic of capital is in full effect. He likes to misrecognize what has happened of course: The traveling activist likes to think



that his hire amounts to being rewarded for his heroic anti-racist act of learning the language of oppressed immigrants, when really he is being rewarded for growing up in a family that encouraged him to take his first Spanish class (and paid for it), encouraged him to travel (and got him a well-paying summer job through a family friend so he could save money to go), and paid for him to go to university in the first place. Also crucial is the fact that whether or not anarchist activities always end up translating into capital, a good share of social and cultural capital in the dominant society certainly helps one buy into the anarchist network in the first place. More respect is paid to the new person at the collective meeting if they have traveled to Mexico, Argentina or Palestine, speak three languages, and already have some activist experience (read: unpaid volunteer work). Of course it is hard to see in which “form of capital” one would slot the fact of holding a First World passport. Bourdieu’s schematic has been rightly criticized for not adequately integrating questions of gender or race (see for e.g. Adkins and Skeggs 2004; Devine-Eller 2005), and yet with regard to “symbolic capital” his schematic does provide for a certain measure of “intersectional” analysis. It also provides a productive counterpoint: While many of the activists in my study do not pay enough attention to questions of gender or race, the dynamics of economic power and capital I sketch out above are addressed even less. Maeckelbergh goes on to say that among “horizontals” or anarchists, “structural discriminations have been addressed” insofar as “meetings are introduced with comments about anti-sexist or anti-racist behaviour” (2009, 164). In Chapter 7 I specifically engage how these comments don’t work anyway (are “nonperformative”), but for now what is most important to notice is the fact that “class” does not even make it on the list. This is no exception – beyond failing to consider “elitist behaviour” problematic on the level of “sexist and racist behaviour”, activists commonly refuse to acknowledge their own class background or that of their comrades whatsoever. In one written example, Amory Starr defends the “summit-hopping” anti-globalization activists by saying that “these distorted images [of “romantic Luddites”] trivialize the suffering and rage of the working classes and youth of the North” (2005, 9), when there were no more white working class participants in that movement than there were people of colour (and the people of colour who were there, were university students themselves).

A.K. Thompson (2010), on the other hand, partially paves the way for me here by engaging the anti-globalization movement as a “vector for the expression of white middle class sensibilities and conceptions of struggle” (11) and by broaching the specific question of why it is that white middle-class activists are particularly interested in “local” struggles elsewhere. During the height of the anti-globalization movement, a critique started to circulate (see e.g. Rajah 2001 – “*Where was the Color at A16?*”) whereby participants’ “summit hopping” and excitement about putting themselves at risk of police violence was located as a specific privilege of white people, who are not already traumatized by police violence and have the time, money and correct skin colour to risk a confrontation with the state. It was good that white activists realized this, but the direction they took in responding to it was messed up in and of

itself. They decided they should turn to “local” organizing and working in solidarity with “oppressed communities” – so far so good, it would seem. Except for them the authentic “local” was conceived to be places like Chiapas, or black inner-city ghettos, or Mohawk reservations. Thompson suggests that these activists could only imagine the “local” as an attribute of the Other because the unmarked nature of their whiteness made them feel everywhere and nowhere at once (Thompson 2010, Chapter 3) .

Their quest for “community” was, to be sure, a white phenomenon in perfect parallel to the 1960s version articulated by Carmichael and Hamilton in *Black Power* (1967), “[white radicals], like some sort of Pepsi generation, have wanted to ‘come alive’ through black communities and black groups. They have wanted to be where the action is – and the action has been in those places. They have sought refuge from a sterile, meaningless irrelevant life in middle class America” (83). Whiteness is only half the story, however – Carmichael and Hamilton say it themselves when they point to middle class America. And it should be significant, for example, that even though I am as white as a sheet I did not have this same reflex. To me “local organizing” immediately meant working with all my white working class trades-worker friends and family to get them on board with the revolution. Whenever I tried to suggest we organize “teach-ins” or direct actions with the people that constituted my “local”, however, my white middle class activist friends’ response was “*Ugh*, but those people are *racist* and *sexist*.” I thought this was obvious. If the white working class were already full of feminist anti-capitalist race traitors the revolution would already be farther along and there would be less work to do. I knew that my “local” people had a long way to go in understanding patriarchy and white supremacy, but I also knew that concepts like “direct action” wouldn’t be that hard to understand: “So you mean, like, instead of filing a complaint with the *Normes du Travail* (the government labour commission), you do something like dump a truckload of gravel in front of their door and refuse to move it until the fuckers pay you?”

“Pretty much.”

“Well *duh*, who the fuck trusts the system to resolve shit for you anyway? Only privileged assholes with lawyers for parents get their so-called rights respected that way!” Exactly. Same thing with “consensus”, “task-sharing”, and “autonomism” – these were all things we already did in our everyday lives. The words we used for them were different (“switching it up”, “being fair”), but we actually had more practice in most of this stuff than the white middle class activists. I figured that if we built on what people already knew, honoured the best aspects of working class values, and strategically sneaked in the stuff about patriarchy and white supremacy along the way we could actually get somewhere. In other words, I am suggesting here that the white middle class activists ignored their own “local” not merely because of blindspots inherent to whiteness, but also because *their* “local” was full of “privileged fucking assholes with lawyers for parents” who the current system favours in every possible way, and so they figured, consciously or not, that trying to organize *their* families and people in *their* neighborhoods would be tantamount to smashing their heads against a

wall. It's way more fun to spend the summer in Chiapas while pointing to racism and sexism among poor whites instead.

In other words, Thompson's (2010) point is important yet incomplete. Although he begins by referring to "white middle class" activists, indeed pointing out how maneuvers such as Starr's (2005, quoted above) that semantically spot-weld the antiglobalization movement to both the "working class" and "the global South" are disingenuous (Thompson 2010, 10), he then proceeds to focus solely on race. Thompson relates activists' behaviour simply to the "epistemic habits of whiteness" wherein unalienated social relations – "community" (along with "locality") — are necessarily attached to the racialized other (see Thompson 2010, Chapter 3). At the same time Thompson occasionally references activists' tendency to emulate poverty (dressing down, "slumming" as a lifestyle choice) without theoretical attention to the fact that poverty and racialization are not equivalent (see e.g. Thompson 2010, 97). If we elide race and class we fail to notice that the "communities" that the activists romanticize versus the working class whose clothing and superficial markers activists borrow do not line up, and thus miss a crucial logic of the phenomenon. White middle class activists seek white redemption by flocking to coloured communities hoping for some "effervescence" to rub off on them, but also work to construct a "good" white identity by defining themselves against poor ("racist") whites and appropriating working class markers of "authenticity" at once, seeking class redemption as well.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that some wealthy people of colour – significantly fewer, but some – also travel around looking for inspiring experiences among "authentic" resistance movements in the Third World during their middle class youth. Not many are highlighted in my story so far, but note that the *chicana* volunteer in Ramor Ryan's fictionalized *Zapatista Spring* (2011), who braids her hair and throws on a *huipil* (embroidered blouse) and doesn't understand why Zapatistas don't recognize her as part of the family, is as typical of middle-class U.S. Americans looking for "roots" as Hezbollah Package Guy is of classy Canadian white boys. Rich activists of colour from Canada, the United States and Europe make use of their powerful currency and privileged passports in various sorts of activism tourism that are simply not available to Mexicans, Cubans, or Guatemalans. Going further, to say that only white people or First World people like to get to know other "locals" as such is ultimately simplistic as well – the Mexican traveler or deportee has trouble upon his return precisely because middleclass Mexicans like to travel and get to know the world too, and not simply because they want to escape violence and poverty.

Much fewer indigenous women from Mexico travel around the world making friends and accumulating activist "cred" than male university students from D.F., fewer ac-

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<sup>10</sup> The white middle class activists in my study do not adopt any clothing, accoutrement or affect of "poverty" that is marked "ethnic" (non-white) in any way because this would amount to "cultural appropriation" (see Chapter 3). The fact that there is not an equivalent discourse of "cultural appropriation" with respect to wearing painters' clothing purely as decoration (i.e. without having worked as a painter) effectively supports my point. See also Chapters 7 and 8, and Skeggs (2004) on class and appropriation.

tivists from D.F. travel around than ones from Barcelona, and fewer *chicanas* travel around compared to white Americans. But all travelers in each category are wealthier than their impoverished counterparts who stay in place, and this striation inflects the anarchist network with particular characteristics, and inflects the cultural production of “anarchism” itself in particular ways.<sup>11</sup> After all, when it comes time to decide which collective to work with, activists count on worldly trilingual elites who have “been there” and often grant to these elites more authority than they do to people who are “from there”, this being true for Oaxacan villages and poor white neighborhoods as well.

Anarchists are very much like anthropologists in this regard, and much like the anthropologist, the burgeoning activist not only travels around to “exotic” local places collecting adventure tales, but also travels around “networking” at congresses, *encuentros*, and bookfairs meeting other activists to whom they show off their collection. This is precisely how the traveling anarchist establishes himself as an important “contact person” or “*enlace*” within his current collective and others to come. Enrique’s speaking tour rival was not only jealous that Enrique got to travel around Europe because it’s fun. Every anarchist knows that traveling around being official spokesperson or *enlace* means a valuable opportunity to increase one’s *personal* network of influence within the anarchist network itself and the world by extension, and it doesn’t seem fair that people who just happen to have money to travel get to accumulate informal power on that account.

Being “contact person” or “*enlace*” means one gets to control information and communication, which must be seen as crucial in the constitution and consolidation of power in both the “node” (the collective) and the “network” (of collectives). The men who dismissed our concerns about Magdalena during the speaking tour were the two “contact persons” of the collectives most involved in the tour, which made it hard to go around them. Stephane’s forwarding of my confidential email to the soon-to-be-angry exile can be seen as an effective maneuver to retain the privileged position of *enlace* to a (reputable) indigenous organization in Oaxaca. Being “contact person” or *enlace* means you are needed and important. Being *enlace* means you can micro-manage collaborations in ways that no one else even realizes. I am still quite sure that consciously or not Carlo sabotaged the Native Friendship Centre event by not bringing the movie precisely because the three women members were the “contact persons” between the NFC and our collective, rather than him.

Finally, being an official or informal *enlace* both instantiates and communicates being “connected” and therefore cool, especially if the connectedness is transnational. Having money to travel to Palestine or Oaxaca or Greece whenever something revolu-

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<sup>11</sup> Skeggs (2004; 2010) discusses the relationship of mobility (both practical and conceptual, which become misrecognized as one) to the reflexive cosmopolitan bourgeois self – some must be fixed in place such that others may represent themselves as distant (capable of distancing). Cosmopolitanism is “a particular variant of the formation of the new middle-class self” and anarchist cosmopolitanism is no exception (see Skeggs 2004, 171–2 *passim*). See also Urry (2000) regarding “the mobile self”.

tionary happens is misrecognized as “a long history of commitment to diverse struggles”, especially if one can count numerous activist friends in each place. A large amount of social capital always reflects well on the holder’s character and skews perception of their acts toward a favourable light, and even if one decides this holder is not above criticism, the social capital itself is often enough to dissuade one from a confrontation: he who has the most activist contacts and friends, wins.

## The “Local” Destination: Oaxaca

When I moved to Oaxaca in 2010, it was clear that since the time of the 2006 rebellion, people participating in social movements had been suffering increased police surveillance, imprisonment, fear, ransacking of homes and offices, infiltration and every other sort of state repression one can think of. Such repression wasn’t new of course – Oaxaca is a place with a long history of political militancy and a history of repression to match – but since 2006 things had been particularly bad. People were preoccupied with trying to free political prisoners, demanding justice for the families of the people who had been murdered by state forces, and doing their best to keep their heads above water, which sometimes meant resorting to alcohol as a coping mechanism instead. Meanwhile, the APPO that had been so spontaneous and inspiring in 2006 had, in the eyes of many activists I spoke with, become “overrun” with Stalinists and paramilitary groups sponsored by the government (perhaps disguised as *campesino* organizations), not to mention a variety of “reformist” characters bent on using the APPO to jumpstart their electoral campaigns. In other words, the local anarchists, along with a much larger swath of autonomist militants in Oaxaca, who rather call themselves *magonista* or *libertario* or something else entirely, did not trust most people involved in the APPO anymore – they were all sold out to the government (“*vendidos*”).

Needless to say, the time of euphoric community feeling and solidarity during 2006 had entered the realm of nostalgia, and the foreigners who had been so excited about the “Commune of Oaxaca” were nowhere to be seen. The wave of thesis-writers had largely thinned out as well, which everyone seemed to be relieved about. Unfortunately I was yet another one, although my choice of topic was marginally redeeming: “No I’m not here to study the APPO, I’m here to study the foreigners who *are* studying the APPO, and all the *gringos* who are obsessed with ‘helping’ Mexican social movements in general.” This was usually followed with a skeptical but intrigued: “So you are studying the whities floating around?” (e.g. *¿Entonces andas estudiando a los güeros en nuestro ámbito?*) This followed by a series of carefully guarded questions as to what, exactly, my deal was. Usually followed by mischievous smiles of varying degree. And the game began: “Fucking *güeros* don’t bring us shit, they just take. Except for the word ‘snack’. They brought us that. I mean that’s a great word. Everything is better now that we have fuckin ‘snacks’...But seriously, you wanna know?”

Where the anarchist cosmopolitan elite lands, all sorts of interesting and dubious things can happen. Pretty much every single time someone told me a story they asked me to deliver the conclusion but not to repeat the story itself – an ethnographer’s nightmare, but a story in and of itself: Why don’t people want me to repeat the stories? The stakes are high. The whities are annoying but they are useful. They have lots of money and Mac computer equipment and some of them are really nice. Some of them are friends, some of them are enemies or potential enemies, and all of them are powerfully located in their whitey First World kind of way. In any case readers will have to forgive the lack of detailed ethnographic illustrations in this area, and consider my form here to be important content in and of itself.

Following the jet-set, their capital, and the nervous silences around it, I can only say certain things. I can say that from a distance, the situation in Oaxaca circa 2010 did not seem so bad. Paramilitary violence throughout Mexico was worsening every moment, but the gravity of the unfolding war was not necessarily on the radar of lefties north of the border. According to the web pages and the occasional communiqué, we had heard exciting news of the *Coordinadora de Mujeres de Oaxaca* (COMO), for example. The women who had started organizing the women’s marches in 2006, called “*las cacerolas*” because the women marched banging pots and pans, had created a formal organizing body to advance their concerns *as* women within the APPO.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, a collective of young people who had met on the barricades in 2006 were advancing a political project particularly intriguing to foreigner activist ears: SEMILLA was explicitly *libertario*, into *autonomía*, and of course the “indigenous struggles” (*las luchas indígenas*). They boasted a variety of successful projects, including a collective house, a clinic, a rooftop garden and last but not least, a very cool webpage. From the looks of it, and from the looks of my own email inbox, any foreigner activist that was still interested in going to Oaxaca was looking to get in touch with SEMILLA.

The COMO did some cool stuff. So did SEMILLA. But things were not as rosy as they seemed from the webpages – the Internet misleads as much as it connects, and as mentioned in Chapter 2, often tends to accentuate dominant voices rather than operate as a social leveler. Many of the women I met that year sighed and rolled their eyes or even launched into furious tirades when I, myself, asked with hopeful curiosity about the COMO. It had apparently been “overrun with self-serving women from powerful organizations” who were “using the COMO to advance their own political careers”. I didn’t hear the same kind of stories about SEMILLA. Rather, most complaints here had to do with other typical grievances within autonomist movements: It was really just a clique of friends who informally controlled it all; many of the youth which were supposed to be its “constituency” had dropped out long before and didn’t want anything to do with it, and so on.

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<sup>12</sup> On “*las cacerolas*” of Oaxaca in 2006 see e.g. Stephen (2007), Denham and the C.A.S.A Collective (2008).

Meanwhile people in SEMILLA were complaining too, in this case about the foreigners. From what I understand, SEMILLA experimented with a rule wherein foreigners were welcome at meetings, and invited to speak and weigh in on the topic at hand, but were no longer welcome to make proposals themselves. Too many people with big ideas who feel entitled to steer the direction of the project because they put up cash. Too many people who are all gung-ho to get big things started but do not follow through because, well, they go home. Various other collectives and organizations felt similarly: “We don’t want to accept any more individual volunteers”, one coordinator told me, “we are interested in developing relationships with sister organizations, collectives or movements abroad, y’know, grassroots projects, and if together we want to organize an exchange that’s great, but when you accept lone volunteers you tend to get these wealthy mobile students who have money to travel in any case and are not motivated to follow through...and if they care so much about changing the world, why aren’t they involved in trying to do so in their own country?”

In general, people in activist collectives throughout Mexico also voice conflicted feelings about receiving money from abroad. An offer from North Americans or Europeans to pay for a free trip (speaking tour, say) for *one* collective member in a country where the currency is relatively weak can create divisions, jealousies, and animosities among members. Offering to ship \$2000 worth of free Mac computer equipment down to “the Indymedia collective” likewise sounds really nice except for the fact that there are often at least three collectives that can lay claim to that name, and sometimes the only way to resolve the issue without creating enormous conflict is to refuse to accept the equipment at all. Furthermore, whether the money comes from foreign NGOs or foreign anarchist collectives, being funded from the outside makes the collective less autonomous, in the sense of both “free” to proceed as it wishes, and in the sense of less legitimate in the eyes of other local autonomists: Some of the complaints voiced about SEMILLA hinged on the fact that it was not “autonomous” or “grassroots” (“*del pueblo*”) at all, but rather “artificially supported” by outsiders. North American anarchists use the exact same language to talk about political projects funded by NGOs and the government, and no doubt many would be surprised to hear that this is what Mexican anarchists say about projects funded by *them*. When the prototype for all power is the state, it is not just gendered power that is hard to see, but the power of First World anarchists as well. None of this is to say that First World anarchists with economic power and strong currency shouldn’t even try to redistribute their wealth, instead keeping it to themselves for fear of the above pitfalls. My point is only that those in “solidarity” might reflect on these issues more than they currently do.

Activists in Oaxaca – and elsewhere in Mexico – also consistently repeated similar grievances regarding the everyday, micropolitical challenges involved in working cooperatively with *güeros*. For example, because I am not vegetarian myself I got to hear continual cracks about vegans who proceed as if its possible to build adobe bricks in the sun all day on a diet of lettuce leaves and peanut butter, and expect others to do the same. People also lamented the fact that “The *güeros* don’t understand our way

of working. Like Steve over there, he's always saying we're slacking off just because we are having fun while we are working! That's *cultura occidental* for you, that's how they work..." said one *chilango*, while moving his hands back and forth next to his head, mimicking something like the blinders on a horse. "They have a one-track mind (*son unos clavados*)", he continues, "they act like fucking machines, like 'taking things seriously' means no smiling allowed...like sure in order to get shit done you have to actually work, but this culture of discipline and productivity is part of what we are resisting!" The *güero* descendents of the Puritans can only devote their summer holidays to saving Mexico, so while they are there, everyone should work as hard and seriously as them. And if the rooftop garden, clinic or community centre has problems later, it's obviously because the Mexicans were "fucking around" too much instead of working.

Another complaint about the *güeros* is that they play a game of one-up-manship that I will title *Gringos vs. Gachupines* – *gringo* being the term for U.S. Americans (sometimes Canadians), *gachupín* being the term for Spaniards (sometimes Catalans and Basques). These two groups of foreigner activists are the most numerous in Mexico, no doubt due to geographical proximity on the one hand, and lack of a language barrier on the other. The game goes something like this: "How dare those *gringos* show up here and act like they belong, fucking Yankee imperialism is the problem in the first place!", says the *gachupín*. "How dare those Canadians show up and act like they are friends of Mexico, shouldn't they be at home bringing the mining companies to court?", says the *gringo* or *gachupín*. "How dare those Spaniards show their faces here, how can you guys even stand hanging around with them knowing it was they who raped and pillaged and enslaved your whole country for centuries?", says the *gringo*. How tiresome this becomes for the Mexicans that are made to listen. Because of course it's the Mexicans who have to hear it. The *gringos* don't say this stuff to the *gachupines* faces, and the *gachupines* don't tell off the *gringos* directly either. The only reason I have the full picture is because both *gringos* and *gachupines* consistently treat me as if I'm obviously part of their team: Being Quebecoise makes me a cousin to the Catalans, and my accent in Spanish is hard to place, introducing me as some sort of mystery European rather than a classic *gringo*. Meanwhile my first-language English makes the *gringos* assume I am from the U.S. like them. In any case, for better or for worse I was uniquely situated to hear the *gringos* and the *gachupines* gripe about each other constantly. Both sides make some very good points I must say.

The easiest dig against the *gringos* is that they don't speak Spanish. With certain exceptions of course, it is true that the *gringos* speak less Spanish than any other type of foreigner around. The *gachupines* point out that it's fucked up to think that one can be useful if one doesn't even speak the language. And not only do the *gringos* not speak or understand well what is going on, but they expect Mexicans to take the time to translate everything in charades for their benefit, and any bilingual person in their vicinity to become their personal assistant. *Gringos* are not good at just sitting there, soaking up what they can and faking the rest, smiling when others smile, but generally making themselves unobtrusive. And yet this is what is necessary if they actually want



to improve their Spanish, which they all insist they want to do. To learn a language one must pass through a phase wherein one is listener above all, wherein one does not direct the conversation, nor contribute any complex thought or opinion, because with rudimentary vocabulary these are impossible to formulate. Yet the *gringos* explain to me on the way home that they couldn't help switching into English (and getting me to translate) because they can't stand the idea that people would think they have such simple thoughts. The U.S. American ego triumphs.

I do understand their frustration. I speak Spanish well but I never sound as intelligent in Spanish as I do in English. If I can translate complex thoughts for the *gringos* these days, however, it's because I went through a long phase of smiling patiently while everyone laughs their asses off for some reason I didn't understand. I find myself agreeing with the *gachupines* that the *gringos* simply don't know how to learn languages because their U.S.-centric outlook gets in the way and, related to this last, because they have less experience in bilingual scenarios than most other people in the world. On account of this, not only do they have trouble learning languages easily themselves, but neither do they know how to interact with second-language speakers with respect and empathy. Instead of carefully pronouncing "I am tired" to the Mexican that knows some English, they say "I's like fuckin beat man". Instead of sending him a text message that says "what are you doing?" they send one that says "whassup?".

My trilingual Catalan roommate that year was convinced that *gringos* do this kind of thing because they are self-absorbed in general. Sergi is quite sure that *gringos* talk about themselves more than other people – "their response to a story is always 'well I once..' or 'that's not what happened to me..' or some other segue back to themselves, I mean just stop and listen to how many times they use the word 'I'!" In the *gringos* defense I pointed out that Spanish doesn't use as many pronouns in general, but ultimately I think he has a point. The U.S. Americans are often as egocentric as people as they are as a country. U.S. Americans act as if they are the fixed point in the universe around which everything revolves and through which all meaning is refracted. Even the leftiest *gringo* thus ends up mirroring their CNN and Latin American Studies programs, replete as they are with courses like "Mexico and U.S. Foreign Policy", "The Mexican/American Border" and "Changes in Mexican Immigration, 1960–2010", wherein 'Mexican Studies' is really only about Mexico vis-à-vis the United States. *Gringos* don't know who the president of your country is but they expect you to know who the press secretary for Lyndon Johnson was and what Hillary Clinton ate for breakfast. *Gringos* didn't learn the local language first and they want you to teach them right now. *Gringos* show up in Cancun and try to pull us over to *their* general assembly because they don't speak enough Spanish to participate in the *transnational* general assembly. Team *gachupín* definitely scores at least one point.

*Gachupines* already speak Spanish. Pointing out the importance of language skills is an easy win. But as the *gringos* point out, the immediate ease and confidence the *gachupines* assume upon arrival due precisely to their language makes for a different kind of failure. They feel too comfortable. They forget they are not at home. They do

not make a point of paying attention to so many differences between here and there. The *gringos* are not the best listeners, but at least they are vividly aware that there is tons of shit going on all the time that they do not understand. The *gachupines* hit the ground running, presuming to understand all subtleties, sarcasm, and stakes involved. The *gringos* may not speak Spanish very well, but what little they speak they learned because they studied – perhaps in one of those U.S.-centric Latin American Studies programs where you do actually learn something about Latin America once in a while. The *gringos* may sound stupid when they talk, but they often know more about Mexico than the *gachupines* who only know that Mexico is a cheap Zapatista-adventure vacation where they can speak their own language. Let's face it, save for the Catalans and Basques, most *gachupines* aren't any more bilingual than the *gringos*. Most lefty *gringos* who show up in Mexico know they are Yankees and expect people to dislike them. The *gringos* point out that *gachupines* migrate *en masse* to Mexico on account of the economic crisis back home, see no problem in snatching up the scarce contracts in NGOs and other “nonprofits” that local people could have been hired for, and expect everyone to welcome them with open arms. They make *gazpacho* to sell in the street and complain when people buy *tostadas* from the *doña* sitting next to them instead. *Gachupines* do not make a point of reading between the lines. They make fun of Mexican Spanish and make little effort to adapt their slang. They act like Parisians in Quebec, and are appreciated even less. Very few of them realize this.

If I were referee I would say that both lose. If I were Leonard Cohen I would find an affectionate way to call them all “dead-hearted turds” in a poetic call for Surrender.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately the main thing to learn from this game is not the list of national defects it produces, the form tells us more than the content. It is no coincidence that the two teams line up with the two groups of foreigner activists in Mexico that are most plentiful. Obviously the real name of the game here is “Who has more of a right to be in Mexico helping out?” All of the foreigner activists feel a little guilty, of course. They may talk too much and fail to have exquisitely developed analyses of their own vested interests, but they do have some concept of colonial history. Somewhere in the back of their minds they know that it is problematic to spend six months in Mexico smoking joints and building mud stoves while Spain is crippled by austerity measures, while *gringos* are forming racist militias to arm the Mexican border, and while Canadian mining companies are ransacking the whole República while raping, killing and imprisoning the dissidents who stand in their way. After all, every time we asked the Zapatistas “What can we do to help?” the answer was something along the

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<sup>13</sup> Leonard Cohen's poem “French and English”, a satiric commentary on the (stereo)typical arguments among Anglophones and Francophones in Quebec, inspired the crafting of this section: “I think you are fools to speak French/ It is a language which invites the mind/ to rebel against itself causing inflamed ideas/ grotesque postures and a theoretical approach/ to common body functions...I think you are fools to speak English/ I know what you are thinking when you speak English/ You are thinking piggy English thoughts/ you sterilized swine of a language that has no genitals...Surrender now surrender to each other/...O deadhearted turds of particular speech...” (Cohen 1993)

lines of “Go home and build social movements there, against neoliberalism and for the people, for their sake and for ours.” This stuff does get lodged in the brain somewhere. But precisely because it is in there, a little box has to be built around it, because when all is said and done, smoking weed and playing in the mud is more fun and that’s what’s going to happen. Focusing on how hypocritical the *other* is helps one to feel better about themselves, no? Sure works for me.

## The “Local” Destination: Montreal

Like other North American cities Montreal provides wealthy whitey First World activist travelers, but is somewhat unique in also being an interesting and “exotic” destination in and of itself. The similarities between the “situation on the ground” in Oaxaca and Montreal may be generally instructive regarding some typical scenarios caused by an activist jet-set passing through. The differences are also instructive: one of the most important points here may be that one cannot extrapolate from one city to another, which further suggests the importance of “local” knowledge, which activists who “pass through” simply don’t have.

When I arrived back in Montreal in 2012, a massive student strike was underway, to be remembered as the *Printemps Érablé* and by its emblematic symbol of red felt squares. The Quebec government’s attempt at imposing martial law to stop the nightly marches had been a massive fail: The *loi 78*, which made it illegal for more than 50 persons to assemble in any given public location, was met with bigger and better marches, now including non-students of all sorts, who emerged from their houses at 8pm every evening to gather at corners banging pots and pans and then march around in every which way, paralyzing traffic all over the city.<sup>14</sup>

In between reading moment-to-moment local news, warnings of impending police actions, call-outs for solidarity actions, and invitations to the neighborhood assemblies that were cropping up, I kept seeing blogposts about what was going on written by a U.S. American anarchist intellectual who was visiting and clearly writing for a U.S. American audience. The blogger transcribed our slogans to contain the word *anticapitalista*, which is Spanish not French. The blogger also subtly switched between romanticizing militant Quebecois culture and relating the strike back to the Occupy movement. In fact, the province’s history of militant street resistance and strong lefty student unions, alongside a large population of nationalist Francophones who found common cause with the students (oppressed as they were by the *federalist* Liberal party government), was probably the crucial mix for the exploding scene in the streets that year. The blogger also talked about the CLAC (*Convergence des Luttes Anticapital-*

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<sup>14</sup> I published a short article on this phenomenon at the time (see Lagalisse 2012). The largest Englishlanguage archive of news and media commentary on the Quebec student strike may be found on the “Translating the Printemps Érablé” website — <http://translatingtheprintempserable.tumblr.com/archive>.

*istes*) as if it had a level of organizational importance approaching that of the CLASSE (*Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante*). Only very specific Anglo activists would tell her such a thing.

These are all interesting points, but every badly translated French word made me so angry that I had to stop and wonder: Could it be that I was building a little box around the fact that I am a clumsy foreigner myself, writing whole chapters about stuff elsewhere that I hardly understand? At least I spoke the language, I told myself. But I had to admit my anger was of the same order of that which people in Oaxaca feel about people like blogger and I both. This had the dual effect of making me feel more accepting of anger that has been shown toward me along similar lines, and making me less angry at the blog. As soon as I was done being angry with *gringos* for being a bit too enthusiastically involved, however, I started getting angry with the local Anglo anarchist scene for not being involved enough.

As individuals many did come to marches and participate in the *casseroles*. The bilingual CLAC did assume an official stance of support and played a significant role in helping to foment the incipient neighborhood assemblies. The lion's share of English-speaking collectives and their pre-existing activist infrastructure, however, did not get on board except to critique. Most of the Anglo activists I spoke to, whose posts I read, whose events I saw advertised and sometimes attended, focused on the reformism, sexism, racism and colonial aspects of the movement. Of course in a way this is simply the classic anarchist role: Revolution may be "immanent" in the people, but the guidance of illuminated men is necessary to guide them in the right direction. Some anarchists in the United States likewise quickly noted the reformist aspects of the Occupy movement (which other anarchists had started) and some therefore abstained on principle, but then again many others felt that it was important to get involved for precisely that reason: Heaven forbid Occupy be abandoned by the leftiest of the left only to be swayed by Tea Party demagogues toward some sort of right-wing immigrant-bashing lynch mob.<sup>15</sup>

In Montreal, however, Anglo anarchists did not so much participate in the student assemblies to "steer" them this way or that, but rather stood back and critiqued from the sidelines. At the 2012 Anarchist Bookfair, for example, which took place in May during the height of the wider popular mobilization, the panel discussion organized on the Quebec student movement was not attended by any monolingual Anglophone anarchists. Racism and sexism in the movement and growing critiques thereof were certainly part of the reason (see e.g. Palacios et al. 2013). But given that in four months the situation in Montreal had gone from a typical string of marches to crowds of twenty thousand people closing down downtown on a nightly basis with music, art, theatre, strollers, bicycles, wheelchairs and naked street parties, followed by brand new

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<sup>15</sup> I wrote a (Spanish language) article about this at the time in the CNT (*Consejo Nacional de Trabajo – España*) newspaper, in which I quoted a U.S. American anarchist involved in Occupy who was advancing this point (see Lagalisse 2011b).







**Figure 4–2.** Cacophony of symbols in Montreal, May 2012. (above) The Quebec flag accuses the Liberal party of working with the Mafia and corrupting Quebec. (left) The colours of the 18<sup>th</sup> century patriot flag represent the English, the Irish and the French (against the British Crown). The “Anonymous” mask here is the original (that is added elsewhere).

autonomous neighborhood assemblies to boot (things local anarchists have supposedly wanted for years), it is worth questioning why nobody was that interested in talking about it. Regardless of the fact that translation was offered, every person in attendance that day was Francophone or Quebecois or both. How does this happen?

A partial explanation hinges on the fact that the majority of Anglophones who make up the Anglo anarchist scene in Montreal are not Quebecois Anglophones but English-speakers from the rest of Canada (sometimes known to Quebecois Anglophones like me as people from the “ROC”). This means that most are not bilingual, which in turn means that they can’t plug into what is going on – not only are organizing meetings and assemblies largely inaccessible to them but they can’t even understand the lively debates online. Whereas local Anglophones could lend a hand translating the Indymedia coming out of Quebec, activists from the ROC generally can’t do that.<sup>16</sup> There is also the fact that the ROC anarchists are just passing through. They spend a few years in Montreal, usually during an undergraduate degree of some sort, and usually leave afterwards because they do not learn French and thus cannot get a job. They inevitably have less affective and personal investment in the Quebec student movement.

While all anarchists are against austerity measures and the neoliberalization of education systems on principle, one who went to school in Quebec paying the local tuition rate, thus benefiting from the struggles of the past, and whose children and friends’ children will be growing up in Quebec themselves, is going to be invested in a way that people who are visiting are not. In this sense, the Anglophone anarchists are comparable to the students of McGill University, whose student population is heavily weighted with wealthy *gringos* and Anglos from the ROC and is the only institution of higher learning in Quebec that never votes in favour of a strike.

There is also the question of a certain disdain Anglo activists from the ROC often display for the Francophone Quebecois, wherein class elitism, subliminal Canadian nationalism, discourses of “anti-racism” and the specific vested interests of ROC activists become mixed up. This is a lot to illustrate with one example, but I’ll try: When I once underwent a job interview to be co-coordinator at a local “progressive” non-profit (the Public Research Interest Group, or PIRG, that underwrites various local collectives such as No One is Illegal and CLAC), the staff interviewers, all of whom were Anglos from the ROC, were concerned to know if I had proper politics regarding “diversity” and a sufficiently robust “anti-oppression analysis” (something we unpack in later chapters).

As part of this vetting, I was asked to role-play how I would deal with a racist person who enters the office, at which point I experimented with mocking up the racist person as an Francophone construction worker, which I conveyed by speaking bad English in a thick faux-Quebecois accent and referencing my tools, and I passed my “anti-oppression” test on this basis. Indeed the staff roared with laughter. When

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, fn. 12 regarding “Translating the Printemps Érablé”.



I pointed out how my mockery of the Francophone construction worker was funny largely on the basis of class elitism (something I did as soon as I got the job), I was told that people, especially “people of colour”, as half of them were, are entitled to make fun of French colonial oppressors. ROC Anglo activists in Montreal point out as often as possible how the Francophone Quebecois are colonial oppressors, pointing to indigenous people as the true victims of colonialism on Turtle Island. The Francophone Quebecois, generally imagined as white, scruffy and with bad hair, are thus framed as an extra-bad version of (already) racist and sexist white working class people, because *de plus* they claim to be colonized themselves, and that’s obviously wrong because they are not Mohawk.

Whereas a *mestizo* university student from Mexico City, who is of Spanish blood save for one indigenous grandmother, and speaks only the colonizer’s language, is considered by Anglo anarchists of North America to be part of a colonized population and an authentic spokesperson for the indigenous people of Oaxaca, a Quebecois university student who is French blood save for one indigenous grandmother and speaks only the colonizer’s language is a conquerer – or “settler” – simply put. The reason for the difference is that among the contemporary left in North America “people of colour” are colonized whereas “white” people are not. This certainly makes sense in a general way because race has always functioned as the normalizing logic of colonialism. Except sometimes *mestizo* Mexicans are arguably as “white” as me. And technically the Quebecois can be as indigenous as many *mestizos* (i.e. not very indigenous at all). It depends how one is counting of course. And of course it is true that the material situation of Mexicans in Mexico, which is economically and politically dominated by Canada, is very different than the material situation of Quebecois in Quebec. Then again, if what makes someone a “colonial subject” as opposed to a “colonizer” is their relative (lack of) economic and material power, most of the white working class in Quebec would have to be redefined as “colonized” while wealthy whites, Mohawks, and black people would have to be “colonizers”. Meanwhile, ROC Anglo university students living in Montreal alternately equate themselves to both white Quebecois and dispossessed Haitian refugees at their convenience, inasmuch as along with the former they are all equally (guilty) “colonizers” vis-à-vis the indigenous, and inasmuch as along with the latter they are all equally (innocent) “migrants”: If any Quebecois person has a problem with anything the ROC Anglos do it’s because they, like all Quebecois, “have a problem with immigrants”.

It is true that Quebecois nationalism famously forgets that the French weren’t actually here “first” (they were simply here before the English). It is also true that Quebecois xenophobia is consistently stoked by politicians who foster in-group solidarity among the “*purlaine*” (“pure wool”) Francophone whites by pointing to contaminating immigrant influences – Pauline Marois, the separatist Premier who was elected on the

heels of the student strike, is just the most recent example.<sup>17</sup> It is also true that ignoring Quebecois nationalism as a response to the overarching cultural and linguistic dominance of English-speaking North America, perhaps recasting claims for Quebecois “cultural difference” as “racist Nazi bullshit”, is suspiciously convenient for Anglos from the ROC who want to move to “bohemian” Montreal yet don’t want to bother to learn French, who feel entitled to jobs even though they can’t speak the local language, who do not have the necessary language skills to interact with the majority of the local population or Francophone social organizations even though they are “committed to grassroots organizing”, and who don’t want to have to think critically about any of this. It is particularly suspicious given that Anglos from the ROC clearly *know* there are “cultural differences” between Quebec and the ROC – it is why they want to move here in the first place: “I just love Montreal! I love how there is so much life on the streets, how people eat and drink together in parks, how we can smoke pot anywhere, how cheap the rent is, how much cool art and music and culture and...”. A little box must be built. In Montreal we do not have the *gringos* vs. *gachupines* game, but we do have the ROC smoke-and-mirrors routine, wherein a highly mobile university-educated anarchist intelligentsia likewise plays around with the categories of race and class in order to mask their vested interests (“Montreal would be a fun place to go to university!”), and to justify their cosmopolitan sojourns, including haphazard participation in local social movements, with “anti-colonial” analyses.

There are of course tremendous cultural, geopolitical and economic differences between the cities of Oaxaca and Montreal, and these differences make the dynamics between and among the residents and visiting activists distinct in each place. One important difference is the level of generalized fear: Activists in Oaxaca are afraid of infiltrators and police because they could be dragged off and shot, whereas activists from Montreal are afraid of the same because they could get an expensive ticket or maybe jail time (I discuss fear, spies and infiltration in detail in Chapter 6). Another notable difference is that the gap in economic power among the foreigners and locals is much more significant in Oaxaca. In Montreal the people passing through may be annoying, but locals do not feel any particular pressure to stay on good terms with them for reasons related to currency exchange, and if an Anglo from the ROC does throw some of her trust fund into a given political project, for better or worse the people involved will not be considered “sell-outs” as a consequence.

Another difference is that in Oaxaca the *majority* of people involved in the anarchist scene actually live there, while the foreigner jet-set that passes through without learning important details about what is really going on is a small *minority*. In Montreal, the wealthy mobile students from the ROC stay longer, usually installing themselves

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<sup>17</sup> Pauline Marois won a minority government over the Liberals during the student strike, going on to propose a “Charter of Values” bill banning all religious symbols directed at immigrants — highlighting the veil while excepting the cross; it was arguably a bid to foment nationalist fervour by which to win a majority government (and thus maneuver towards national separation? – so goes the debate), that ultimately failed.

as students, and do eventually learn a bit more contextual information than do most people who pass through Oaxaca. However, because the ROC Anglos are the *majority* of participants in the Anglophone anarchist scene (which overlaps with, but is largely segregated from, the local Francophone anarchist scene), and because they inevitably leave to be replaced with a new shift of undergraduates, all collective memory goes by the wayside. Only the ethnographer of the *longue durée* can point out that there are some Anglo anarchist collectives and organizations in Montreal that might not still exist if it were not for so many fresh students that arrive from out of province and join without knowing why everyone else dropped out six months before.

Meanwhile, as different as they are, Oaxaca and Montreal have the anarchist jetset in common and the jet-set itself inaugurates a consistent set of problems. In Oaxaca many NGO jobs are snatched up by foreigners. In Montreal the few Anglophone nonprofits that exist tend to hire people from the ROC. In both cases locals who are qualified for the jobs are passed over because highly credentialed foreigners are dubbed to have “better politics” in one way or another. In both places too a substantial portion of scenesters do not speak the local language well or at all, which means an incapacity to build deep friendships and trusting work relationships with residents. In both cases, longtime residents don’t want to bother investing in building friendships with the foreigners, because they all end up leaving pretty soon anyway. In both cases, new scenesters do not know past histories of relationships among particular local persons and collectives – so much water under the bridge! – and bumble around causing problems for everyone else involved as a consequence. In both cases, outsiders both paternalize and romanticize the “locals” who aren’t flying around the world like they are. While people in Montreal are more (transnationally) mobile than those in Oaxaca, in both places “locals” are conceptually fixed in place vis-à-vis the cosmopolitan anarchist who transcends locality, culture and vested interest to boot.

## **One Big Glorious Mess (In Which Many Messes Fit)**

We are a long way from the happy convivial crew of solidarity we saw at the Foro Social Alternativo in Caracas. I should remind the reader that the people I am talking about are the same ones who chained themselves to large objects for two years straight to effectively stall the Keystone XL oil pipeline across North America. This is just one of the many effective campaigns that I do not discuss here. This work is not primarily about the logistical details of anarchist organizing (and is largely silent regarding anarchists use of the Internet, among other things) partly because it seems irresponsible to outline precisely how the anarchists manage to pull off the *successful* campaigns – anarchists already know this, and yet the authorities might not. Rather, this work concentrates on anarchism in its less glorious moments, on the contradictions

of “anarchism”, the power relations involved in its cultural production, and how these bear on organizing efforts. Questions like this necessarily involve sobering answers.

And yet, one counterpoint to our sobering journey so far might go as follows: It may be true that anarchist social movements reflect and perpetuate the axes of power operative in the dominant society – those of the “race, class, gender” trio and more – but that doesn’t mean that anarchists are simply failing. To demand that anarchists always practice what they preach is unreasonable – they preach perfection. So who really cares if our blogger spells *anticapitaliste* wrong, at least *someone* was writing *something* to try to explain what was going on to the *gringos*. While I think the biases and exclusions of “anarchism” are important to consider – hence this work – I also think that to demand the anarchists be perfect in order to be good also reflects and perpetuates the logic of capitalism and the state. To demand that anarchists always be in exactly the *right* amount of solidarity with the *right* categories of people (who must then fit into categories precisely) is itself reflective of fantasies inherent in bureaucratic state planning and corollary academic production: only from a distance can anything seem so neat (can neatness be desired). People must be divided up neatly into “indigenous” and non, various categories of oppression must be fixed and counted, algorithms will be required in order to manage and assess from a distance.<sup>18</sup> This is how governmentality works, not anarchy (Foucault 2009). This is the fantasy of the sovereign who simplifies in order to control (Scott 2005). A fantasy of permanence, related to the imagined permanence of state power itself.

Let’s use my Catalan roommate’s project to illustrate this counterpoint: Sergi, a carpenter from Barcelona, first left Spain at the age of 30 when he came to Oaxaca in 2005 on an exploratory vacation. He had read about Ricardo Flores Magón, knew Magonistas still existed, was sick of the anarchist squat scene back home and used some money he had saved to go on an inspiring visit to Mexico for a year. It so happened that the Oaxaca uprising of 2006 happened while he was there, which was very inspiring indeed. He was drawn in to the fray and developed lasting bonds of friendship with various Oaxacans during the intense period of *communitas* that characterized the temporarily “free” and barricaded city. He left when he ran out of money, but came back a few years later with a used van that he bought and filled with tools in Mexico City.

When Sergi showed up at the indigenous human rights organization with his kit everyone was flabbergasted. Sergi had told them two years before that, if they were interested, he would come back and set up a small carpentry workshop and free school on the premises to teach indigenous youth the basics of building furniture, *artesanía*, and renovation work, and they had said “sure” but figured he would never actually do it. Foreigners propose to come back and engage long-term projects all the time, yet never do. And yet here Sergi was, in the flesh. Perhaps significantly, Sergi does not have a

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<sup>18</sup> Note that in Chapter 9 I analyze both activist and academic praxes of “intersectionality” in these terms.

bourgeois background, and as a carpenter he stood nothing to gain professionally by citing a Third World Volunteer Experience – carpenters are not hired on the basis of establishing a cosmopolitan self the way people from the professional middle class are, they are hired to build shit.

Sergi's project involved unexpected challenges of course. The handful of indigenous youth that first signed up could not interpret a bird's-eye-view diagram, for example, nor knew the geometry required to calculate how to cut a piece of wood into various useful pieces without creating unnecessary scrap. Until then, Sergi had not realized that his carpentry know-how relied on some very specific math skills, nor that the Cartesian plane was something he had been specifically taught and had internalized over the years. There was also the fact that Xochitl was the only woman coming to the shop, because while parents were eager to send their teenage sons to the city to sleep over unsupervised at the centre for a few months to learn carpentry, sending teenage girls to do the same was not as inviting. Xochitl felt that Sergi respected her as a student, but the other men were overbearing and patronized her. Sometimes the eccentric anthropologist roommate who had worked as a builder for a decade came along and gave Xochitl pep talks – "It's true, the guys will just keep you sanding in the corner forever if you don't grab that plane or drill and tell them to stuff it." – but often the roommate was off being an eccentric anthropologist somewhere else.

There was also the fact that the workshop wasn't making any money. Sergi didn't mind putting up the cash for the tools and van, nor did he mind working for free, but the amount of wood required for practicing and building things was a constant expense that he couldn't cover. A market stall in town was arranged to sell the *artesanía* and furniture they were making, partially to provide the students with a complete apprenticeship that covered the whole production and business process, and partly to make a bit of money to cover the wood being used, but the shop was still running at a serious deficit regardless. The students were slow. Sergi wanted the students to understand that if they don't make the stuff within a given amount of time they would never be able to make a living off of it, but neither did he want to be the overbearing foreigner-boss inculcating indigenous youth with capitalist work discipline. He wracked his brain over this problem many an evening over his nightly *mescalito*, and was ultimately at a loss.

One day a 20 year-old German guy showed up out of nowhere – apparently he had gotten out of national military service by opting for a period of "social work" service instead. The NGO he was originally sent to did not have any need for him so he was bumped over to this centre, which didn't have any particular need for him either, except for the fact that Sergi had thrown together a mostly functioning carpentry school that sort of needed an assistant. After months of sitting on his behind being useless at the first NGO, Ben the German was very much looking for something to do. He also happened to be an engineering student – very good at geometry and proficient at all Cartesian planerelated operations; he even had Autocad on his laptop. Ben was also thoroughly cultured in capitalist work discipline, and proceeded to churn

out lampshades, deck chairs, and picture frames at an extremely efficient velocity. For many months, Ben picking up the slack meant that every Saturday the team had lots of stuff to sell at the market to make money back, which meant Sergi could concentrate on pedagogy: the carpentry operations that it makes sense for the beginner to learn first are not necessarily the same operations required to make sellable items by the end of the week.

The story goes on, involving many mishaps, unbalanced budgets, contradictory agendas, and things working out just in time, or not. The centre was once ransacked by agents of the state, throwing everything and everyone into disarray. The van mysteriously disappeared for two weeks once, making it impossible to go buy more wood (it showed up somewhere else two weeks later). Eventually Ben the German was recalled to his country and engineering program. The anthropologist disappeared to Texas because she was running out of money and the Fulbright foundation offered her fifteen grand if she showed up in Austin on the right date. Sergi fell in love, eventually left Oaxaca, and the carpentry shop was no more. It had not become a solid self-perpetuating “grassroots” institution, it never was. The carpentry shop lasted three years, and while everything I have written so far could be brought to bear on why and how this eventuality is not ideal, neither must we consider the carpentry shop a failure. Perhaps only fifteen teenagers learned enough carpentry to later build furniture and knick-knacks all by themselves, instead of a more grandiose 50 or 500, but its still fifteen more than before, and everyone involved learned many practical lessons.

The anarchist world is not a five-year plan, but rather a mess of contingencies. A mess in which everyone makes mistakes, things happen haphazardly, and where people surprise you. It is also necessarily a mess whose effects are necessarily hard to measure. Precisely because anarchists do not seek to affect/effect state power or create formal and permanent organizations, they are inherently “illegible” (see Scott 2005) to the instruments normally used by the state and its “arborescent” institutions (including the academy) to measure, rank, and track people and their activity. In the end it is hard to tell whether or not anarchist projects have “succeeded”. The carpentry shop might flop, but maybe three years later one of the students opens up one of his own; maybe Sergi’s next project works better based on past mistakes; maybe Ben the German starts reading about anarchism when he would not have before. No wonder anarchists like the rhizome so much: Just when one thinks the lilies are under control, out pops one in the middle of the yard. Similarly, who cares if the COMO (or even the APPO) becomes “overrun” with sell-outs and articulated with the state – the women who drop out of the reformist COMO thus realize they have something in common with each other and form new collectives and co-ops of their own (this is, in fact, what happened). The effect of autonomist movements are never fixed as law but are more accurately seen as “ripple effects” (see also Nelson 2003).

Even so, the rhizome obscures as much as it sheds light. Whereas the rhizome is one kind of plant, the network articulates many species together – what anarchists are often tempted to call the “anarchist network” in fact involves, and relies on, many





**Figure 4–2.** Occasionally industrious *güeros* (Ben the German and the Anthropologist)







**Figure 4-3.** Carpentry/craft workshop with children at local daycare, organized by Sergi and Ben the German. These artisanal rhizomatic grasshoppers just might change the world.

people and groups that are not “anarchist” at all: The anarchist world is a mess where the selfmanaged carpentry shop in Oaxaca works out because a random guy shows up to fulfill his duty as a German citizen. The Foro Social Alternativo only works out because nonanarchist *señoras* are hired to cook. Women friends in both Oaxaca and Montreal tell me that they are *libertaria*, committed to anti-capitalist politics, and therefore working with the *militantes*, but: “if I didn’t have my non-political friends and their New Age feel-good crap and just someone else outside to talk to once in a while, I would never be able to survive working with all those macho motherfuckers.” Anarchism, itself, is not autonomous. When “anarchist” projects rely on NGO volunteers, hippie confidantes and hired gendered help, perhaps the alternate metaphor of interdependent species of mushrooms, which co-exist in “patches”, would be appropriate (Tsing 2012; 2015).<sup>19</sup> Ultimately “anarchism” is not a discrete “thing” any more than it is autonomous, but rather a word that serves to articulate diverse (or not so diverse) people and movements together, inaugurating certain social relations. Both Sergi and I were, by 2010, pretty sick of hanging around anarchists *per se*, but like the gender-diverse people who show up at “transgender support groups” even though they would never identify as transgender themselves (see Valentine 2007), Sergi and I met because we both decided to attend an organizing meeting for an anarchist *congreso*, and bonded on account of our similar ambivalent feelings about anarchism. The European activists who sent us a bunch of money to replace the van when we thought it had disappeared did so partially because of their affective ties with Sergi, but partially because the organization we were working with was “Magonista”, and therefore anarchist, and therefore cool. Here “anarchism” is a discourse that brings diverse groups into alliance: Mexican organizations that articulate their politics as “Magonista” articulate well with Spanish collectives that articulate their politics as “anarchist” (because everyone knows Magon himself identified as an anarchist). Collaborating magonistas and anarchists are very different in many ways, but they figure they have enough in common to “co-exist” for a while, and often do just that.

Meanwhile, in Oaxaca and Montreal (and no doubt elsewhere) the word “anarchist” is used very differently, sometimes inaugurating transnational collaborations among movements and collectives that are organizationally and ideologically very different. In Montreal there are many activists who consider themselves and the logic of their collective organizing to be “anarchist” even when their groups are underwritten by universities and non-profits (and tax dollars by extension). In Canada, it is so taken for granted that political projects get money from somewhere beyond the personal pockets of participants that almost anything short of running an electoral campaign or

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<sup>19</sup> Many ideas in Tsing’s essay *Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species* (2012) are developed further in her recent book titled *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (2015), including a proposal to adopt “patches” and “mutualisms” as frameworks to approach “shifting assemblages of humans and nonhumans” (41). While Tsing’s usage is particular, it is amusing to note that another Deleuzian concept – the “assemblage” – appears in thought experiments that may well serve to demystify the “rhizome” itself.



**Figure 4–4.** The anarchist scene as “patches”, wherein collectives overlap. The little dot-people that are in two patches at once would be the *enlaces*/contacts. Note that the patches bordered by double lines are not collectives but other social scenes and institutions with which the anarchist scene itself also overlaps. I have purposely made the Mexican side of the equation opaque by lumping it all together. The asterisk on the edge of the star-shaped *Ici la Otra* patch (sort of) represents my social location in 2006–7.

taking money directly from politicians may be considered an “autonomous” initiative.<sup>20</sup> In Oaxaca, people in the same groups would be considered “*vendidos*” pure and simple. In Mexico, paramilitary fronts and government-run unions (“*los charros*”) aside, the vast majority of political organizations, collectives and co-ops do *not* receive funding, directly or indirectly, from the government. In the language of activists from Montreal of course these would all be considered “anarchist” or at least “autonomist” movements, and yet people in Oaxaca do not use this language – the rare direct reference to “*Autonomía*” (if not anarchy itself) for which the A in SEMILLA stands is part of what makes the ears of North American anarchists perk up, and yet dozens of other initiatives in Oaxaca could also technically identify as “*autónomo*” according to the North Americans’ definition, but would simply never bother using such a word – locally speaking, it would be pretty redundant.

In Oaxaca, the word “*anarquista*” is often reserved for young street punks (otherwise known as “*anarcopunks*”), whereas the broad category of autonomist movements in North America categorized as “anarchist” in ethnographies like Graeber’s (2009) are, in Oaxaca, called by a variety of different names, including “*organizaciones horizontales*” (vs. “*organizaciones verticales*”). Indeed, when Maeckelbergh (2010) adopts “verticals” vs. “horizontal” as the main etic categories of her ethnography, she is both directly and indirectly inspired by the emic ones of Latin American militants, yet is not entirely transparent about this, nor the fact that many of the groups she calls “horizontal” would not necessarily qualify as “*horizontal*” according to Latin American definitions.<sup>21</sup> North American anarchists do have some notion that the vocabulary used

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<sup>20</sup> There certainly exist anarchists in Canada and the United States who refuse monies from every and all government-funded institution, as well as refuse to have bank accounts to put such money in. For example, the Direct Action Network (DAN) of the “anti-globalization” era (see Chapter One) would not work with any institutionally-funded group whatsoever. In general, however, such a stance may be considered “hardline” among many other anarchist-identified activists who don’t mind asking for a few hundred dollars from a campus PIRG discretionary fund, for example.

<sup>21</sup> Participants at the European Social Forum were using the words “horizontal” and “vertical” to distinguish between activist types at least as early as 2003 (personal interview with 2003 ESF participant), whereas the specific word “horizontality” entered the English-speaking activist lexicon around the same time that Sitrin (2006) published *Horizontalism: Voices of Popular Power in Argentina*: “*Horizontalidad* is a word that has come to embody the new social arrangements and principles of organization of these movements in Argentina. As its name suggests, *horizontalidad* implies democratic communication on a level plane and involves – or at last intentionally strives towards – non-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian creation rather than reaction. It is a break with vertical ways of organizing and relating.” (Sitrin 2006, 16). Maeckelbergh (2009) uses “horizontal” and “vertical” as ethnographic categories based largely on the fact that “horizontal”-identified activists in Europe use this dichotomy to refer to themselves vs. their “vertical” Other, but also cites this same passage from Sitrin while offering her own theoretical definition of “horizontality” (68–9). Sitrin (2006) and Maeckelbergh (2009) both apply this concept to a broad swath of social movements, including ones in “the US and Canada, where autonomous groupings are being built on the basis of consensus decision-making, anti-hierarchy, and anti-capitalism” (Sitrin 2006, 15). Their use of the “horizontal” label to refer to diverse activists within this general tendency is understandable – in each place they call themselves something different yet their organizing logics are amenable to one another, and they often do actually collaborate. All of the activists in my

by militants in Latin America is different and vice versa – anyone with some travel experience figures out pretty quickly that in Latin America “*libertario*” is used more or less the same way North Americans use “anarchist” and vice versa, for example. Likewise, a Quebecois anarchist arriving in Italy realizes pretty fast that calling oneself an “anarchist” means identifying as an “insurrectionist anarchist”, and he may call himself “autonomist” during his stay instead.<sup>22</sup> In any case these translations are never precise equivalents, and it remains the case that collaborating activists who believe in organizing independently from government identify each other based on shifting and incongruous vocabularies that do not mean the same thing to everyone involved.

Tsing’s (2005) vocabulary regarding the “friction” of transnational collaboration becomes appropriate here – anarchists, much like the environmentalists Tsing discusses, are necessarily involved in “awkward” engagements, where “words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak” (xi), and where universalisms (anarchism, indigenism, feminism, etc.) are always “unfinished achievements” (7). Anarchism is never complete, autonomous and discrete but, like all “engaged universals”, it shifts and creates “new forces and agents of history” in its path (8). Tsing also notes, as I have myself, that “those who claim to be in touch with the universal are notoriously bad at seeing the limits and exclusions of their knowledge.” (ibid.). In our case, the imagination of the anarchist-network-as-rhizome serves well to obscure such limits and exclusions inasmuch as the anarchist network is decontextualized and analyzed apart from the broader *social* patterns that give it rise, including both the scattering of NGO volunteers, the predictable prerogatives of bourgeois travelers, and the various movements and agendas that are articulated to constitute a smooth and distinct species – “the *anarchist* network” — in spite of themselves.

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study are arguably “horizontal” by the same token. By using the same (exogenous) term for everyone, or by assuming that the (endogenous) meaning of “horizontal” is the same everywhere, however, certain differences are glossed over. When considering how colonial logic bears on the cultural production of the contemporary Left and/or “anarchism” specifically, we might consider how English-speaking leftists look to Latin America to “articulate” new universalist vocabularies as opposed, for example, to imposing North American categories on Latin American social movements (e.g. “Those *piqueteros* are obviously all anarchists, they just don’t know it.”). We must also pay close attention to the particular power English-speaking intellectuals enact when they apply a word (*horizontalidad*) outside of its original context and imbue it with “official” definition by translating it into English and referencing each others’ work, especially if the way the word is applied changes along the way. To Sitrin’s (2006) credit, I understand she struggled with this inevitable problem while deciding on a title for her book (personal interview with mutual friend).

<sup>22</sup> Many more examples abound, e.g. in Greece to call yourself a “leftist” or even “autonomist” implies support of the Left-wing government. Such things are generally explained upon arrival, wherein cosmopolitan locals familiar with the vocabularies of foreigners offer a briefing on category translations.

## The Rhizome in 3D

Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 1986) has been taken to task for implying that the logic of capital is totalizing, unescapable and informs everything we do all the time. It would be a mistake to apply his analysis of capital conversion lock, stock and barrel to all of human interaction (see Swartz 1997). It would also be a mistake to assume that Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of the inherently subversive rhizome (versus the hierarchical "arborescent" system) applies lock, stock, and barrel to anarchist social scenes. However fancy Deleuze and Guattari's thinking may be, and as much as they insist they are working against binary logic itself (which unlike the rhizome, is tree-like or tap-rootlike), one can hardly blame the anarchists for running right out of the park with a brand new binary: cool non-hierarchical rhizomes vs. uncool hierarchical tree-shaped things (Deleuze and Guattari's line of flight is re-territorialized faster than one can say "machinic assemblage", as of course it would be).

The fact is both things are true: The anarchist network is overdetermined by the power relations prevalent in the dominant society, and also departs from the logic of capital in a "rhizomatic" fashion (understood in a multiplicity of ways), wherein dominant structures are not simply "reproduced" in the network. There is an excess in every direction. Freaky things can happen. Indeed we might pile on other trendy ideas from 21<sup>st</sup> century natural philosophy to point out that the network – or rhizome – is a non-linear system, wherein small disturbances have large effects and vice versa. While we can expect patterns at one scale to be partially replicated at another in perpetual feedback loops (the interaction of individuals will affect interaction between activist collectives, which will affect regional networks, transnational networks, and vice versa), the relationship of one scale to another is in no way linear (see Mosko 2005; Strathern 2004).<sup>23</sup>

Today's anarchists are enamoured of chaos and complexity theories almost as much as they are of the rhizome. Their vision of social change happening through non-linear ripple effects finds credence there. Their ideas about the importance of "diversity"

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<sup>23</sup> Conceptual frameworks borrowed from developments in non-linear dynamics may very well serve in the formation of a non-determinist materialist approach to social change (see e.g. Harvey 1994; Byrne 1998). But the impossibility of precise quantification with regard to social phenomena remains a caveat: While one lesson of chaos theory is that the distinction between analogy and homology is itself questionable (Mosko 2005, 26), application of chaos and complexity theories in the realm of the social runs the risk of using chaos as a freewheeling metaphor that does not correspond empirically to chaos and complexity theory as these are applied in biology and other natural sciences (Maeckelbergh 2009; Chesters and Welsh 2006 arguably providing examples). Regarding relations of scale, Strathern (2004) makes allusions to fractal graphics in her discussion of "partial connections" but "fractal self-similarity" does not actually suggest "dynamic non-linearity"; rather, what does is the not-quite-replication of the Mandelbrot set in particular (see Mosko 2005, 25; Gleick 2008, 223–34). In any case, Strathern's (2004) exploration has helped develop my own thinking regarding scale and rhizomes — metaphors and analogies are always useful in making new, fruitful connections, and often constitute a critical step in broad shifts of scientific paradigm (see Mosko 2005, 36–7; Kuhn 1970). I discuss chaos/complexity theory and its mathematics further in Chapter 9.

also find credence there. Maeckelbergh (2009), for example, uses complexity theory to suggest that the anarchist movement itself is a dynamic, complex, and therefore very sustainable and subversive system (see also Chesters and Welsh 2006). Anarchists' hopeful History washed clean of Marxist historical materialism (linear and passé) finds credence there as well: the Australian camping next to me in Cancun was reading *1000 Years of Non-Linear History* (1997), in which Manuel de Landa outlines “a renewed materialist philosophy of history in the tradition of Fernand Braudel, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, while also engaging the critical new understanding of material processes derived from the sciences of dynamics.”<sup>24</sup> Perfect. And why not. Anarchism has always been inspired by natural philosophy, and it makes sense that it be renewed in the same way. What we have here is a 21<sup>st</sup> century example of anarchists tinkering with developments in the natural sciences to argue that the universe is (still) on their side. In fact, insomuch as fractal geometry and non-determinate systems (chaotic Deleuzian rhizomes) are to “post-anarchism” what Euclidean geometry and teleological materialism (triangular Hegelian dialectics) was to classical anarchism, the “post” in “postanarchism” refers largely to a new kind of mathematics glorified by different European philosophers.<sup>25</sup>

All this being said, attention to complexity theory may very well inspire productive thinking around anarchism. For example, thinking about the “avalanche” metaphor as it relates to “punctuated equilibrium” (see Bak and Sneppen 1993) could help resolve the debate between the “insurrectionalist” camp (that is counting on the “event” which will automatically trigger the revolution) and the “prefigurative politics” camp (which concentrates on building alternative socialities that will replace capitalism *sans* major event) that have become polarized – one might say in an “arborescent” fashion – in North America over the past ten years. In the experiment, most grains of sand fall, landing one by one, to slowly accumulate into a cone-shaped pile; at some point one grain falls and an avalanche occurs. In this “critically organized system” one lonely event can change everything *but* the conditions have to be right – again, both things are true. The pitfall here is simply that theories based on the behaviour of sand or plants cannot necessarily be applied to social phenomena lock, stock and barrel either, and what we are often left with are simply metaphors. There is nothing wrong with metaphors *per se* — it may be productive, and thus entirely valid, to think of all societies as sandpiles, all anarchist networks as rhizomes, or indeed all factions of the

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<sup>24</sup> This quote is from de Landa’s overview of the book; see <http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/thousand-yearsnonlinear-history>.

<sup>25</sup> The phrase “post-anarchism” appears to have been coined in 1987 by Hakim Bey in “Post-Anarchism Anarchy” [http://deoxy.org/meme/Post-Anarchism\\_Anarchy](http://deoxy.org/meme/Post-Anarchism_Anarchy), and is now often used, colloquially among activists as well as within academic writing, to refer to anarchist philosophy inspired by the insights of poststructuralism (see e.g. May 1994; Newman 2010).



Left as interdependent mushrooms, but only if we remember that metaphors always obscure at the same time as they reveal.<sup>26</sup> The map is never the territory.

Whereas the rhizome is imagined as smoothly integrated and non-hierarchical, anarchist collectives continually break up, and only some people keep the name. In both Mexico and Montreal, collectives flailing in the throes of death often inspire someone involved to snag the email account, change the password, and start up another similar collective shortly after. In each case, no one who wasn't present beforehand knows that that email is now arriving to a different collective of people, nor why the collective is different, nor what happened to cause the schism, nor who to side with.

Part of the reason our Ici la otra collective got into that sticky mess for sending ten grand to an organization that wasn't necessarily part of the APPO is because a few people in the collaborating organization were riding on the reputation of a previous organization of the same name that was much larger, leading anyone who gets their information on the Internet to think that they had a long unbroken history of solid organizing work with dozens of local communities. Meanwhile, Elizabeth, who left the Ici la otra collective crying as I joined, did not start up her own Zapatista collective. Enrique did not start up a new Colectivo Libertad either. When I got sick of my anarchist roommates and their Rotten Grapefruit Class-Power Cleanses and left that collective house, I did not manage to whip up a new-and-improved seventeen-person housing cooperative down the street where tools were not left rusting in buckets of water. In these scenarios, the rhizome is "broken, shattered at a given spot" and does *not* "start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines"; in these scenarios, Elizabeth, Enrique and I are lilies wilting in plastic bags on sidewalks. It is important to consider who these bagged lilies tend to be. In our Ici la otra collective a gendered pattern is most obvious, and one might wonder what this means for the "network" as a whole. One could argue that our collective itself was small and therefore negligible, but so many drops make up an ocean. Furthermore, in this non-linear system one drop may stir up an ocean. In all of our work, we privileged solidarity with activists and organizations that did not engage seriously with gender as a system of domination, and this no doubt affects the politics of the network itself. We have also already seen some ways in which colonial logic and racism are replicated in the anarchist social scene, ranging from the most obvious to the most covert and therefore insidious. Meanwhile, a university-educated anarchist elite prides itself on its no-borders cosmopolitanism, misrecognizing economic power, the accrual of cultural capital, and the bourgeois longing for authenticity as "transnational solidarity". Anarchism can be brought to articulate with the prerogatives of capital as well as anti-capitalism.

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<sup>26</sup> See fn. 20 regarding metaphor in relation to chaos and complexity theories and the role of metaphor in creative thinking; see also Sontag's classic work (2001) regarding how metaphors obscure at the same time as they reveal, as well as the seminal work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) on conceptual metaphors in the English language; note that three of the key metaphors they analyze are: "life is a journey", "love is war", and "social organizations are plants".

None of this is suggested by two-dimensional images of happy, resilient and flexible rhizomes, or the imaginary of “network” in general. Figure 4–1 suggests the rhizome is not an “arborescent system with centers of significance and subjectification” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 16) but rather an “acentred” system wherein “communication runs from any neighbor to any other, the stems or channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment.” (17). Anyone who suggests that this well-captures the anarchist network is proceeding in poor faith. Perhaps the fact that it is difficult to measure the “success” of anarchist projects makes it all too easy to say they are successful. Perhaps universityeducated anarchist writers like to misrecognize their own vested interests. Perhaps I am the first person to write on the topic who could never afford to spend summers having Third World Volunteer Experiences.

Whatever the reason, to me it is entirely clear that the anarchist network most certainly has centers of significance and is not a homogenous root system of one sort of plant, but rather a network of differently positioned subjects who are not interchangeable, nor defined only by their state at a given moment, and wherein pre-existing circumstances largely determine who gets to be a stem or a channel. Thus Figure 4–1 should perhaps be modified in the following way, wherein “nodes” are proportionately enlarged to reflect their greater influence depending on how “densely connected” they are. If the model were also rendered in three dimensions, wherein the larger, more “connected” nodes are portrayed on top, the spatial representation could better convey the power hierarchy within the network itself in ways that two-dimensional pictures of the “rhizome” cannot.

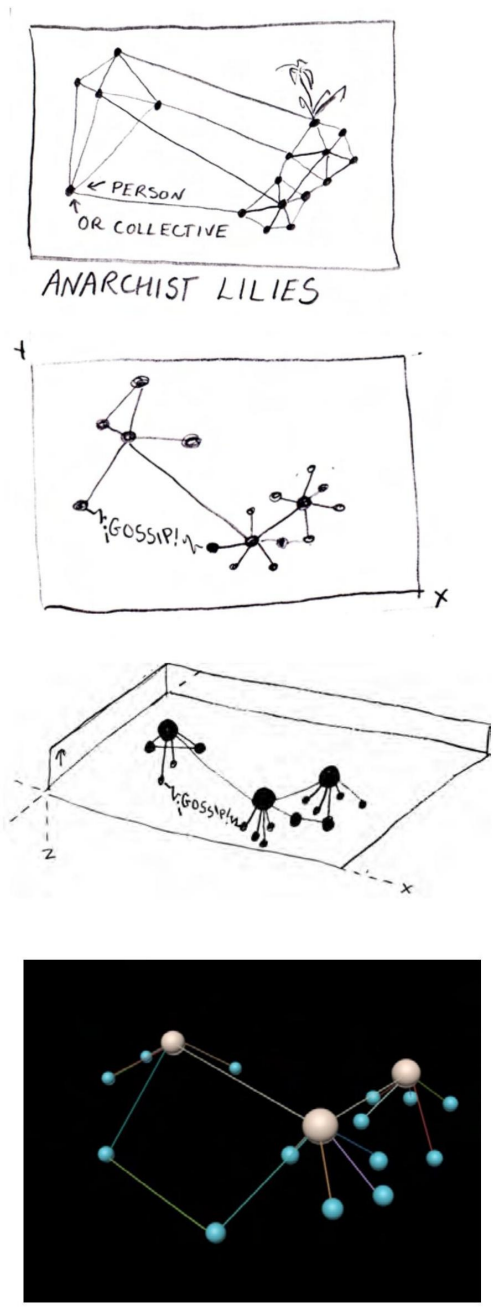


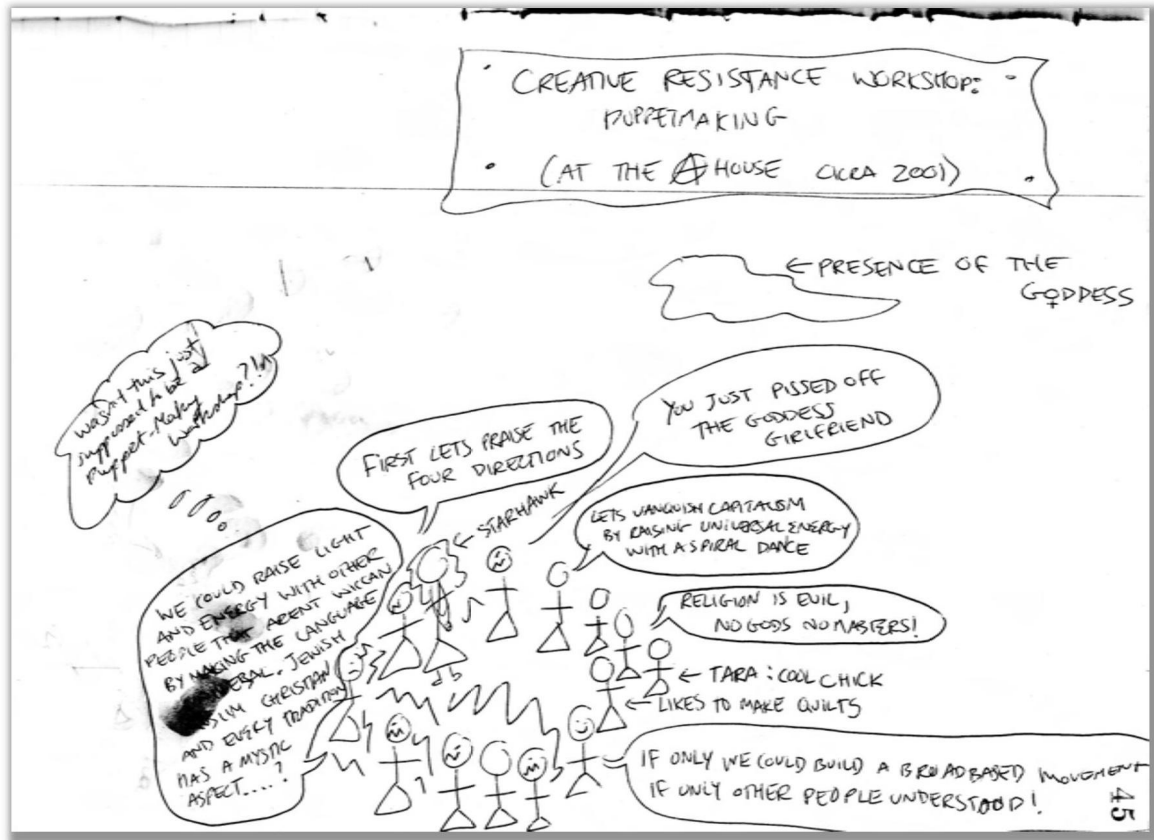
Fig. 4-5. The rhizome in 3D

# Chapter 5 – Articulating Anarchafeminism

At that same “Creative Resistance” workshop leading up to the FTAA summit in 2001, where the Ya Basta guys popped in to say that we should come glue their foam weapons together because we “weren’t doing anything”, I also said something that inspired a symphony of groans: When the group was discussing the wording of banners, statements and call-out invitations, I ventured to say that referencing the “goddess” only, as opposed to “god” as well, would have an insularizing effect — “or, if we don’t want to say God” I said, “Why not something more general like ‘divinity’ or ‘creation’? If we are about basing our resistance in spirituality, why not appeal to all those religious people who do so? I used to be into the Goddess in high school and I get it, but this is not speaking to me now.” As the last sentence came tumbling out of my mouth I knew I had blown it, but it was even worse than I thought. Apparently everyone in the room except for me was crashing at that house all weekend because some important witch guru named “Starhawk” was visiting from California and staying there too, and apparently the whole point of that “Creative Resistance” workshop was to plan a specifically pagan-feminist action.<sup>1</sup> They failed to put that part on the flyer. At the time I felt embarrassed and shut right up – I had clearly stepped in a pile of shit by implying that the religious feelings of every woman in the room amounted to an immature teenage obsession. In the intervening 15 years, however, I have often thought about what I would have liked to say at that moment: “It’s one thing – and totally fine – to get together with one’s neo-pagan feminist friends and plan a goddess ritual action, it’s quite another to host a public workshop for women to plan “creative resistance” and assume that everyone who shows up will want to march under the banner of their Goddess, and then act like if they don’t it’s because they aren’t *really* feminist.” There.

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<sup>1</sup> Starhawk is respected as matriarch-guru of the Reclaiming Tradition, the political current of neopaganism practiced by the majority of anarchafeminist pagan activists during the anti-globalization movement; from the Reclaiming Principles of Unity, “We know that everyone can do the life-changing, world-renewing work of magic, the art of changing consciousness at will. We strive to teach in ways and practice in ways that foster personal and collective empowerment, to model shared power and to open leadership roles to all. We make decisions by consensus, and balance individual autonomy with social responsibility.” (Reclaiming 1997). See also my Chapter 3, fn. 2, and Graeber (2009, 42–7, 220). Starhawk’s *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) was a favorite within this circle of friends (and “affinity group”) that year.



**Figure 5–1.** “Early draft”, circa 2005. My somewhat-obscured word-balloon should read: “We could raise light and energy with other people that aren’t Wiccan by making the language universal. Jewish, Muslim, Christian and every tradition has a mystic aspect?”. Meanwhile my thought -making workshop?” -balloon reads: “Wasn’t this just supposed to be a puppet

Some anarchafeminist women may be more open to spirituality than their Ya Basta roommates, but that doesn't mean that anarchafeminists are the natural allies of all women, including women of colour, indigenous women like Magdalena, and myself. Middle class anarchafeminists of the First World operate with all the same misrecognized interests as First World activists in general. Anarchist women, like their male counterparts, tend to juggle the multiple discourses of "taking lead" from anarchism and "taking lead" from "indigenous resistance struggles" and/or "movements in the global south", which are positions that can sometimes contradict one another. Five years later, as mentioned in Chapter 2, anarchafeminist punk women from Montreal treated Valeria from the Ici la otra collective condescendingly because of her feminine gender presentation, which discouraged her from joining their projects, and made it easier to believe her male Mexican friends when they said that all local feminists were assholes.

Meanwhile, down in Mexico, I have seen anarchafeminists from Spain give presentations on the "*post-porno*" movement back home that succeeded only in offending everyone, and then treat local anarchist women as if they are suffering "false consciousness" for being put-off by post-porno instead of inspired by it.<sup>2</sup> Such Mexican women are obviously "uptight Catholics who haven't liberated themselves". Maybe. Or maybe women living in a country saturated with femicide, dirty paramilitary war, rape, torture, and media that sensationalizes all this violence by publishing photos of victims of domestic and sexual violence, as well as dismembered limbs and new piles of decapitated bodies every single day, may find it somewhat difficult to see how mock-ups of women raping men with dildos is going to harbor a social revolution.

While in Mexico I have also seen anarchist women from the United States tell (butchy) lesbians that they are "really" transgender, or should identify as "queer" instead of "lesbian". Even if "queer" were not an awkward foreign word, why should U.S. Americans get to tell Mexican women what they "really" are? Sometimes the very same "queer" foreigner women will acknowledge the imperialist history of feminism even as they go about imposing North American trans\*/queer categorical discourse south of the borders without a second thought – what's the deal?

Sometimes anarchafeminists' priorities can border on the surreal. One time I showed up at a collective house in D.F. and was informed by a team of foreigner anarchafeminists that we would be spending the weekend crawling around the house catching cockroaches in plastic bags. A pile of transparent cockroach balloons was already accumulating in the corner: it was important to fill the plastic bags up with air so that the cockroaches could breathe until they would be released in the park. The cockroach liberation was to be done at two in the morning because of the by-law against releasing plague in public areas. Of course if the women cared so much about cockroaches living unmolested in their natural habitat they should have just left them in the house. A

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding *postporno* see Llopis (2010); see also Preciado (2000) at <http://totalartjournal.com/archives/1402/the-contra-sexual-manifesto/>

cockroach left in a park is going to find the nearest kitchen – hence the bylaw. As if cockroaches eat grass! I managed to keep my mouth shut this time, and even succeeded in gently placing two cockroaches into temporary bubble homes while keeping a straight face, but the whole time I was promising myself to write a sarcastic paragraph about it all even though it might hurt their feelings. They were very kind to offer me hospitality, roaches or not.

It would be very easy to argue that anarchist women of the First World are just another example of offensive white feminists. It's an obvious argument, and the thing to do. It's how a white woman academic such as myself earns bonus points today, and something that anarchist men of every colour would appreciate very much: When anarchist men bumble around the Third World doing offensive things they call it "transnational solidarity" whereas when women do the same they call it "imperialism", and of course more reasons to justify this double-standard are always welcome. Indeed, the easiest thing to do would be to sit back and simply scold anarchafeminists of the North by repeating the now banal refrain that they should be "more sensitive to difference", cite Chandra Mohanty's famous essay *Under Western Eyes* (1984), and move on. Instead I will take the road less traveled by, and proceed to focus on encounters between anarchafeminist foreigners and Mexican anarchist women that are less cut and dry. In a political climate whereby white anarchist men so easily slam white women for being "racist feminists" and anarchist men of colour slam women of colour for the same, this appears the more responsible thing to do. All the more so, because this political climate is not unique to the anarchist scene. Chandra Mohanty (2003) herself felt compelled to publish a qualification – "I am misread when I am interpreted as being against all forms of generalization and as arguing for difference over commonalities." (225); and, "[m]y central commitment is to build connections between feminist scholarship and political organizing", wherein "cross-national feminist solidarity" and "anti-capitalist transnational feminist practice" are "necessities" (230). It is in this vein that I present two scenarios below that do not fit easily into the accepted narrative regarding the "imposition" of feminism, and rather evoke the possibility of confluence and collaboration across difference, however fraught this terrain may be.

One story refers to diverse women organizing in the "public sphere" of an anarchist congress in Mexico City, while the other recounts an informal argument that occurred in the process of everyday life, in this case in a bar, where the white woman present is myself. Neither of these stories is meant to serve as a "model" for solidarity, nor are they meant to suggest that white feminists are not really racist after all, but they are meant to complicate simplistic narratives (of the same) in a constructive way. These stories also serve to illustrate anarchism as a flexible discourse, one that serves to articulate diverse ideas and discourses together, as suggested in the last chapter.

While anarchism carries with it heavy historical baggage that inflects its usage and deployment, anarchism's nominal value of being "against all forms of domination" does allow it to be mobilized in a variety of ways, some less traditional than others. In this chapter we see how anarchism functions as a rhetorical space as much as a

fixed discourse, and how activist women occupy this rhetorical space to articulate the importance of feminism itself.

## The Anarchist Congress, D.F., Mexico, 2011

The two Spanish sisters living in our collective house in Oaxaca wanted to go to the “First National Anarchist Congress” (*Primer congreso nacional anarquista*) in Mexico City that spring, and I did too. On the six-hour bus ride I heard a deluxe version of the Mambo story, the most extended-play version to date. The Mambo was a womenonly anarchafeminist squat in Barcelona that was totally awesome, until it exploded and blasted disillusioned anarchist chicks and their deluxe Mambo stories to the four corners of Latin America. Apparently post-porno mock-ups of women raping men with dildos were controversial in Barcelona too. Apparently “race was an issue”. That’s the nutshell version. Mónica wanted to write the longer one but was nervous to do it because it was so contentious, and because there were so many other people that “knew more” about it, who “had their Masters in anthropology already” or “wrote books”. Mónica never felt entirely comfortable in *los movimientos* in the first place. It was hard integrating, she said, because everyone saw her as “*barrio*” (from “the hood”), and associated her with sketchy drug-addict skids. Also the immigrant neighborhood where she grew up was Spanish-speaking – not Catalán – and at first she did not speak enough Catalán to follow along when everyone lapsed into their first language. At one point she ended up dating an activist guy and got sort of “in”, but it turned out he was the ex of some star activist chick who was in the process of banishing him from the scene, so that didn’t work out very well. All of this sounded very familiar.

We arrived at the *congreso* four hours late but so did everyone else so it was okay. We were to divide into *mesas* (“roundtables”) based on theme – Anarchism and the Punk Movement, Anarchism and Art, Animal Liberation, Insurrectionalism, Anarchofeminism, and so on (see Figure 5–1). The next day was to be a *plenaria* (plenary session) where each *mesa* was to present a summary of our discussion, along with concrete proposals for organizing, to everyone else there. Organizers had picked *mesa* categories ahead of time, but of course at an anarchist *congreso* these things are only guidelines. When we all got together some *mesas* were renamed, dropped, or added.

Mónica, Beatriz and I experimented briefly with the idea of each going to separate *mesas* and then filling each other in, but ultimately we all went to the *mesa anarcofeminista* because that’s what we felt like doing. When we walked in the room was still filling up, but soon we had over 30 people and one woman piped up saying “Let’s start with a go-around (*ronda*)”.

The first woman that spoke said that her anarchist husband recently tried to beat her up and that’s why she came. Everyone nodded and rolled their eyes. The only two men who showed up said they were interested in learning about “the women’s point of view” and “what feminism could bring to anarchism”. Most women took the go-around



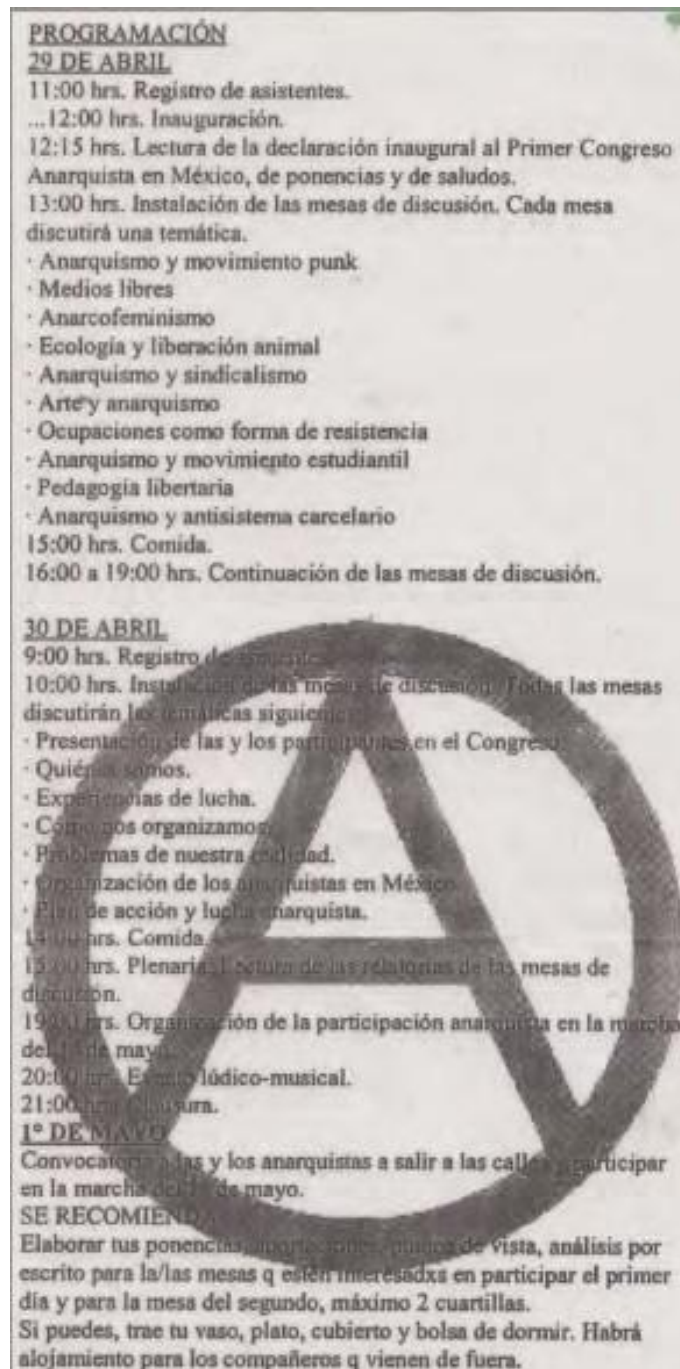
as an opportunity to explain how they got into anarchism, feminism, or both; in many cases one had led to the other: “My case is complicated, I started as a feminist but the women killed my enthusiasm (*me desanimaron*), they talk a lot but they’re deceptive, they betray you (*casi traicionan*), so I dropped out of the feminist collective and later became an anarchist...but now I want to get back into feminism.”

Each woman also took the opportunity to say what collectives they were in and what projects they were working on – some had worked with imprisoned women guerrillas in Colombia for the past three years, some had just formed a *circulo de estudios* (“reading circle”) to study de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (2000 [1949]) for the first time. As usual there were a few people who did not hail from any particular collective and, as usual, said so rather apologetically, insisting they were really interested in the theme: “It drives me mad that these guys say they are anti-authoritarian but then they act authoritarian!”

Some of the women were not in anarchist collectives, they explained, but their boyfriends were. Some women there – ten out of thirty-five – were *extranjeras* (foreigners) from Spain, Argentina, and Colombia, whereas I was the only one whose first language was not Spanish. Some women there were only seventeen years old and brought their kids with them, whereas the oldest women there were not quite forty. Most participants were twenty-something university students, which made sense as the congress took place on a university campus.

The last woman to speak in the go-around said that she wanted to present a request (*una demanda*) at the *plenaria* the next day: the father of her kid, who hits her, was right there at the *congreso*, and it’s not okay that he gets to be the cool anarchist while she is afraid to show up. She ended her nervous speech by pleading with us to “not see it as a personal problem”. We paused, looking around the room at each other for cues as to how to proceed, when the woman who had suggested the go-around (and was fastbecoming *de facto* facilitator) said, “She wrote to us beforehand [nodding to the woman], let’s see what we can do, perhaps we can ask tomorrow morning if we can have space during the *plenaria* to make a denunciation (*denuncia*)? This is an official proposal, what should we do? And how should we organize the rest of the talk (*charla*) this afternoon?” Two different women suggested that we talk about the relationship between anarchism and feminism and ways we can organize together (*vehincularnos*) first, making sure to leave enough time for the “case” later. Everyone nodded, most women making sure to offer Azucena, the woman with the *demanda*, a reassuring glance.

The first woman to speak began by saying that we must differentiate between *feminismo* and *hiembrismo* (that inverse of *machismo* that the Ici la otra guys had complained so much about) and went on to explain that for her, radical feminism advances the idea (*plantea*) that we must eliminate all structures of masculine domination. She went on to explain that “egalitarian democracy is not just about having 50/50 representation, which doesn’t make sure that there will be equal participation”, and finished by saying that in the anarchist movement there are also *machistas* that



**Figure 5–2.** Excerpt from *congreso* pamphlet schedule distributed on the first day. Most of this stuff happened mostly when it was planned. More stuff was collectively planned and invented on the spot too. This is the idea. This is *autogestión*/ selfmanagement.

Note guidelines at the bottom (“SE RECOMIENDA”): “Elaborate your presentations, contributions, points of view and analysis in writing for the *mesas*...If you can, bring a cup, plate, cutlery, blanket and a sleeping bag. There will be lodging for comrades who are coming from out of town.”

don't recognize that women are also "living beings": "Sometimes they say 'es México, soy machista', I mean, give me a fucking break (*osea no chingues*)".

"Yes they focus more on capitalism...but we have to recognize that the patriarchy is interrelated with the system but also functions alone, before capitalism it existed in many places...Meanwhile in my feminist collective, not everyone is an anarchist, we have to advance (*plantea*) *feminismo libertario*, because the patriarchal system is woven together with the capitalist system and the state and they support each other."

The rest of the women continued, picking up the threads that had been started – many complained about the logic of *cuotas*, a "discourse of the government" which is replicated in the anarchists' logic of "50/50 participation" in projects, and which many women present linked with "academic feminism". "It is important to question this academic notion of 'género'," they said, gesturing the scare-quotes. (In Spanish the word *género* doesn't mean the English "gender", and many translated academic texts use "*género*" or even "gender" in quotations, as they do with "queer" as well.) As was the case in the feminist reading circle I was part of in Oaxaca at the same time, some women at the *congreso* loosely associated a certain jumble of Judith Butler, French psychoanalytic feminism, and queer theory with a "deradicalized feminism" that was observed to be suspiciously concomitant with the Mexican state's turn toward "gender equality" (*equidad de género*) and its logic of *cuotas* under Vicente Fox, the previous Mexican president.

Many women also discussed the problem of sexist lefties (*machistas de izquierda*) and the double-standard — within the movement and without — wherein "if the men sleep with lots of women they are bad-asses (*chingones*) whereas if I go out with lots of guys I'm a slut (*puta*)". We also spent a good fifteen minutes talking about how it's impossible to swear without being misogynist – in Mexico this is pretty much the case.<sup>3</sup> There was also much talk about how we have to challenge the idea that women's inferiority resides in biology – one woman mentioned an article she had read recently that explained how "bodies vary so much that the differences between one man and another, and one woman and another, are bigger than the differences between men and women in general, so the whole argument about biology is crap". Someone pointed out that "it is not that women have a natural 'place' because of their role in reproduction, but rather that this dominant discourse about this 'place' being 'natural' is used to control and manipulate women *as* reproducers". The next woman to speak clearly knew her Engels (2010 [1893]): "Yes, women are manipulated to create profit for men....after all, it is with the advent of private property that women come to provide surplus value for men..."

At this point a guy who had been standing in the doorway for less than two minutes jumped in, asking if he can share "a brief word". The women in the room all groaned

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<sup>3</sup> Common vulgarities in Mexican primarily include variations within the "*chingar*" word family (*chingar* meaning rape/sexual violation, e.g. "*Chinga tu madre*", "*chingadera*") and the "*puta*" word family (*puta* meaning whore or slut, e.g. "*hijo de puta*", "*putazo*").

and fidgeted while a handful yelled out that “there is a speakers list, everyone has to wait their turn!”. The guy waved his hand at us exasperatedly and walked off. After a brief pause someone said, “hey, can someone make a speakers’ list?” and we laughed. We had not been working with a speakers’ list, but rather successfully improvising. Ever since the first *ronda* the 35 of us were all just speaking if we felt like it, and if two women started speaking at the same time one would say “go ahead” to the other and the rest of us would smile or nod at the women who stepped back – she should be reassured that she will get to speak next. Every so often many people would chime in at once, at which point a random person would call out their names in a certain order, or point at them if their names weren’t known, at which point the women would say their names in order themselves. If a new woman started to pipe up before that list was finished then a bunch of us would always say “Hey there’s still people waiting!”

This is very different than working with a “speakers’ list” at home, which involves a person with official status who keeps an official list, and sometimes has an official mandate to “stack” the list to make sure enough women, people of colour, or gender-variant people get to speak, and who is the only one officially authorized to say “Hey there is someone waiting!” Neither does our approach count as a “speakers’ list” in Mexico – we simply hadn’t been writing anything down whatsoever. What changed after the interruption was that one woman kept a written list whenever a bunch of names were called out in order. But in fact it is easier for each woman to remember that her name was called out after “Maria” and before “Elsa”, and thus to know she should speak as soon as Maria is done, than it is for one woman alone to keep track of everything, including what everyone’s name is, even if she has a pen and paper. So we kept collectively facilitating as before, but now with a half-assed document to wave at the next guy who thought he should be able to speak immediately upon arrival without having any notion of our conversation.

The next person on the “list” to speak was one of the two men present, who said “It’s that the man thinks he is the boss – the ‘man-boss’ – it’s a stupid instinct, and in anarchy we will continue to have this problem...My dad treats my mom like shit, I see it, sometimes I tell her off – ‘you don’t have to take this, you’re free man! (*jestas libre wey!*)”

“And why don’t you tell your *Dad* off?” advised everyone else in unison.

“Well...I have tried! I have spoken to him, but also I think that women can’t keep permitting this pattern, they have to do something because not many men think about these things, ‘I come first’ is what they think, stuck in their anarchist mentality (*en su pedo de anarquismo*), like gender egalitarianism is for later, for the future.” The man sarcastically struck a pose in imitation of the famous Thinker, chin resting on hand, and said “This is what they are like — ‘Gee I’ll have to think about that, whatever...’, and then put it out of mind.” The women nodded.

“We have to break patterns in how we relate in life in general, in everyday life, this is the relationship between anarchism and feminism...sometimes we permit all these lightweight abuses but this is no good” said the next woman.

“In Barcelona we are all feminists, y’know? There everyone talks the talk (*todos manejan el discurso*), it’s accepted and no one feels they can say otherwise, but in practice everything is still the same.”

“Yes in Spain it’s like...Sometimes people think the Spanish guys are not as bad because they can rattle off all the reasons why they are feminists and appear to have their shit together, but it’s the same crap – we end up in this double-struggle, fighting the system and fighting our own *compañeros*, it’s so draining, anyway it got to the point where I don’t even work in mixed groups anymore, I mean fuck it...”

“Yes I think we should work more in *grupos no-mixtos*, but then the men say we are ‘shutting ourselves in’ in order to ‘fuck them over’. They talk all about ‘autonomy’ when it comes to ever other struggle but when it comes to women? Ha! Forget it! There always has to be at least one man present to ‘legitimize’ the affair.”

I was the next to speak and used my turn to elaborate on what I had just heard — “yeah, when it comes to everything else its all about ‘solidarity’ – solidarity with the *indígenas*, solidarity with the workers and the animals and the migrants, truly endless solidarity, but as soon as its *women* we’re talking about ‘solidarity’ stops being the key word and all of a sudden the key concept is ‘autonomy’, in the sense that ‘it’s important for the struggle to be led by those most affected’ and so women ‘should organize autonomously’, which is basically a fancy way for men to justify not paying attention to male domination using anarchist discourse *itself*...And if it wasn’t obvious already, the disingenuous use of this ‘autonomy’ concept becomes all too clear when – as you say – we actually go ahead and *do* it and all of a sudden ‘women’s autonomous organization’ is not the right phrase, being replaced with ‘feminazi witch-fest’ or whatever...”

“Yes they call us feminazis, that’s what they do...” said a few women in response, and the dicussion soon turned to whether we should try to teach men about feminism: “We should also...I mean it shouldn’t be all our responsibility but we also have to help teach them, otherwise how will they...?”

“We should organize workshops for men...”

“They *don’t show up* though, I mean look here today, men are invited to this *mesa* and look, only two showed up! Fuck it...”

At this point one of the guys suggested that “what’s important is to destroy individualist feminism because anarchafeminism is social feminism, and to pursue social feminism we have to destroy the state.”

“Anarchafeminism is not just about the state, its about social relations in all fields!” The other guy in the room seemed to get it:

“Yes...us men, we have these habits, like when we talk to each other we talk about interesting things but when we talk to women its just about sex, sometimes they respond so...or otherwise we just treat her like ‘the girlfriend of so-and-so’...”

“Anyway, speaking to both points”, said the next woman, “I would say that yes, it’s true we don’t want to isolate ourselves by working alone, in the sense that then the men don’t have to think about it, but even if we continue to work in mixed collectives we also need a non-mixed space to talk. Sometimes our boyfriends are *in* the mixed

collective with us, and so we can't talk there...In the last collective I was in, there wasn't even space for the women *in* it to talk to each other alone, if we so much as tried they call us malicious gossips!" Right. The conversation about the pros and cons of working in *grupos no-mixtos* went on for some time. Everyone was generally frustrated about the double-bind where we either work alone and get nailed for being exclusive man-hating *hiembristas*, or try to work with men and organize workshops for them which feels like a waste of energy – a fourth shift on top of the “triple duty” the working activist mother already has. It is painful and useless like “banging our heads against a wall” because they don't change anything anyway, and if you get frustrated they just blame you for not teaching them properly. The conversation finally changed topic when someone said “We should really talk about the feminicides in Juárez, we haven't talked about femicide at all...”

“Yes! And we should also talk about the femicide within the movement! Let's not forget Mary and Xochitl...”. Xochitl was an anarchist woman in D.F. until her activist boyfriend stabbed her multiple times and killed her. Mary, I had heard more about – her whiteness didn't save her life but it made her a very interesting story. Mary was a young American woman who was volunteering at a Magonista organization in Oaxaca until she was raped, killed, mutilated and set on fire, apparently by a punk guy that she met at an anarchist squat space. They had gone camping. When she first disappeared the Magonista organization and some other lefty groups in Oaxaca published verbose *denuncias* of such political repression in Mexico — repression that is so bad that “even foreigners can't do political work without being followed and killed by police”. When it was found out that the guy who killed her wasn't a cop but a comrade, the Internet went silent. The line in the commercial media to the effect that “some *extranjera* took too many mushrooms and things got out of hand” was the only story to be found. In writing, anyway.

In hushed voices other stories traveled. Dozens of versions. There was the one where the guy got caught because he was bragging about it drunk one day, and the other guys in the bar beat him up. There was the one where his own friends figured out it must be him so held him down, attached clamps to his balls, and electrocuted him for a while – Mary was “*de la banda*” (one of the gang), after all. In every story men exacted vengeance with the help of violence and torture. Whether or not they were true, these cautionary tales replete with bloody details and the smell of singed pubic hair were significant: A warning to anyone who might try the same? Inspired, perhaps, by so much sensational paramilitary narco-violence and its technology of terror? A good show for anyone who might say that activist men don't take this kind of thing seriously? Mirroring the Mexican rule of law at the grandest scale, sensational acts of revenge by manly-men took the place of any concerted structural initiative. Mirroring the tabloid news – called *la nota roja* (“the red review”) for its bloody colour – sensational close-ups of tortured bodies took the place of open discussion about the issue, pattern, context, cause and effect of such violence. The analogy only goes so far – I do not write in fear of being dismembered by paramilitary cartels, but in the anarchist public sphere

silence about violence is imposed as well. After all, if we anarchist women say anything about stories such as Mary's or Xochitl's we are seen to be giving the police an excuse to raid anarchist squats, therefore being imperialist feminists or *agents provocateurs* working for the government or both.<sup>4</sup> Personally, I am sick of being called a racist or a spy for talking about rape, so I keep deleting this paragraph. And then putting it back in. As the women at the *congreso* said, the idea that it is our responsibility to protect a social movement that protects our aggressors is absurd – if anarchist guys don't want us citing examples of rapes and beatings and murders that could justify police violence in their direction, then perhaps they should work harder at making sure their anarchist comrades don't provide us with any such examples.

The depressing conversation about feminicide in the movement and how we can't talk about it was cut short by a long-overdue dinner break, and when we reconvened it was time to talk action. Our *de facto* facilitator had been keeping a list of proposals that had come up during our earlier conversation: self-defense workshops, writing a manifesto, art installations, workshops for men, making a list of women attacked by anarchists to post up at the *congreso*, and so on. We decided that we would need to meet again in order to plan out all of these ideas, because time was running out and as the facilitator reminded us, we hadn't talked about Azucena's *demanda* yet — “Azu has a draft of her *denuncia* written out, you wanna go ahead and read it Azu?”

“Well okay, I am going to make this *denuncia* because it doesn't seem coherent to me that here he is all talking about ‘anarchy’, and saying its repression when a cop beats someone up in a demonstration but not when a man hits a woman, and then if you talk about it they just call it gossip, like personal troubles that you should keep to yourself...And I mean I have to be *congruente* myself, I'm anarchofeminist and meanwhile putting up with violence? Then everyone says I am a hypocrite!”

“I think its important the *denuncia* is collective, so as to not put you at risk, no?”

“Azu and I have already talked about her safety”, said the *de facto* facilitator, “she has decided she is going to do this and we should just help her with whatever she needs.” “Yeah I mean about your security, what are you going to do? Did you break up? Do you live with him? Maybe not mention his name?”

Everyone started shaking their heads and waving their fingers back and forth: “If this is what she has decided to do then we should not question it!”

“Yeah maybe she'll be at risk but she's *already* at risk, I mean its not as if she is safe with her aggressor here.”

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<sup>4</sup> Sensational examples abound. The same week as the *congreso* my Spanish girlfriends and I went to an event about the “*caso bombas*” (bomb case) in Chile: At the time, members of a long-standing anarchist squat in Santiago were being rounded up and persecuted as terrorists because one participant had allegedly put an explosive device in an (empty) automatic bank machine. One of these squat members apparently stabbed and killed his girlfriend that same year, and local activist women were encouraged to say nothing lest it give the police further “excuse” to arrest this anarchist and others. My friends and I were disturbed to see that this aspect of the “*caso bombas*” was not discussed whatsoever at the event we attended.

“We should make a support structure, a telephone tree, and collect some money even...”

“Yes and we will say that if anything happens to Azu then we will hold him responsible!”

“We will say his name but make clear that its one example of a broader phenomenon so it doesn’t appear like ‘revenge’ like they always say, like towards one person in particular, you know, we’ll say there are many more and we have all suffered, stuff like that.”

At this point one of the guys said that, “In any case its risky, the men know guys that do the same thing, and they know they are guilty too, and they wont want to be under a microscope themselves...if women do this they always say they are *sanjuaneras* [unnecessarily punishing].”

“We should mention other names, specific names!”

“Will they even let us finish? Will everyone at the *plenaria* start whistling?” (Whistling over an unwelcome speech is a common tactic in Mexico.)

“Well, before they would have whistled and yelled us off stage, but not now, now there is a history of *denuncia*...”

“Let’s brainstorm...Let’s draft the statement of support to go with Azu’s *demanda*, we don’t have much time.”

“Yes...and you know I have seen this stuff come up in other contexts, like in even more delicate situations, like in a Zapatista collective that I was in one woman accused a local Zapatista guy, and everyone said it was just a misunderstanding due to ‘culture shock’ and got angry with her for ‘dividing’ everyone. This is why we need to come up with a specific solution, or something in particular we are asking for, because otherwise they will say it’s just to divide...”

“Yes what do we want as a result?”

“If he wants to say something after it’s fine”, said Azu, “let him speak if he wants...”

“Like, to ask forgiveness?”

“No, because this is the pattern of abuse anyway, but I mean let him speak, if he wants, I am not saying he should not be able to speak...”

“And what is it that you want afterwards?”

“I want him to speak to me quietly when he talks...we have kids together so we have to talk.”

“Oh my! Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Post-*denuncia* is the most dangerous time, remember...”

“Someone should accompany you after the *congreso*, for a while, you should not be alone.”

“I’m not sure she knows what she is going.”

“I think she knows very well what she is doing.”

“But how can we protect her? Those of us that don’t even live here?”

“Look there’s a *compañero* who’s beating her up and we have to do something...”

“Do you want him to have to leave the *congreso*?”



“Well yeah...”

“The problem with that is that if we say that abusers have to leave or can’t come in then we wouldn’t be able to let *anyone* in!”

“For me its pretty clear that if my aggressor is around he’s got to go”, said Azu, “let them go and better themselves, and if saying they have to leave means 40 people have to leave then fine!”

“Then they say, ‘But who will make the revolution?’ it’s always the same...”

At this point some of the women suggested breaking into two groups, one that would make Bristol-board signs with markers to put up around the *congreso* and to hold up in front of the crowd the next day during our presentation, and one that would draft the statement of support. We had decided that to ask for space for the *denuncia* the next morning wouldn’t work, and were now planning to use our *plenaria* slot to mount the *denuncia*. We were only halfway through both projects when we realized it was almost ten o’clock at night. All the other *mesas* were long gone.

We were still finishing up the statement at four o’clock the next afternoon, with only a half hour until it was our turn to speak. The facilitator from the day before was typing like mad, having shooed away the writing team for the sake of efficiency. Others were scrambling around looking for a printer cable. The rest of us were smoothing out all of the crucial details with ten minutes to go: “We need a volunteer to read this out, who feels up to it?” “Should we all stand in front with the posters?” “Should we all go on stage with Azu?” “How are we going to do this?”

There were at least four conversations going on at once. Someone was counting heads. It was decided that two women should accompany Azu on stage, one of which would read the statement of support when Azu was done. The rest of the women would stand in front of the stage, just below it, facing the crowd, each holding a poster. I said that I thought that it would be best if the women who accompany Azu were Mexican, at which point everyone burst out laughing, saying “Of course!” My first reaction was embarrassment, and piled on top of a lot of anxiety, it was enough to make my eyes well up with tears. Audre Lorde (1997) came to mind, and I tried my best to discreetly choke them back.<sup>5</sup> The women clued me into the conversation that had happened a few moments before, which I had clearly missed: “You *extranjeritas* will not go up there because you know what the guys will say, they’ll say that you have ‘come to conquer them’! You will all hold posters at the bottom, well, if you feel comfortable with that, or take video from the crowd...”. Perfect. “Should we do something to relax before we go up there?” There was only time for a quick group hug, they were already calling the *mesa anarcofeminista* on the microphone in the auditorium.

They let us finish. By which I mean that only a dozen or so men decided to whistle during our presentation. From where I stood with my poster, I could see the men in the

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<sup>5</sup> In my memory, Audre Lorde had written something poignant in *Sister Outsider* (1997) about the annoying and oppressive dimension of white ladies’ tears (which bring attention to their own suffering), but I seem to have misremembered this. See Accapadi (2007) for a discussion of white women’s tears in this vein, and Lorde (1997) for poignant discussions of almost everything else.



**Figure 5–3.** Anarchafeminist women at the *plenaria*. Most hold posters below the stage, while Azu and two other women read the *denuncia* and a collective statement of support on stage. The one poster legible in the photograph reads: “If you touch one of us you touch all of us”. Photo taken by *mesa* participant in the audience.

audience glaring at us, and the women smiling. We finished to an enormous applause, because the women in the audience clapped so loud they made up for all the men who were just sitting there, still glaring. Afterwards we filed out of the auditorium, and those of us that got separated from the group later reported that men were whispering “feminazi” as they walked by. One Spanish woman was cornered by a man that said to her, “I suppose you think Queen Isabel is oppressed too?” And so on. When we had managed to all gather again in the room where we had our *mesa* meetings, we quickly planned another meeting to follow up on all the workshop and direct action ideas that we hadn’t been able to talk about because we were worrying about what to do about Azu. All of the other *mesas* had used their presentation time to present the projects that they had come up with the day before, but we hadn’t gotten to those yet. Most people present could make it to another meeting on Friday, so we set the meeting for then, and were free to walk the fifteen kilometers necessary to find vegan quesadillas.

## You tell them!

Sometimes instead of being told that it’s best if I just hold a poster, I have been asked to speak up. The same week of the *congreso* I went to visit a friend in the hospital. I met his girlfriend first and went with her, because she had the visitor’s card required to get in. On the way there in the metro she asked me to speak with her boyfriend about his friendship with an anarchist man who was known for smashing his girlfriends head into a wall so many times she was left with brain damage. She had already spoken with him, but wanted me to bust his ass as well. The instance that most sticks out in my mind, however, was a conversation that happened in a bar one night in an indigenous village in Oaxaca.

Ten of us were sitting around a table at a bar in the village, one of the few proper “bars” as opposed to the long-standing *cantinas*. Run by young people, it had a wash-room for women and Gogol Bordello was playing on the stereo. Everyone there was from the village except for me, and Carmen and I were the only women at the table. Ladies room or not, to spend an evening at the bar is to enter the domain of masculine recreation. Everyone was speaking their first-language that I don’t understand most of the time, so I spent most of the evening listening quietly, or having small one-on-one conversations in Spanish on the side . At some point the larger group conversation became heated, and when my friend who had brought me to visit briefly lapsed into Spanish I realized they were arguing about something related to the community radio station.<sup>6</sup> Carmen saw me prick up my ears and looked at me shaking her head as if

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<sup>6</sup> While various commercial as well as municipal “cultural” radio stations have been active in many Mexican villages since the 1970s, there has also been a broad movement of building autonomous (“pirate”) radio antennas in many indigenous and *campesino* villages – short-range stations which, generally speaking, broadcast programming in indigenous languages, air debates related to local concerns, and sidestep the legal requirement to air national electoral propaganda. Collaboration on independent radio

she was exasperated with the conversation. Most of the guys saw this happen, and the two men who I knew best – my friend who had brought me, Gabriel, and his friend, Carmen’s partner, Miguel – decided at that moment to switch to Spanish, urging the others to do the same, so that I could participate in the conversation.

“But don’t you think that that was the wrong way to go about it? I mean just suddenly like that (*de golpe así*)? The people are not ready!”

“So true.”

“Totally, the women hear stuff like that and next thing you know they think they can just go out with as many men as they want!”

“It becomes libertinism (*se convierte en libertinage*)”. Carmen was now looking increasingly frustrated, but kept just shaking her head instead of letting loose whatever she was thinking. Her partner Miguel turned to her and gestured to her that she should speak.

“We-ell...”, she said, “it’s very complicated isn’t it? The truth is its very complicated. And this about ‘suddenly’, well! Men always say that its ‘too sudden’, it doesn’t matter how, nor when, nor where these ideas come up, the men always say its ‘too sudden’ or that the timing is bad, it’s just an excuse to not have to listen to critique.” “Yes I would agree with you Carmen”, I intervened, “One gets the impression that there is never a right moment or context to talk about these things!” (In my experience men’s most common rebuttal of feminism is that it is racist, not that it is ‘sudden’, but in both cases men are seeking to avoid the issue, and in any case I had already decided I was going to back Carmen up no matter what she said.)

At this point my friend and host, Gabriel, chimed in: “But when they say, for example, that when their husbands come home drunk at night they should just not let them in the house, I mean what crap (*no mames*), that’s just destroying the family when before the family was working just fine!”

“For the *men* the family was ‘just fine’ perhaps but for the *women*?” said Carmen.

“But they talk as if all men were bad (*malos*) and violent and its not like that!” This last comment received supportive cheers of “*¡sí!*”, “*¡no mames!*”, “*¡se pazan de lanza!*” (“they go way overboard!”), from the group of men around the table.

“That’s not the point.” I said, and the guys shut up. I then looked at Carmen, giving her the floor.

“The truth is that you guys say that you are against *machismo* and that you are fighting it but the fact is you aren’t. And this “*libertinage*” deal, well, you want a woman all to yourself? That only lives for you? But you guys don’t do the same, you don’t think nor act as if you should exist for only one woman!”

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projects has been one field of “solidarity work” in which urban indymedia activists including many anarchist *chilangos* have often proved themselves useful and welcome in remote villages. Needless to say, dramas do ensue, as do local power struggles over control of independent radios and their programming. Seasoned activists and anthropologists know that when the community radio station comes up, as it inevitably does, things are going to get interesting.

“For me five or six are good!” said one of the guys, and the rest started cheering and toasting their beer bottles.

“You see?! It’s not equal, if it were equal, well...” But no one was listening and Carmen knew it. The guys were still toasting and cheering.

“Hey!” I said “Carmen is talking!” Everyone shushed each other, but instead of looking to Carmen to see what she had to say, they wanted to give *me* the floor. “What do *you* think Erica?”, “Yes, let’s hear what the *extranjera* has to say!” I was on the spot. It bothered me that they wanted to hear from me more than Carmen, and I knew that no matter what I said it would be easily tossed off as a foreign idea, but Carmen was looking at me nodding her head, and so I decided I had to come up with something.

“Look, I don’t know exactly who said what on the radio, but like Carmen said, this ‘suddenly’ business is a typical excuse, and about this question of violence, the issue is not just that the men are violent, and what proportion of men are violent, or whatever, its also things like...Gabriel you may scold me for this but, for example, when we got back to the house last night, after midnight, your mom woke up and got herself out of bed offering to heat tortillas and leftovers for us. We are perfectly capable of heating up tortillas and leftovers ourselves, why didn’t you tell her to enjoy her sleep instead of watching her drag herself out of bed to feed you when you are almost thirty years old?”

“But she is happy to do it.”

“She may very well be happy to do it, she is entirely used to it after all, I am just pointing out that these things can be way more subtle than a punch in the face.”

“But like Gabriel says, this is a labour of love (*trabajo de corazón*), we must respect the role of women.”

Carmen was not convinced: “I think we should be questioning this ‘labour of love’ business, this is just how you guys justify the fact that women have these burdensome circumscribed ‘roles’, as you say...”

“But if it makes them happy?”

I was not convinced either: “*No mames*”, I said, “There are workers that are totally exploited, who work from six in the morning to six at night, who take it for granted that this is how things are, perhaps they are happy that this factory is paying them more than the one before, and feel like things are going pretty good, but in their case we would say that they are exploited even if they don’t realize it – what’s the fucking difference, huh?”

The men fell silent for a moment. “Hmm, good point” says one. “This is true”, said another. Carmen was smiling at me. The moment of reflection did not last long, however: “But it’s also a question of culture”, said Miguel.

“Yes”, said Gabriel, “You have to understand that we have grown up in this culture and its very difficult to change, I struggle with it all the time, trying to challenge myself and change, trying all the time!”

“Yes when culture teaches us to be like this it is very difficult to change so all of a sudden!”

“You guys just use culture as an excuse”, said Carmen, “And of course we have all grown up in this culture, but the struggle (*la lucha*) is to unlearn the things we have learnt...”

“We *are* struggling!”

“Seems like you gotta throw a little more weight into it (*darle mas fuerza*).” I commented.

“Fucking-A (*Orale*)” said Carmen.

“Sure but its never going to work if the women start with such extreme demands (*posturas extremas*)”

“Yes that is not the way...”

“Yes attacking us is not the way”. All the guys started cheering again and began talking amongst themselves in their first language. Carmen tried to respond, saying “Look guys...” but her boyfriend cut her off saying “No *you* listen” at which point I say “Let her speak!”, and, as an aside to Carmen, I whisper “Of course we’re supposed to listen to the men right?”. She shook her head in frustration, “Yup this is how it is”. I turned to the guys and said, “You see what I mean about it not just being about physical violence? Look at what is happening right now, you guys won’t let her finish speaking...”

“Yeah this is a perfect example” said Carmen, and then turned to me to add “It’s so good you are here.”

“But look”, said Miguel, “the problem is when feminism turns into women’s machismo, like the feminism of the 60s and 70s, this is just another kind of machismo after all, you don’t see it that way?” he asked Carmen and me. Carmen decided to give some ground – “Well sure, some of them went overboard, but now there are many...most feminists are not...” – but the guys were laughing and talking amongst themselves again, “Yeah that feminine sexism is fucked up, they just want to dominate men!”

“Hey!” said Carmen “Why is it that every time we try to criticize machismo we end up criticizing feminism instead? Why should we have to take the defensive position?”

“Yeah why are we even talking about feminists in the 60s and 70s anyway?” I threw in, “Maybe as a way to ignore the two real-life women feminists sitting in front of you right now? We are not feminists from the 60s. We don’t speak for them. We speak for ourselves.”

“Yeah there are a lot of feminists, what about the rest of them? What about all the indigenous women feminists?” said Carmen, but the guys were not absorbing anything we were saying. Gabriel jumped in at this point, insisting that “women dominate too”, which he illustrated by describing his sister-in-law, a *mestiza* woman his brother married who is always asking him for money and doesn’t let him go back to his *pueblo* to visit. I responded by saying that she certainly sounded like a real bitch, but that this was not a convincing argument as to the non-existence of patriarchy. Miguel rounded

this off with yet another general comment that “Some feminists really go overboard though.”

“As I said”, said Carmen, “Every time we get to criticizing machismo you guys start criticizing feminism instead, its bullshit...And you speak as if all feminists are radical separatists, its ridiculous!”

“Its true there are feminists that fight alongside men”, conceded Miguel, “It’s true, the indigenous women...the Zapatista women for example.”

“That’s right, when men understand we can work together, but when men refuse to understand, well, then we have to fight.”, said Carmen.

“Yes it’s true, it’s true we have to fight together”, agreed Miguel, “and they have that Revolutionary Women’s Law and everything...”<sup>7</sup>

“Sometimes that law isn’t respected, Zapatista women are still struggling as well” I added, “when I went to the *encuentro* there was this roundtable on...”

“...What’s the *deal* with that law anyway though?” Miguel’s agreeable phase was over. “I mean here we are supposedly against ‘laws’ and then to make a ‘revolutionary law’? It’s a contradiction in terms!”

“I don’t understand, does the law bother you?” I asked, followed by Carmen who repeats “Yeah, does it bother you or something?”

“Well! A revolutionary law! What bullshit, we know very well that as anarchists we are against laws, we are fighting *against* laws in general...in the Spanish civil war there wasn’t any need for laws, everyone worked collectively!”

“But even during the Spanish civil war the women did need to get together as women because...”

“...The men *don’t understand!*”

“Okay, okay, okay, but look, let me ask you two something,”, said Miguel, “Who’s more screwed over (*jodido*), women of the lower class or bourgeois women?” “We-ell...” I said.

“The lower class women right?” Carmen and I are looking at each other, rolling our eyes. “You see? If the lower class women are more screwed over then we should focus on capitalism because it’s the system that screws over *everybody*.” “We shouldn’t have to *choose* between these struggles” said Carmen “Yes, why should we have to choose?” I repeated.

Miguel continued to talk, “...and this is how we see that the 60s and 70s feminist deal has infected the indigenous struggle, in a really nasty and insidious way, in the sense that even within our own struggle women have the idea that...”

I was no longer listening because Carmen had leaned over, putting her elbows on her knees and her head in her hands. She was almost underneath the table. Was she pissed off? Sad? Drunk and dizzy? Miguel saw me looking at her and said, “She’s fine.”

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<sup>7</sup> The *Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres* of the Zapatistas may be found at [http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1994/1993\\_12\\_g.htm](http://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1994/1993_12_g.htm); an English translation may be found in Appendix A.

I was not sure. I kept looking at her while the others kept talking, and noticed that she was shaking. When I looked up the second time Miguel said “She’s laughing, not crying”. It was hard for me to tell. Everyone was back to talking in their first language, and once in a while I did hear Carmen laugh. It seemed to me, however, that she was not laughing because she was having fun, but rather in exasperation – “better to laugh than cry”. Maybe she was letting loose a laugh here and there precisely to hide the fact of how upset she was. I rubbed her back once in a while as a consoling gesture – the least I could do was communicate in some way that I knew she was upset, regardless of what her friends and boyfriend were telling me.

When she finally sat up again, about twenty minutes later, her eyes were puffy. Someone pointed it out. She said it was because of the cold – this always happened when she got cold, she explained. She looked over toward the kitchen, and I asked her what she wanted – a coffee. Once she had her coffee and a few Maria biscuits, she turned to me and spoke to me on the side: “Sometimes I think I just can’t take anymore, I just want to disappear from this world.”

“Yes, I know what you mean, it happens to me too...I get so frustrated, fed up.”

“Yes, I’m *so* fed up (*harta*).”

“Sometimes I have a lot of energy to struggle and fight in these arguments and sometimes I’m just so worn out I don’t even want to leave the house.”

“I just don’t know how to go on sometimes, here the *machismo* is so bad, elsewhere its better, the French for example they understand more, they’ve already got it...”

“We-ell, in a way its better in some other places, like in Canada as well, let’s say, but the truth is we have many of the same problems. The debates, for example, like the one we just had? They always go the same, ours sound very similar... Or otherwise sometimes the guys will agree in conversation with our points but in practice they still act like assholes.”

“And what drives me nuts the most is that these guys, as *anarchists*, are supposedly the ones confronting and fighting machismo but they are *not!*”

“Yes the hypocrisy is the worst.”

“Yeah like if they were just people, normal people, ordinary people, well, then it would bother me too but I would have more patience...but these guys are supposedly the ‘educated’ ones and that, *that*...it’s just too much.”

“Yeah cause I mean they act like they are the ones that are going to teach others how to be and the ‘culture of resistance’ and all that, its very arrogant cause they don’t have a clue where to start themselves, how are they going to teach others?”

“Yes, sometimes the non-anarchist people, just ordinary people, the *campesinos*, well, they know better. And they say they’re not educated, but life is a school – of course they have an education. My parents, for example, they have way more *conciencia* than those anarchists, for sure! (*conciencia* being that word that means both [social] “consciousness” and “conscience”). My parents did everything together, they went to the fields (*rancho*) together, they sowed the seeds together, and when they got back to the house, my father prepared the coffee while my mother prepared tortillas – they



always worked side by side. My mom is real strong, it was her that taught me to not serve men – “you’re not here for that”, she would always say.

## Anarchism as Platform

Sometimes anarchism is brought to articulate with men’s desire to silence indigenous women like Magdalena; sometimes anarchism is used by indigenous women like Carmen to try to shut up her boyfriend. Inasmuch as anarchists are “opposed to all forms of domination” (rather than primarily “opposed to the state”), anarchism provides room for flexing, debating, and ongoing renovation, and often functions as a platform or rhetorical space for interlocutors to advance diverse moral arguments. The fact that whenever anarchists are speaking *as* anarchists, the speaker’s anarchist identity can be rhetorically accessed to “hold anarchists to their word” on a number of counts, is part of the reason that people who are not historically part of its main constituency adopt it as a “universal” for the purpose of argument and dialogue across difference.

Here it might be tempting to perceive anarchism as an “articulating principle” in the Gramscian tradition (1971): Just as religion may be brought to articulate with revolutionary activity as opposed to fulfilling its inevitably conservative role according to the traditional Marxist formula, anarchism may be brought to articulate with women’s critique of gendered power despite its pattern of use in the past, and despite its founding formula, wherein Power = the State. But Gramsci was largely concerned with state power or “hegemony”, and as Chantal Mouffe emphasizes, Gramsci’s hegemony “involves the creation of a *higher synthesis*” (1979, 184) based on “articulating principles” that allow diverse groups to “fuse in a ‘collective will’ which becomes the new protagonist of political action” (ibid.). Anarchists do not seek “hegemony” or ultimate syntheses, nor would I say there is much “fusing” going on. Ethnographically speaking, what we rather see is a social and discursive field characterized by ongoing argument.<sup>8</sup>

Hall (1996), who considers articulation in both senses – as alliance, “a linkage which is not necessary, absolute”, as well as linguistic expression (141–2), is perhaps more useful here. Choy (2005) takes the useful double-entendre further in his discussion of “articulated knowledges” — some counterknowledges are articulated (linked) whereas others fail due to how they are articulated and by whom. In a social scene organized around the concept of “anarchism”, women more easily engage their male counterparts by articulating critiques of male domination with/in the language of anarchism itself. Beyond Carmen’s illustrative case, my own articulation of “gossip” as/with “direct action” in Chapter 2 is an example of such an attempt. Of course it is true that anarchism can also be easily articulated back to the men’s defense, with all the weight of history on their side (e.g. “These feminist critics are just sectarian Marxists!”). Sometimes it

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<sup>8</sup> For further discussion regarding the ways in which anarchists are not Gramscians, see *Gramsci is Dead — Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Day 2005).

certainly does seem as if everyone is simply choosing the definition of anarchism most convenient to his or her own particular interest. Tsing's (2005) vocabulary regarding transnational collaboration is thus prescient here as well – these are also “awkward” or “sticky” engagements, where “words mean something different across a divide even as people agree to speak” (xi). When anarchism means something slightly different to everyone, tracking present-day contests over its usage allows us to perceive certain things about “anarchism” that will never be elicited by examining its history.

In this vein, what Tsing (1997) argues regarding environmentalism and feminism may be applied to anarchism as well: “Each, it is said, has developed from the history of Western thought; each expresses Western insights that are now spreading to other countries and cultures”. Tsing suggests “cultivating a distance from this story”, which is no doubt a valid thought experiment with respect to anarchism as well, considering it was cross-cultural exchanges across the “East”-“West” divide that led to its formulation in the first place. Instead of “following Western originals across non-Western cultural transformations” we might follow the narrative contests through which foci of cultural difference are identified”; “instead of debating the truth of Western-defined universals, we can debate the politics of their strategic and rhetorical uses around the globe” (254). Here, anarchism is not automatically imperialist and sexist because most of its 19<sup>th</sup> century proponents and theorists were European men (a categorization that itself means defining Russia as part of Europe, ignoring the Japanese influence on Kropotkin and the Slavist agenda of Bakunin, and editing out all pagan roots). Rather, anarchism is not categorically one thing or another, but is sexist, imperialist, or any number of other things, depending on what people are doing with it right now. As we can see, approaching anarchism ethnographically in this way does not necessarily clear its name: anarchism is currently brought to articulate with various patriarchal and imperialist modes of thought and action just as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and sometimes indeed with the logic of capital itself, but these are not the only things going on. Although the results are never secure, anarchism may also be brought to critique normative ideas in creative ways.

## Cultural Relativism

From Montreal to Mexico, anarchist men use “culture” to justify current gender relations. Mr. NEFAC was more concerned about white women not respecting Magdalena's “culture” than he was about activists not respecting Magdalena herself, for example. Meanwhile, anarchafeminists in Mexico City are infuriated by anarchist men who laugh off their grievances with statements like “*Soy Mexicano, soy machista*”: “I'm Mexican, of course I'm sexist, whaddya expect?!” Then of course there are Miguel and Gabriel who tell Carmen – “But it's a question of culture!” Significantly, Carmen says, “You guys just use culture as an excuse”.

Carmen is quite sure she will still be indigenous if she gets to sleep off her hangover like everybody else instead of being dragged out of bed at 5 am to make tortillas. Why should the guys get to be the ones who define “indigenous” – or “culture” in general – anyway? Very often “cultural relativism” is brought to relativize everything except for a certain idea that one must always submit to existing social authority and male social authority in particular, the slip being hidden in a move whereby not Magdalena, not Carmen, but Mr. NEFAC, Juan, a hypothetical village leader or Carmen’s boyfriend get to decide what “culture” comprises and whether or not it should stay the same. Even if a definitive village authority were known, present, and real, if a person judges that Carmen should behave the way the village authority commands, this person is arguably neither a “relativist” nor “anti-imperialist” (nor an “anarchist” for that matter): He or she deigns to adjudicate between Carmen and the village leader from the position of distant observer, and based on an imported and *a priori* premise of his or her own that stipulates that women should always act the way male village authorities say (while supposedly anarchists are all about “questioning authority”).<sup>9</sup>

It is certainly the case that many non-Western women have resented and continue to resent the imposition of “Western” or “white” feminism, and when this is the case one should listen and learn. Dozens of militants and academics from Audre Lorde (1997) and bell hooks (1981; 1997) to Chandra Mohanty (1997) and Saba Mahmood (2005) have developed versions of this argument very well, and the activists in my study repeat it often. One hears less about the women of colour intellectuals who point out how romanticizing the “ethnic” or “indigenous” or “colonized” as “communities” (of colour) serves to maintain – or even increase – patriarchal authority in those communities (see e.g. Wallace 1990; Bannerji 2000; Nanda 1997).<sup>10</sup> One hears less about women of colour who are interested in many aspects of “western feminism”, including key arguments put forth in the now-much-derided “second wave”.

Imagine my surprise when activist women in Mexico were complaining about the fancy fourth-wave of gender studies and coming up to me later to say that they “had

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<sup>9</sup> Note that Graeber (2015) rehearses the same argument (in reference to the “ontological turn” in anthropology, which arguably reproduces the same colonial logic I find among anarchist activists): “First of all, who gets to define what counts as a “cultural universe”? Can Nuer not judge Dinka, or are all Nilotic speakers close enough that they can be considered members of the same moral community? In drawing borders, one can’t simply follow “native categories” because you need to have those borders to know who the relevant “natives” are. So there needs to be an external authority who decides on borders. But then the same problem crops up again when you have to decide who, inside those borders, gets to define what should be considered “Nuer ideas.” Chances are there’s next to nothing that every single individual you have just defined as “Nuer” will agree on. So the relativist must appeal to authoritative views. But how are the local authorities to be identified? One cannot use “Nuer ideas” to identify them because that’s just circular again: you need to know who the authorities are, first, in order to know what “Nuer ideas” about authority actually are. So, oddly, if you are a cultural relativist, authority is the one thing about which you can’t be relativistic.” (33)

<sup>10</sup> Michelle Wallace (1990), for example, demonstrates how black women’s oppression actually increased during the Black Power movement of the 60s and 70s partially due to the white impetus to respect “black community”.

heard that a feminist wrote somewhere that ‘the personal is political’ — do you know where I can find this?” Are scholars such as myself to say that this Mexican activist woman is experiencing “false consciousness” or, even better, has “underdeveloped” thinking? There are certainly other women in Mexico who do appreciate Judith Butler and queer studies — are readers such as yourself to say that these women are more “on point”, being “less behind the times”? In a related vein, shifting our attention to activist practice around feminism north of the borders as opposed to its informing theories, are we to say that the current Anglo-American version of the debate around “women-only spaces”, polarized as it is between the diametrically opposed agendas of “trans\* allies” and “Trans-Exclusive Radical Feminists (TERFs)”, is in some way more “advanced” than the differently-polarized debate in Mexico?<sup>11</sup> Are we to say that this Anglo-American scenario somehow represents a general state of improvement? If the answer to any of these questions is “yes”, then commitments to “relativism” are suspiciously haphazard indeed.

In addition, one hears less about scenarios wherein the people who resent the “imposition” of feminism are not the women of colour themselves but the men around them. At the *congreso* in Mexico City, for example, we do not see women resenting “white feminism” but rather organizing strategically around the fact that the *men* will call *all* the women colonialists if the white women are allowed on stage. What we see here and in many other examples so far is men co-opting women of colour’s critique of feminism to their (i.e. men’s) own ends, at the expense of women of colour themselves. Crucially, this often happens by the sleight of hand involved in the deployment of “cultural relativism”: If Carmen is into feminism, it is because she is not *really* indigenous. By redefining “indigenous” to mean “happy with current gender relations”, the guys make it rhetorically impossible for Carmen to be indigenous and feminist at the same time.

This double bind facing indigenous women has often been commented on (e.g. Hernández Castillo 2008). The frustration Carmen feels being caught between her university experience in Mexico City, where she appreciates her studies but faces racism and prejudice of all kinds related to her indigeneity and second-language Spanish, and her experience back in her *pueblo*, which she loves and wants to defend but does not romanticize the way outsiders do, was, to my ears, similar to the dilemma and frustration of many other indigenous women discussed in Aída Hernández Castillo’s recent

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<sup>11</sup> For a sense of the “trans\* vs. TERF” debate, see the following web articles written/ reposted during the flourishing of argument around transphobia within the organization Deep Green Resistance in early 2013: <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2014/02/23/a-toxic-culture-of-violence-and-shame-how-dgrs-denialof-transphobia-exposes-worse-tendencies/>; <http://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/2013/05/15/deep-greentransphobia//>; <http://deepgreenresistance.org/en/who-we-are/faqs/radical-feminism-faqs>; <http://veganideal.mayfirst.org/content/lierre-keith-case-study-anti-trans-hatred>; <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/02/08/1276144/-Lierre-Keith-DGR-feminist-and-transgenderexterminist-slated-as-a-PIELC-keynote-speaker#>; for a certain overview see Delilah Campbell’s piece “Who Owns Gender?”, which circulated at the same time: <http://www.troubleandstrife.org/newarticles/who-owns-gender/>

anthology (2008). While I respect this work and bought an extra copy to gift to Carmen, I find it curious that much academic discussion so far, including many pieces in Hernández Castillo's book, appear to "take lead" from women who respond to the aforementioned dilemma by emphasizing that there is something wrong with feminism as opposed to something wrong with their indigenous bros. Should not one arguably listen and learn from women like Carmen as well?

Whereas in mainstream politics gender is used to trump race (Bush bombs Afghanistan supposedly to save Muslim women; the Mexican government installs PRI women candidates in indigenous villages in Oaxaca referencing "*equidad de género*", etc.), in the upside down world of the anarchist and academic left, race is mobilized to trump gender on the basis of the fact that gender is often used by others to trump race. In other words, neither the mainstream politicians nor the activists performing the second operation are implementing a properly "intersectional" analysis, the latter merely prioritizing axes of oppression in a different order.

## Academic Feminism, or Intersectionality Take I

Anarchism does not offer all the answers, but neither does feminism. The women in Mexico City shift between anarchist and feminist collectives for a reason: Feminists are caught up in their bourgeois concerns as much as anarchists are caught up in their androcentric ones. Anarchists are frustrating hypocrites, but feminists "kill their enthusiasm" as well. The women in D.F. feel the need to question "academic feminism" in particular. It may seem an unfortunate coincidence that some of the activist women quoted above associate the concept of "gender" with (now ex-) President Fox, but their related assessment that current academic feminism is "deradicalized" bears witnessing. It is quite clear to many activist women that academic feminism is simply not speaking to them: Women in the feminist reading circle in Oaxaca that same year decided to do "the wave" every time we came across the word "*ontología*" while reading aloud – this in order to keep spirits up and avoid becoming completely demoralized by the (empowering?) feminist text.<sup>12</sup> Academics often insist that their sophisticated paragraphs, replete as they are with disclaimers, multiple semi-colons, ellipses and passive voice, are important to do justice to the "sophisticated nuances" of their arguments. But usually all this means is that if there is a provocative idea in there somewhere it will be couched in a syntax whereby the reader cannot tell if it is meant to be the author's opinion or someone else's, whether it is meant to be read as a question or a statement, and so on. The academic feminist reserves the right to say 'That is not what I meant' in case important persons disagree. Given that academic feminists write oracular texts that are, in any case, locked up in the private coffers of academic journals, one certainly

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<sup>12</sup> The human "wave", which I learned at baseball games as a child and was amused to find in Oaxaca, consists in each person raising her arms in succession, in a line or around a circle, to form a wave pattern.

does get the sense that academic feminists are simply not writing for the public. Who are they writing for then? Other academic feminists? Maybe highly educated policy hacks? Lawyers? People in positions of power in bureaucracies? These are all powers that the anti-capitalist anarchafeminist thinks should not even exist – no wonder they call academic feminism “deradicalized”. Meanwhile, the book our feminist reading circle in Oaxaca was reading when we started instituting “the wave” was an anthology co-edited by Aída Hernandez Castillo (Suárez-Navaz and Hernández Castillo 2008), in which Mohanty’s seminal essay *Under Western Eyes* (1997 [1984]) was published in Spanish for the first time: Why was Mohanty’s essay, which largely revolves around the problem of First World women speaking about Third World women in their absence, translated into Spanish only thirty years later? This arguably does not reflect well on the last few decades of English-speaking “anti-racist feminists”, myself included.

Academic feminism certainly has a lot to say about “women of colour” in general, and the operation(s) of “intersectionality” in particular. While I have already made passing reference to “intersectionality” on several occasions, it is now time to give “intersectionality” proper attention. Many of the activists in my study are fervent advocates of intersectionality. A certain faction, here perhaps best represented by Mr. NEFAC, is clearly not swayed by “intersectionality”, but a faction just as large tends to write off all such Mr. NEFACs as “fundamentalist class war guys” with the authority of “intersectionality” in tow.<sup>13</sup> In Chapter 3 I am part of this “intersectionality” faction, whereas below I critically engage the same.

The concept of “intersectionality” has a growing history of moving from social movements into the academy and then back again (and then back again once more). First mapped out by black feminists outside the academy, in response to the practical dilemma of being torn between (sexist) black liberation movements and (racist) feminist ones (see e.g. Reagon Johnson [1983], Hull, Scott and Smith [1982]; Anzaldúa [1987] echoes the same as *Chicana/xicana*), the analytical operation of “intersectionality” has subsequently been theoretically developed by many women of colour academics (see e.g. Collins [2004], Crenshaw [1991], Mohanty [1984], Haraway [1990], and Sandoval [1991]). The basic idea is that by paying attention to the experiences and insights of people who experience an intersection of oppressions – such as women of colour – we will not only be better practically equipped to address the violence faced by women of colour specifically, but will also learn more about each system of oppression in general, as well as how they articulate, than if we were to approach either in isolation. Chandra Mohanty (2003) points out, for example, that an “analysis that pays attention to the everyday experiences of tribal women and the micropolitics of their ultimately anti-capitalist struggles illuminates the macropolitics of global restructuring” (233). It has indeed been shown time and again that taking the experiences of black women, indige-

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<sup>13</sup> Note that the transcribed No One Is Illegal radio interview with Glen Coulhard (2015) in Appendix B includes specific examples of activist references to “intersectionality”; further examples are also included in later chapters of this work.

nous women, or “women of colour” in general as an analytical starting point allows for insights into the nature of capitalism, the state, “sovereignty”, racialization, heteropatriarchy, and so on, that wouldn’t be possible otherwise (see e.g. Hartman 1997, Spillers 2003, Alexander 2005, Smith 2008). Chapter 3 of the present work, which moves from the experience of Magdalena during the speaking tour to uncover a historical and theoretical articulation between gender and the racialized secular in general, is also an example of an “intersectional” analysis and presented as such partially because I know that many activists in the “intersectionality faction” may easily follow and appreciate such an exposition (see also Lagalisse 2011).

Intersectionality is fairly easy when there is exactly one “tribal woman of colour from the global south” in the room surrounded by a cloud of white *man*archist douchebags. As soon as one leaves Canada or Spain for Mexico, for example, “privileging the insights of women of colour” starts to be pretty useless as a directive. Who are the “women of colour” in Mexico anyway? Everybody? Maybe just the browner ones, or the ones that look and talk like Magdalena? Does that include Carmen? Says who? Maybe just the ones that self-identify that way, meaning nobody? The operative racial categories, both objective (structural) and subjective (one’s “selfidentification”), are not everywhere the same as those salient in the country just north of the Mexican border. When First World feminists only write about transnational solidarity as opposed to actually trying to do it, it is apparently easy to proceed without taking this into account.<sup>14</sup> Inasmuch as First World feminists are aiming to effect domestic policy – Kimberley Crenshaw (1991) was a lawyer after all – none of this even matters: It is only “women of colour” in the United States who are relevant, because other governments will deal with other “women of colour” elsewhere.

Of course, following from the discussion in the last chapter, we must interrogate why it is that an activist leaves their First World abode for Mexico in the first place. It is usually just as much because of the economic crisis back home, or because one’s collective house exploded, as it is about “helping” Mexicans. But unless we are to say that all First World subjects should stay home (unless they are academic feminists doing research or pursuing postdoctoral fellowships) and that no one should even try to organize transnationally against neoliberalism (writing about it being sufficient), academic feminism might try seriously engaging the practical problems of transnational activist work. As it stands now, even those who do their homework and read up on “intersectionality” are left in the lurch. Regarding real-life everyday scenarios in the realm of transnational collaboration, “intersectionality” currently fails to answer some important questions.

As I suggested above, for the foreign solidarity activist arriving in Mexico, the Zapatista woman, the indigenous woman working for the government, and the *mestiza*

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<sup>14</sup> Regarding the activities of professional transnational feminists, see Desai (2013) who analyzes the feminist dialogues at the World Social Forum to arrive at a critique that intersects with and complements my own.

punk in Mexico City all look like “women of colour” and thus a problem immediately arises. Even if North American lefties could wrap their heads around the fact that in Mexico the *mestiza* is (sort of) the equivalent of “white” in the U.S. (and that for many Mexicans, most “people of colour” in the U.S. might as well be “white”), this still wouldn’t solve the problem – indigenous women can be both Zapatistas and PRI candidates. If it should occur to the reader that obviously one should support the Zapatista woman as opposed to the indigenous woman PRI candidate I would tend to agree, but we must be honest about what we are doing here: We are “taking lead” from *Zapatismo*, or anarchism, or some other informing political ideology, while using “women of colour” as a subterfuge. As usual, perhaps it is not all bad to “take lead” from anarchism or *Zapatismo* – these are *a priori* ideological stances that one brings to bear on cross-cultural encounters but then again so is the notion that “women of colour” are a homogenous bloc. Both stances have their merits, yet both are far from perfect. In any case the imperatives of “intersectionality” are not clear. One might try to resolve the problem conceptually by saying that the fact that the actions of Zapatista women are ultimately *in the interest of* all women of colour, whereas those of the PRI candidate are not, means, in fact, that picking the Zapatista woman is still privileging the lives of women of colour. Indeed this may very well be the case, but this is not privileging the *knowledge* of “women of colour” generally speaking, it is privileging the “intersectional analysis” of third parties, perhaps including First World women of colour academic feminists, who have decided that the PRI apparatus in Mexico is hopelessly corrupt and that the anti-authoritarian autonomist Zapatista movement prefigures, and will succeed in achieving, a radically democratic decolonized gender-egalitarian world.<sup>15</sup>

In any case the reader will notice that I myself have chosen to engage with very specific “women of colour” – anarchist women. And of course anarchist women, almost by definition, are going to question traditional authority and male domination. The question thus becomes: Should I be talking to other “women of colour” instead? Perhaps more “authentic” ones? If so, what is going on here exactly? Would either activist or academic proponents of “anti-racist feminism” and “intersectionality” actually try the same maneuver as Miguel, and proceed as if “happy with current gender relations” is semantically equivalent to “woman of colour”? And if I am supposed to be “taking lead” from *specific* “women of colour” then who are they? According to what criteria? Bringing anarchism to bear on “intersectionality” teaches us something as does bringing “intersectionality” to bear on anarchism, while bringing intersectional analysis to “intersectionality” itself teaches us even more: If the imperatives of “intersectionality” are such that I should speak to *certain* women of colour then there is either some other ideology informing “intersectionality” that is being kept hidden, or at the very least there are other “intersections” that cross-cut “women of colour” that are not being explicitly addressed. At this point, activists who say out loud that they are specifically

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<sup>15</sup> If the difference between these two operations is still not clear, note that in Chapter 9 I elaborate on this problematic in detail.



looking to work with anarchist indigenous people seem to deserve at least some points for honesty. The vast majority of literature that cites “intersectionality”, including all the works I have cited so far, is concerned in particular with the intersection of gender and race. This makes sense, since it was the intersection of gender and race that led to the theoretical development of “intersectionality” to begin with. People who are *not* women of colour should want to avoid the pitfall of deriving an interesting theoretical idea from women of colour’s experience of oppression and then not bothering to apply it in the service of women of colour. Meanwhile, it makes sense that women of colour academics tend to focus on the problems of “women of colour” like themselves – it’s not as if white women, white men, and men of colour tend to break their backs working on these problems, so women of colour are left holding their own bag, which is how we get “intersectionality” in the first place. And yet the rationale of “intersectionality” itself suggests that the cross-section of gender and race need not – indeed cannot – be the only epistemologically fruitful or politically important one, so it is important to wonder why other intersections are rarely explored in this genre.

No doubt the oversight is *itself* partially due to a certain intersection of sexism and racism – perhaps many activists and academics have a hard time fathoming the idea that “women of colour” could develop theoretical knowledge of general utility. Only the “unmarked” white male could possibly develop a properly abstract epistemological theory; the knowledge(s) of women, people of colour, and women of colour will always be hopelessly bound to the “marked” subject positions from whence they come, inevitably informed by “bias”. And yet, one would think that women, people of colour, and women of colour would be less swayed by *this* bias, and work on extrapolating “intersectionality” to other intersections as well. Without leaving women of colour behind, one might be interested in queer women of colour (vs heteronormative ones), poor women of colour (vs. rich ones), or Third World women of colour (vs. First World ones). There have been a few experiments in this regard; Johnson and Henderson (2005) for example explore the intersection of sexuality/race (vs. the more classic gender/race). But even though “intersectionality” is generally put forward as a valuable and widely applicable epistemological method, with most authors making a general point somewhere in the text that “those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen” (Matsuda 1987, 324), “women of colour” continues to be positioned as the intersectional category *par excellence*: it is their experiences in particular that are imagined to provide a “theoretical value-added” (see Nash 2008; Chapter 8 of this work). Sometimes it seems as if both activists and academics that invoke “intersectionality” actually think, consciously or not, that “women of colour” are a homogenous bloc with a “world-historical revolutionary role”.

The pattern of use does seem to suggest that while “women” is an unacceptable monolithic category (not to mention the “working class”), “women of colour” is a perfectly acceptable monolithic category: While women are divided in terms of race, and people of colour are divided in terms of gender, enormous differences in material situation, socioeconomic class, and colonial/imperial location among “women of colour” are

rarely discussed. Consider the comment by Mr. NEFAC in Chapter 3, wherein Magdalena had “no analysis” because she had no “experience in union movements” and “less education” – all of which I framed as problematic. Later, when I said that we should at least listen to the indigenous woman Andrea Smith, if not Magdalena, because Smith publishes with Duke University Press, how many readers noticed an enormous problem? Magdalena as a poor woman from rural Mexico and Andrea Smith as a university professor residing the United States are vastly different subjects with vastly different experience; according to the logic of “intersectionality” itself Andrea Smith should not necessarily be able to stand in for Magdalena. There are certainly some experiences and positions they share, including concerns around sterilization as a tool of genocide, which have characterized both of their political careers (see Smith 2008; Chapter 3 of this work). These are subjects that live in different places however, speak different languages, and have very different positionalities within state hierarchies that are themselves in distinct positions vis-à-vis one another; they participate in different cosmologies, practice different traditions, have different experiences of different forms of social organization, have drastically different economic means, and no doubt different insights into the local/global worlds in which they live as a consequence. Indeed if Magdalena were actually still alive they would probably enjoy talking.

Meanwhile, there are at least a couple of things about transnational solidarity activism that are perceived first and foremost by white women. White women such as myself are in a unique position to comment on the misleading self-images of anarchist men from Canada and France, for example, and it is arguably our responsibility to do so. I also tell my Mexican woman friends about the Mexican men who whisper in my ear “*¿Te pones Mexicana o qué?*” (“What, pretending you’re Mexican or something?”) when I don’t want to have sex with them.

It was disturbing to see the proliferating and ever-embellished accounts of Mary’s murder compared to the silence that surrounded Xochitl’s. A white woman can rest assured that her death will be talked about more than that of her Mexican *hermana* (although never in public) but to say she can “rest assured” while dead is sort of a bad joke. A white woman in Mexico knows that the aggressions she faces – which only find their fullest expression in Mary’s raped and mutilated body – are racially motivated. When Mexican anarchist men say “What, you pretending to be Mexican or something?”, they are saying a few things at once. They are complaining about Mexican women being prudes, which, if we take this as having any bearing on reality, is no doubt due to the fact that if they sleep around they get called sluts (*putas*) instead.

They are also suggesting that white women don’t have a right to say no precisely because they are white. Mary’s murderer no doubt thought the same thing. White activist women everywhere internalize this logic to the extent that even when they themselves are violently raped, they do not feel entitled to complain – as an activist woman in Montreal once explained, “I was on an Indian reservation so it’s complicated, I shouldn’t be on their land anyway, in any case that’s what the other activists will

say...”. She is correct. Generally speaking, if a white woman activist mentions any sort of sexual aggression on the part of a man who is not white she is told by activist men (as well as academic ones) that talking about such things serves to justify colonialism, that is, that *she* is the one being violent, and that she should shut up immediately.<sup>16</sup> She often does. Where a commendable desire to be anti-racist feminists and paralyzing white shame come together with women’s feminine socialization as selfless care-givers, some very nasty things can happen.

One must be careful of course. Whenever the oppression of white women is discussed, one must avoid locating white women’s oppression in the discrepancies between her experiences and those of white men: White women simply wanting all the power and advantages of rich white men does not constitute a radical project, this being one of the classic pitfalls of bourgeois feminism. The example that sticks out and is most often repeated by the activists in my study is that of domestic labour, wherein white bourgeois women of the First World want to liberate themselves from unpaid domestic labour, but then effect this by underpaying women from the Third World to cover for them instead.

Returning to our present example, one could point out, just as truthfully, that the only reason white activist men get to travel to Mexico in the first place is because of their imperial position (powerful currency, respectable passport, colonial desire), wherein white women feeling slighted because they don’t get to have as much fun fucking around in Mexico “helping” people is simply a function of jealousy over power that shouldn’t exist in the first place. For this reason I emphasize that my ultimate point is not that white women should get “to play” too, but to highlight a dimension of transnational solidarity activism that might otherwise go unnoticed: Inasmuch as white foreigner men do get to play around in Mexico (and arguably elsewhere), it is *because Mexican men take out their colonial resentment on white women specifically and disproportionately to white men*. Even if put this way, wherein the complaint is brought not to Mexican men but to the white foreigner men who benefit from violence against white women, white activist women are generally afraid to broach the topic because, like my friend quoted above, they know “what the other activists will say”. In the upside down world of the critical (academic and activist) imaginary, white women’s bodies are to be offered as the consolation prize for colonial violence, a medium for its reckoning, the settling of accounts, and the bread that is broken for the sake of building community once again.

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<sup>16</sup> The same is true among anthropologists. In multiple seminars I have heard women graduate students been told that it is “irresponsible” and “imperialist” to discuss any sexual violence they may encounter in the field along these same lines: We are taught to tiptoe around the damaged conscience of research so as to protect the new (supposedly) post-colonial (image of) anthropology; our main preoccupation should be protecting the honour of the discipline by carrying out our feminine duty to serve as vessels of honour/guilt, rather than engaging the tricky business of conveying complex relations, i.e. writing good ethnography.

White women aren't helping the general situation, of course, when they arrive at parties in Mexico and gladly absorb the attentions of the six men sitting closest to them while their girlfriends sit there glaring. Try proposing an "anarchafeminist solidarity network" after that – it's not going to go very well. It is all very tricky. Because even if the white foreigner woman makes the effort to make friends with Mexican women instead of their boyfriends, it is only when the white woman is attached to a Mexican man that she will be truly invited into the fold — heterosexual women and lesbian women find this out in different ways at different times. This is frustrating to begin with, but it is also frustrating to see that so many white activist women in Mexico buy into and perpetuate this dynamic by snubbing other white women who do not have Mexican boyfriends. I get how it happens; I have been on both sides. It is nice to find another foreigner friend with a Mexican boyfriend because then it is possible to bond about so many things that others would not get. And yet there is more to it than that – a sense of superiority, as if having a Mexican boyfriend proves something about oneself, perhaps that one is more "anti-imperialist", or in any case welcome in Mexico in ways that the unattached woman is not: Women have their own version of the *gringos vs. gachupines* game.

I could go on. To summarize, however, every transnational solidarity activist should read Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008) but, as they do so, they should also make a critical note of how Fanon's analysis of racialized desire, as brilliant as it may be, reserves empathy for black men such as Fanon himself, while black women are posited as traitors to their race and white women are posited as oppressors simply put. With this work serving as the foundation text on racialized desire, it is hard, even for insolent white women such as myself, to find space to complain about the indigenous man who follows up his "But you're not Mexican" comment by whining, "But I never got to fuck a foreigner woman before!" and ultimately resorts to a tirade about me being a racist anthropologist. It was only when a "woman of colour" friend of mine – Carmen, it just so happened – insisted that this was unfair, that I felt entitled to say so myself, and thus will now point out that all four men who have called me a racist anthropologist in the past decade have done so precisely at the moment that they realize they won't be able to have sex with me. This means that they would be happy to sell out their people to a racist anthropologist for a little white ass. It is a problem that their hypocrisy is ignored while white women's hypocrisy is endlessly studied, and it is also a problem that white women such as myself do not speak up about this, or only do so by relying on women of colour to validate their experiences first – they are the ones holding the "intersectionality" stick after all.

Something has gone wrong. The power of "intersectionality" is becoming articulated with positions and practices that no anarchist or anti-racist feminist proponent can reasonably condone. With Nash (2008) I must ask: Why has there been so much talk about intersectionality as a theoretical operation without any proposed methodology? What would an intersectional methodology actually look like? I engage all of this

further in *Intersectionality Take II*, but for now, what is our solidarity activist to do? What better formula is there?

## There is no formula

There is no formula. Things must be figured out as one goes along by listening to the real-life women around us – by “walking asking questions” as it were. Sometimes real-life women want the foreigners to shut up and hold posters, sometimes they want the foreigners to speak our opinions as loudly as possible. Dialogue is the only way to figure out when to do which, or when to do something else entirely. Rambling on about “postporno” with no attention to one’s audience is not dialogue. Neither is writing sophisticated feminist books that no ordinary person can understand. Neither is sitting quietly saying nothing because one is terrified of sounding racist or offensive in some other way.

That same night at the bar in the *pueblo*, before the heavy conversation occurred, everyone was laughing and horsing around in their first language that I don’t speak, when at some point the guys started mimicking stoners smoking joints. This is a language I understand, so of course I immediately joined in: I clowned around pretending to smoke a teeny roach, sang a few Cypress Hill lyrics that everyone would recognize, and pretended to scarf down a huge bag of chips. Everyone “shat themselves laughing” (as one says in Mexico).

Months later Carmen told me that it was at that moment that she knew we could be friends, and that my attitude was part of the reason she felt comfortable pursuing the argument we later had. “All the other foreigners that come up here just sit there like this” – she clasped her hands together and thrust them between her knees that she also drew tightly together, hunched her shoulders forward, and drew her head down, mimicking a meek, defensive, protective posture. “They don’t say anything and have no sense of humour, they just smile politely and it’s impossible to talk to them about anything. Why is that?” I said I couldn’t say for sure, but that it was “probably because they were afraid of offending someone, so figure its better to stay silent? Basically I would say its because they are afraid of seeming racist.” Carmen paused for a few moments and said “But that’s racist in and of itself!”

Yes, and this paralysing white shame plays a contributing role of its own in the formation of anarchist networks instead of anarchafeminist ones, ones where men are the contact persons or *enlaces*, and women talk about it on the side during chance encounters in bars. Perhaps instead of breaking their heads on their male dominated anarchist collectives, anarchist women should just network among themselves, as (even) Zapatista women suggest, or at least ask themselves honestly why they have not done so already.

Or maybe anarchist women should ditch the anarchist scene altogether – as many do – and become involved in already-existing anti-capitalist feminist solidarity networks

that contain zero references to anarchism whatsoever. All the switching back and forth between anarchism and feminism, in any case, does not promise to end any time soon. As for me, being pleasantly evasive has never been my problem – I find other ways to offend people: Just as we cannot proceed as if we already know how to make a world revolution based on a selective reading of Bakunin, neither do we learn how to make a world revolution by reading feminist theory or slapping on some ready-made “intersectionality”.

# Chapter 6 – Policing the Boundaries

As much as the anarchist scene can be imagined as a network, it is, at the same time, a very tight-knit, bounded, moral community. The word network does not elicit this phenomenon. The imaginary of “network” does not emphasize boundaries. Be they networks of people, day lilies or mushrooms, networks interpenetrate, criss-cross, and overlap with and among other species as well as their own. The network invites us to perceive affinity as opposed to homogeneity, hybridity as opposed to purity, commensurability as opposed to fundamental difference. The network highlights interdependence and transgression, suggesting a queered anarchist universe where subversive troubling of boundaries occurs, where neat typologies have no sway, where illicit relations trouble sacred categories to produce a robust, sustainable eco-system of revolutionary human activity.

Anarchists do mingle and work with all sorts of people in a pragmatic fashion, as I described in Chapter 4, troubling tangible systems of power and their symbolic order at once. And yet only certain collaborators are invited to the after-party – both figurative and literal. Similarly, anarchists as people have all sorts of friends, but of all of these work colleagues, old friends from high school and knitting club members, the anarchist will only invite a select few – perhaps none – to the anarchist party *per se*, be it a demo after-party, a dance-party fundraiser, or a spoken-word performance followed by a DJ named No Bordaz. This is because anarchist space is heavily patrolled. The newbie might request Bob Marley or the Grateful Dead, and that wouldn’t look very good. Or something more serious might happen – the newbie might look at someone’s tits too long or fondle someone’s afro, and then the anarchist who brought the person with “bad politics” would be guilty of unacceptable sexism or racism by association. Anarchist bouncers are unconventional, but take their jobs very seriously. As in Cancun, no one without the designated green bandanna may pass through the gate. After all, these strangers might be even worse than hippies, oglers and pestilent white people – they could be infiltrating cops.

In the next two chapters I take on the challenge of “insularity” posed by the old Cuban anarchist at the closing assembly of the Foro Social Alternativo in Caracas – and many other anarchists as well – by exploring in detail specific ways in which anarchist worlds are bounded, some being more overt than others. In this chapter I explore the formal exclusion, whereby persons are explicitly banished or denied entry on the basis of possible “cop” status. Formal, because the expulsion is official (acknowledged in speech)

and backed up by a certain formal logical operation: by definition “cop” ≠ “anarchist”. Within a social movement that is nominally committed to “diversity”, “outreach”, and “inclusion” of as many people as possible, the application of “cop” invokes a state of exception, whereby the normal course of debate and contestation not only *is* but *should be* suspended for the sake of protecting everyone’s basic safety. If “anarchism” is a space of ongoing argument, the invocation of “cop” serves to shut that argument down. I suggest that both suspicion of traitors and ‘cop-calling’ as a potential discursive register tend to characterize anarchism wherever it goes. In this exercise I attend to semantic displacements within what English-speaking anarchists call “security culture”, with attention both to the real and present danger of police infiltration as well as how the various dynamics of (sub)cultural distinction discussed so far are euphemized in discussions around security.

Wherever we find anarchism we also find less formal exclusions, ones that are not – and cannot be – recognized in speech. Previous chapters have pointed in different ways towards a set of subliminal exclusions along the lines of race, class and gender, for example. These would never be admitted openly and rather operate in an invisible and misrecognized fashion in ways we have already seen. The chapter following this one complexifies this investigation by further attending to axes of cultural difference as misrecognized boundaries of “anarchism” proper: Most anarchist activity ultimately happens in specific places where “locals” and transnationally mobile anarchists contest and collaborate, and where certain composites of cultural traits are recuperated as more “anarchist” than others. Activists drawing the boundaries of “anarchist culture” – always informed by the biases of “local culture” – work to include some people in anarchist spaces at the expense of others, an operation which also proceeds silently via mediating discourses, such as those of “consensus” and “anti-oppression” in North America.

For now, a close look at broad patterns of when and how people are explicitly and forcefully excluded from anarchist spaces – camps, parties, list-serves – tells us a lot in and of itself about the content of anarchism and where the boundaries of anarchism lie, as well as how these boundaries are often mystified and why. The formal ‘cop-call’ expulsion may be taken as a limit case, but also involves works of displacement that are particular and important to apprehend in and of themselves: While it is understandable that anarchists fear spies and police, the designation of persons as “cops” tends to function according to the misrecognized logic of capital discussed in previous chapters. The triage of who’s “in” vs. “out” is continually inflected by the power dynamics of race, class and gender, yet these are often displaced in activist discourses of “security culture” and “safety”. How this plays out in Mexico and Anglo-America is very different because the contents of capital and fear are different in each place, and yet the form of this complex is similar across borders, and bears surprising consistency throughout the past century of anarchist organizing. Banishment on the basis of treachery, real or projected, is an old theme, wherein the designation “spy” and the more free-handed attribution of “bad politics” insidiously interpenetrate.



Throughout this chapter I move back and forth from Mexico to Canada and back and forth through time, highlighting the similarities and differences between contexts with regard to anarchist fears and their displacements, and comparing briefly the “security” concerns and strategies of anarchists at the turns of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Towards the end of the chapter we land back in Anglo-America, to consider the slippage between “spy” and “bad politics” wherein a third term – “safe space” – mediates the ensemble. In Anglophone North America, anarchist commitments to “diversity”, “consensus process” and “safe space” all nominally ensure precisely those values, and yet are often non-performative to the extent that transgressors of this trio, like “spies”, are often identified based on misrecognized criteria. Just as the President of Venezuela suggests Luis and other indigenous activists are CIA or “green mafia” when really they’re just cramping his style, activists accuse each other of the same for a variety of reasons. Significantly, both with respect to the “spy” and persons who generally make activists feel “unsafe”, the self-policing within the anarchist movement in Anglo America somewhat mirrors the logic of neoliberal governmentality, wherein both the form and contents of banishment-as-punishment appear to protect and consolidate bourgeois moralities within the anarchist scene. Meanwhile, cultural capital – “cred” – translates into authority among the anti-authoritarians, and while all the formal rank and ritual trappings of the pyramidal underground societies that first called themselves “anarchist” has been effectively done away with, what we are in fact left with is an insular group with a pyramid-shaped (informal) authority structure with “secret passwords” being displaced to, and misrecognized in, proper subcultural knowledge. Broadly speaking, we may note that while anarchism’s networking logic is the reason the anarchist scene covers the whole world, its often disingenuous demands for purity and perfection are what makes the anarchist world a very small one after all.

## Surveillance and Infiltration

Participants in anti-systemic social movements, and perhaps anarchists in particular, are right to be concerned about undercover police and intelligence agents infiltrating their groups and activities. Often their non-activist friends and family will laugh off such worries, particularly in Canada – most white members of the white middle class in Canada are largely drawn in by Canada’s self-presentation as a nice, friendly, civilized country that respects the rights of all its citizens and doesn’t do mean things to people who don’t deserve it. For this very reason, if a person insists surveillance is a real concern in his or her case, interlocutors will often respond as if the worried person is either a “paranoid conspiracy theorist” or a real-life terrorist deserving of repression.<sup>1</sup> It

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<sup>1</sup> Note that I analyse the category “conspiracy theory” and its contents elsewhere (Lagalis 2015). It may be worth noting that some anarchists are enthralled with certain ideas that others call “conspiracy theories” (or know they are true), yet in North America most anarchist activists reel away from the teleological logic of the laughable “conspiracy theory”, wherein this phrase is generally used as an insult. I

doesn't matter how many times the CBC (the national news service) publishes accounts of the Prime Minister's new "spy palace", or how many times other commercial media venues publish that such-and-such animal rights organization has been infiltrated by intelligence agents for the past ten years, or how many times activists can match up photographs of police officers with ones of the only person at the demonstration throwing rocks, for most Canadians "Agent Provocateur" is simply the name of a chain of British lingerie stores – sexy in a James Bond kind of way.

Sometimes people who have a notion of social history ("critical" academics for example) acknowledge COINTELPRO, the intelligence ensemble that engaged a sustained and multivalent attack on the Black Panthers among others. But this was back in the 60s, when the academics were young (and more critical as well), and besides, that was in the United States. Present-day anarchists concerned about the same sort of thing in Canada today are obviously delusional, paranoid and boasting an inflated sense of their own importance. In fact the state must think present-day anarchists are very important indeed. It is altogether obvious and well-documented among those involved that presentday anarchist movements (that involve no "terrorists") are everywhere spotted with government agents, who generally fall into one or more of three categories: Infiltrators, informants and *agents provocateurs*.

Infiltrators are agents of the state that pose as activists, inserting themselves into dissident groups in order to report to the government on their activities. Bob Lambert, for example, posed as an animal rights activist named Bob Robinson while working for a British secret police unit called the Special Demonstration Squad (SDS) when he started courting Jacqui, an animal rights activist who was ten years younger than him – "I always thought he was besotted with me...Most of the time we went to animal rights meetings in east London because that's who he wanted to be introduced to."<sup>2</sup> By becoming close to Jacqui, Bob was taken in and trusted by other activists in the scene – "I was trusted and liked so no one ever questioned him because he was with me." When Jacqui suggested they have a child, Bob consented. When the child was two years old – in 1986 — Bob disappeared from Jacqui's life saying he was "on the run". Looking back Jacqui can only figure that he left because she ceased to be useful to him – "Once I became a mum I cut back on doing all the animal stuff and I was no longer any use to him". Jacqui never heard from him again, and only discovered his true identity by spotting his photograph in a newspaper decades later. As she later told a parliamentary committee, "I went into shock. I felt like I couldn't breathe and I

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suggest that anarchists in North America should be interested in engaging, mobilizing, and qualifying so much popular discontent evident in the "conspiracy theory", and yet imperatives of respectability appear to overdetermine activists' approach to the phenomenon, whereby the "conspiracy theory" is dismissed as a dangerous "distraction" and associated with both a racist white working class and wrongheaded ethnic populations at once.

<sup>2</sup> This quote and others are taken from an interview with Jacqui published in The Guardian (2013) <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/24/undercover-police-spy-girlfriend-child> (accessed July 28, 2015).

started shaking. I did not even read the story which appeared with the picture. I went inside and phoned my parents. My dad got the paper from their nearest shop and my mum got out the photos of Bob and our son...”. Jacqui was effectively raped by the state – “I was not consenting to sleeping with Bob Lambert, I didn’t know who Bob Lambert was.”

Agents provocateurs are agents of the state that insert themselves into activist groups or events for the express purpose of performing or instigating illegal activities which will justify repression of the activists in question. The simplest and most common examples of agents provocateurs are the plainclothes police that mingle and march around in the middle of activist demonstrations for the purpose of throwing objects at police so that the police may “legitimately” attack the protestors with tear gas, pepper spray or boots and batons, and perhaps round them all up in a mass arrest. Sometimes these agents are very easy to spot. For example, in 2009 during a demonstration in solidarity with Gaza in Montreal a man threw a rock towards the police from very far back in the crowd, so far back that the rock didn’t even make it across the line, and hit another protestor in the back. Indeed he was so far back in the crowd that he was standing right next to the very, very last contingent in the march – the “Baby Bloc”, which is the group of parents with babies and small children who purposefully walk together at the back of the march, making a safe escape easy if or when the police decide to attack. When this guy threw his rock we all looked over at him – what kind of asshole throws a rock while standing next to a bunch of six-month old babies? Only a cop. Indeed he had a high-tech ear piece wired to his head and the shiniest black shoes in the crowd. We confronted him and he actually ran off towards the police who hid him behind their line! Of course the police subsequently attacked us, saying that they were responding to “protestor violence”.

Sometimes government agents are infiltrators and agents provocateurs at the same time, in which case the infiltrator works over a longer term to persuade activists to engage in violent activity for the purpose of criminalizing and imprisoning them. The case of Brandon Darby is illustrative here: When Hurricane Katrina destroyed New Orleans in 2005, Brandon jumped in to help Scott Crow drive to New Orleans from Austin, Texas with a slew of supplies in order to perform a search and rescue operation. Among other things, they rescued a veteran Black Panther from a severely flooded neighborhood while fighting off roaming bands of armed white militia, and were hailed as heroes. Thus began the Common Ground collective, which grew to coordinate First Aid relief, drinking water, soup kitchens and neighborhood patrols in decimated popular neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> Thus also began the activist career of Brandon Darby, who had not previously been socially integrated into activist networks and activities. By 2008 he had lots of “cred” indeed, and despite the trail of ignored activist women who

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<sup>3</sup> Crow (2011) writes a critical reflection on this history – an important story beyond its relation to Darby.

consistently complained about his macho protagonism and sleazy behaviour, Brandon was a wellrespected activist.

That year, Brandon coaxed two friends to put together Molotov cocktails to bring to the Republican National Convention and then informed on them as terrorists, landing each of them some heavy jail-time. He subsequently issued a public statement explaining that he had become an informant (this being our third category, referring to true activists that switch sides) on account of good conscience: His experience among the activists had taught him how dangerous they are. Many activists suspect that Brandon Darby was an infiltrator from the beginning, however, and that the racket about him “switching sides” was a strategic maneuver to prevent any assertion that the two Molotov cocktail builders were only experimenting with violent tactics on account of Brandon Darby himself. I also think it is likely that Brandon was an agent of the state from the beginning, because when I happened to be broke and stranded in Austin in early 2004, Brandon offered me a job polishing floors, saying that he had heard I was into “political stuff” and wanted to “get involved”, always spending our drives to jobsites in the mornings elaborating gung-ho speeches about how we all needed more guns if we wanted to be effective. I thought it was fucked up to be talking about social justice while paying me and five migrant Mexicans to sand concrete for four dollars an hour without any facemasks, but, then again, student activists back home had expected me to risk electrocuting myself for free out of pure “solidarity” while they collected \$100 per workshop hour to teach “anti-oppression”, so this in and of itself was not particularly suspicious. And when Brandon insisted we go together to see a talk by Rachel Corrie’s sister (Rachel being the young U.S. American killed by Israeli bulldozers while standing on top of a Palestinian house) and didn’t know anyone else there, he simply appeared to be a neophyte seeking to learn. Maybe he was. Or maybe he was looking for his entry. In any case whenever he wasn’t talking about guns he was flashing his shit-eating grin trying to get into my pants, and I am very happy that I never slept with him. This is how it is. Of all the people that want to accompany activists to events, who try to make friends with them and charm them with shit-eating grins, a portion of them are spies simply trying to land everyone in jail. After all, the three examples above are ones in which the agent was exposed or exposed himself, and one must imagine that for every infiltrator that activists catch, there are dozens more that activists never find out about. Sometimes activists in the United States petition to see their FBI files and can deduce from them that during a given period in question, a rather close friend must have been a spy, and are left wracking their brains trying to guess who it was. All of this inevitably translates into pervasive anxiety among activists regarding the true intentions of their peers, and understandably leads to activists practicing a certain discerning eye when meeting new faces. The stakes are even higher in Mexico than in Quebec, Texas or England, and the terrain even more fraught. No activist can effectively petition for her secret police file in Mexico, and even if she could get her hands on one, it would be largely irrelevant: In Mexico everyone knows the rule of law – *estado de derecho* – basically does not exist. While the style of police

actions in North American cities differs, and while the legal processes (and secret police units) in Canada, the United States and Britain differ as well, these three contexts are more comparable than any of them are to Mexico, where my three categories of infiltrator, provocateur and informant that activists work with in the English-speaking North do not properly translate, and where militants are rather primarily concerned with *infiltrados*, *porros*, and *paramilitares*.

An *infiltrado* is an infiltrator, and here the usage and referent is the same. *Porros* are a specifically Mexican phenomenon, and refer to mercenary groups affiliated with government (traditionally the PRI apparatus) that operate on university campuses under the guise of student associations, often formally recognized and funded by the university like any other club. The *grupos porriles* recruit disenfranchised youth, offering them “protection” from bullies and empowering them to bully (and rob) other students, which is reason enough to join. Although the *porros* generally know that a chain of command runs up the political ladder, and respond when called upon to disrupt the leftist activities of students, most are not directly contracted by the state nor act out of specifically political feelings but rather raid student union offices, beat up student activists, scribble inflammatory graffiti on university walls, and serve as agents provocateurs by throwing rocks at police all on account of patronage relations among the *porros* themselves: To join the *grupo porril* one must often prove ones salt by committing acts of vandalism, robbery or disruption of student activity. The *grupo porril* lies somewhere between a fraternity and a street gang at the disposal of the state – a unique monster, whose motivations and tactics are not comparable to anything in the experience of activists from Canada or the United States.<sup>4</sup>

And then there are the *paramilitares*. Whereas in Canada activists must be concerned about one out of a hundred activists being a well-behaved sleeper agent, in Mexico activists must navigate a terrain in which agents of the state consist in heavily armed guerrilla armies, who either bother posing as *campesino* liberation fronts or not. For example, the “United Movement for Triqui Liberation” (*Movimiento Unido para la Liberacion Triqui* — MULT) sounds like something Zapatista-esque, and yet members of the “Independent United Movement for Triqui Liberation” (*Movimiento Unido para la Liberacion Triqui Independiente* — MULTI) insist that MULT is rife with paramilitaries at the service of the state and responds largely to the interests of *caciques* (local “big men”/indigenous elites). Dissidents on the ground in Oaxaca have a hard enough time teasing all of this apart, whereas the naïve foreigner basically doesn’t stand a chance. Meanwhile, whereas the Canadian concerned with sleeper agents is worried

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on *porros* see Poniatowska (1980), Ramirez and Durón (1984), as well as the text published by the General Strike Committee (CGH) of the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM) in 2004: “El porrismo, el reacomodo y nuestras tareas” at [http://web.archive.org/web/20040908131343/mx.geocities.com/organizacion\\_cgh/documentos/porrismo](http://web.archive.org/web/20040908131343/mx.geocities.com/organizacion_cgh/documentos/porrismo). The following documentaries on YouTube are also informative: “10 junio 1971 – Halcones, Terrorismo del Estado” at [http://youtu.be/2sr\\_38brmx](http://youtu.be/2sr_38brmx), and “Porros 3 de Marzo Historia” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZK4jKvmDnc&feature=youtu.be>. All sources are in Spanish only.

about landing in jail, at the time of writing students all over Mexico are outraged over the fact that forty-three student activists were recently disappeared and are most likely buried in a ditch (#tod@s somos Ayotzinapa). In Canada the compliance of the (relatively comfortable and apathetic) public is achieved via propaganda and buttressing the illusion of rule of law, whereas in Mexico the government doesn't need to bother planting Molotov cocktails in activist backpacks in order to get away with imprisoning them, they just murder or imprison them regardless.

The different stakes and levels of fear on either side of the borders engender different activist cultures of suspicion vs. trust/*confianza*, different ways of activists sussing each other out, and different dividing lines between the information activists, even those who are friends, will willingly share with each other and information that is simply never repeated aloud. These differences in activist culture lead to all sorts of misunderstandings, sometimes engendering suspicion in and of themselves: Activists in Mexico may explain that they are quite sure that such-and-such *gringo* must be a spy because he walked into the pirate radio station "supposedly" to do an interview but then started to brazenly rifle through all the documentation on the shelves, and yet this is very possibly simply the behaviour of a clueless *gringo* who does not realize that as an unknown foreigner he is necessarily "guilty until proven innocent" and is most definitely not in Kansas anymore, where community radio stations are much happier to share their "visioning-retreat" minutes with random activist interviewees. And given the scenarios of fear and repression just described, it is arguably more incumbent on the *gringo* to "learn the local language first" than it is on Mexicans to be understanding and openminded towards the clueless *gringo*.

Sometimes the different stakes involved lead to social friction that does not reach the level of spy-accusations but troubles transnational collaboration nonetheless: Many Mexican activists will not divulge information to a foreign activist comrade not because they specifically think he or she is a spy, but because the foreign activist can't be trusted with it precisely because they are clueless as to the Mexican political landscape and might go around sharing this information with others in turn, who they consider trustworthy according to misplaced calculations derived from another context. The *extranjer@* activist does not know the right cues to look for. The *extranjer@* activist might easily confuse MULT and MULTI. The *extranjer@* activist is a bull in a china shop and the Mexican activists know it. Meanwhile the *extranjer@s* may misread the scenario, and getting the drift that information is being withheld from them, take it personally. I remember having moments like this myself, arrogantly feeling indignant that I should be treated with suspicion: In fact my Mexican activist friends are often protecting me as much as themselves by offering selective renditions of events.

## Security Culture and the Spectre of Judas

While the way repression and fear thereof play out differently in Mexico, Montreal and London, in my experience most anarchist scenes are characterized by a comparable complex of fear related to spies and surveillance, gossip around the same, and a shifting overlap of both with a more diffuse and general anxiety around whether comrades are as dedicated to the cause as much as others, or as much as they should be. Claudio Lomnitz (2014) unearths a similar complex in his recent historiography of the *Partido Liberal Mexicano* (PLM) and the editorial collective of *Regeneración*, which is to say the Flores Magon brothers and their comrades at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lomnitz refers to the anarchists of this transnational network as “slaves of freedom”, and what he says in this respect is appropriate to their 21<sup>st</sup> century counterparts as well: “The life of the freedom slave was full of love. It was a love for humanity that emerged from an everyday practice of love for the comrade or openness to the comrade” (2014: 220). Here we may think back to my earlier discussion regarding anarchist reciprocity and faith. Precisely because the comrade is full of solidarity, he or she is “always nagged by suspicion”; “Given the magnitude of these individuals’ sacrifices – they led passionate, open, giving lives – they could easily suspect that they might be taken advantage of.” (221). After all, if individuals merely pretend to lead the anarchist life and then reap benefits from the establishment on account of it, then they were – and still are – effectively “robbing the sacred gift of workers’ love and solidarity...They were, in other words, traitors, and like Judas, they always betrayed with a kiss. They had to, because the only way to dupe a comrade was with a nod and a bow to the libertarian communist ideal.” (222). In other words, an understandable fear of betrayal extends far beyond the acute worry around spies, and in practice the two necessarily overlap: “If a comrade was thought to be opportunistic and had personal ambitions, that person could be prone to selling out and maybe even to selling out his comrades” (295). For this reason, “the line between personal dislikes and suspicions of treason could get thin, and work was required to keep them distinct.” (ibid.) Now as then, a comrade might easily be suspected of “cashing in on fundraising drives” or “using militancy to create a political career for himself” (ibid.), and the same can be said with respect to academic careers as well. Then as now, “when militants left the cause, they often lamented their lack of selfishness during their years of militancy.” (221)

In other words, it makes sense that anarchists are concerned to discern whether or not their comrades have properly anarchist politics – “good politics” or the right “*línea política*” in the vernacular – just as the specific worry about spies makes sense as well. All of this does, however, end up creating contradictions that are hard to manage – one might even say unique anarchist neuroses: Anarchist activists generally claim to have a “better analysis” than everyone else while insisting they are against “vanguardism” and hierarchy; meanwhile the search for anarchist purity and social diversity clash, leading to a variety of impasses that must somehow be displaced.

Such an outcome is arguably inevitable within a social movement that does not want to operate via “secret societies”, rather committed to “outreach” and the “grassroots”, and yet has to worry about state surveillance and repression as much or more so than was necessary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A whole discourse and set of practices referred to by activists as “security culture” arises: Everyone is technically invited to the party, but precisely because this is the case some very big bouncers – figurative and literal – are necessary just in case some distinctly “wrong” people show up. And yet there is no easy way to tell if someone is “wrong” or not, leading to a scenario in which “security concerns” are often applied in a haphazard manner that reflects a diversity of other agendas and informal hierarchies within the anarchist scene itself.

Consider, for example, the following lists of “warning signs” taken from *Profiles of Provocateurs* written by activist Kristian Williams (who we may remember from Chapter 2 as the guy who wrote *The Politics of Denunciation* that feminists denounced). With respect to the first case/profile, the following “red flags” should have “signaled something was awry”: “**Money Issues:** Bryan’s habit of throwing around cash meant that even though a lot of people didn’t like him and his ‘blustery bro-dude personality’ they were willing to put up with it”; “**Legal questions:** Bryan had made plans to go to the RNC [Republican National Convention] himself, but was escorted off the plane by authorities. The reason wasn’t clear: he never really explained...”; “**Bluster:** Several people remember Bryan bragging that he had a record and had been arrested for political action...”; “**Questions about his personal life:** One friend recalls: ‘When I went to the bathroom in his apartment there was nothing in there...I started asking how long he’d been living there, and he got all aggravated’”; “**Pressuring others toward illegal action:** ‘Bryan kept pushing Brady [McGarry] toward more radical ‘real militant action.’””; “**Warnings from others:** Several of Rick Wilson’s friends told him something was wrong, including one person who reported being followed. But Wilson just blew them off.”

The second profile, of Anna, similarly points to money issues, vague and inconsistent explanations, documenting incriminating evidence (insisting the group keep a little notebook), and failure to follow agreed-upon security protocols. The third profile is of Brandon Darby, where we are told that activists should have been suspicious of Brandon due to his “**Previous behaviour...**Several local activists describe [Brandon] Darby as a troubled, paranoid man with a volatile history with women, a penchant for violent rhetoric, and a strong authoritarian streak...he also drove a wedge between me and Lisa Fithian and eventually caused her to leave too.” The fact that he was in the habit of “**Demanding access to sensitive information he didn’t need**” should also have tipped activists off. Beyond these signs there was Brandon’s “**Assumption of authority**”, his tendency to “**Exagerat[e] his own knowledge and experience**” and “**Tak[e] credit for others’ work**”, as well as his “**Hero complex**” and “**Bravado**”.

From having met Brandon Darby myself I know very well what this list refers to, and that his *protagonismo* (as one would say in Mexico) was off the charts. However,



what is crucial to notice here is that perhaps except for pressuring activists into violent activities and demanding access to sensitive information, all of the traits noted in the three cases above could easily describe many anarchist men. The issue of “avoiding questions about personal life” is certainly useful to consider, except that many anarchists avoid going into unnecessary details about their lives with anyone but very close friends (*los de confianza*) precisely – and arguably legitimately – because they are themselves concerned with spies being present. Particularly the last half of the list with respect to Brandon – “assumption of authority”, “exaggerating his own knowledge and experience”, “taking credit for others’ work”, “bravado”, etc., does not refer to anything special regarding the tendencies of men in anarchist collectives. Perhaps the author means to say that the “assumption of authority” *vis-à-vis other men*, “exaggerating his own knowledge and experience” *vis-à-vis other men*, “taking credit for other *men’s* work”, etc., is what should seem suspicious. Either way, the experiences of anarchist women become irrelevant here, just as Lisa Fithian’s long-standing critique of Brandon was irrelevant until key male protagonists transformed her “opinion” into “knowledge” by repeating it themselves.

In other words, what tends to happen in practice is that activists are singled out as suspicious *not* because they exemplify any of these – or other – arguably suspicious characteristics, but rather on account of *who* accuses them of being “sketchy”. Not only does it help to have masculine authority, but being a “key protagonist” is itself important. Only well-respected activists who have a lot of “cred” themselves can get away with knocking the “cred” of others. Here is where we see “cred” translating into authority among the anti-authoritarians, with “secret passwords” displaced to, and misrecognized in, subcultural knowledge.

Neither activists nor academic researchers tend to take a long view of surveillance and infiltration. Many activists (largely middle-class and university educated) are as familiar with Foucault (1977) as the academics are. They are generally familiar with the “panopticon” (that modern architectural arrangement whereby institutional authorities can see us but we can’t see them) and the notion of populations being increasingly controlled through the construction of surveilled and fearful self-disciplining subjects as opposed to via brute force – although this is somewhat more applicable to Canada than Mexico. However, the specific governmental tactics of infiltration and surveillance of targeted dissident groups, and the correlate cultures of fear and resistance strategies that develop in dialectic have not been given specific nor historical attention by either activists or researchers (except perhaps for those working for the CIA itself). Again, the earliest example most often cited by activists and academics alike is with respect to COINTELPRO, and present-day activists’ overwhelming concern with “Internet security”, e.g. the pitfalls of using corporate-controlled social media platforms, engenders a “security culture” that proceeds as if surveillance and infiltration were somewhat irrelevant until the moment we stepped into George Orwell’s dystopia of “1984”: Only two decades after he predicted it the British government set up a web of surveillance cameras that covers most of the country. George Orwell’s own house was briefly gar-

nished with a CCTV camera next to the commemorative plaque. Presumably people complained.

Activists (and everyone else) should indeed be concerned about high-tech surveillance drones that have the capacity to transport nano-weaponry, but the general problem of the need for secrecy versus popular mobilization reaches as far back as the “Left” itself, and has involved a variety of creative organizational constellations that ultimately define the texture of social movements and the everyday life of activists in ways that have not been sufficiently addressed. In some ways this is understandable – I myself have trouble charting an argument around this topic while skirting so much information that would be useful to authorities. In any case, a thorough historiography of the phenomenon is beyond the scope of this work, and yet I point to certain parameters of such a study if it were to be done. An honest look at the genealogy of leftist dissident movements and their various organizational forms suggests that changing dynamics of suspicion and displacement necessarily overlap with *a priori* notions of the revolutionary subject, wherein the struggle over power to define the political among differently positioned subjects (along the lines of race, class and gender among others) is rendered in terms of “security concerns” and vice versa.

## “For Your Own Security”

To illustrate let’s begin with an autobiographical example, and one which encourages us to take a long view of yet another aspect of anarchist culture at the same time – colourful correspondence.

When I wrote to my Ici la Otra collective in late 2006 regarding the dubious status of the speaking-tour sister organization, and Stephane forwarded my email directly to one of its members, the angry exile, the first thing the exile did was launch into an attack on the speaking-tour list-serve regarding my credibility, intentions, divisive feminism and probable affiliation with state authorities. Of course a list-serve argument of magnificent proportions ensued. Consonant with the pattern of list-serve arguments in general, the first replies were in a tentative mode, relatively diplomatic, seeking to prevent escalation of conflict, but it did not take long before enormous quantities of shit were being thrown in every possible direction. Also consonant with the pattern of anarchist list-serve arguments (and perhaps list-serve arguments in general), the shift from restrained debate to a vicious free-for-all correlated with most of the women on the list-serve falling silent (I myself permanently “unsubscribed”), while a handful of men wrangled to the death. A less-generalizable phenomenon also transpired in this particular case – the argument shifted from a partially bilingual exchange to a purely Spanish exchange, which made sense as most of the affected parties’ first language was Spanish (and the rest of us could communicate in Spanish whereas the reverse was not the case). Related to this last, the vocabulary, tone, and genre of prose involved in the argument were increasingly of a Mexican order – e.g. “Dearest brothers and sisters

in struggle, we write to you from the scorched earth of these lands of resistance, our feet burning and our revolutionary hearts heavy, hoping to rescue our noble movement for freedom from the satanic snares of treachery..." Of course *gringo* activists can be rather florid in their list-serve arguments as well, but the historical referents, plays of identity and sarcasm involved here are distinctly Mexican and were squarely above all of the foreigners' heads (including mine).

At the time I felt a combination of righteous indignation, insecurity, and disorienting confusion. Looking back, with the wisdom of hindsight, ten years more experience and considerable self-reflection, I can appreciate that many of my original actions and reactions in this scenario are characteristic of the "clueless *gringos*" that I tend to chastise. At the same time, ongoing experience during the same period suggests that the operation of "divisive feminist *and/or* CIA agent" present in this particular listserve argument is widespread and not reserved for clueless *gringos* – the anarchafeminist women at the *congreso*, for example, complained of the same. Moreover, the spiraling degeneration from reasonable argument to knee-jerk shit-hurling does not appear to be the particular fault of the internet list-serve as medium of communication.

Consider, for example, what transpired when the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) of the Flores Magon brothers launched a revolt in 1906 that failed miserably. Ricardo lashed out in "vituperative attacks, insisting that the like-minded close ranks around key points, most particularly around the need for immediate revolution" (Lomnitz 2014: 201). His main rival on this point was Camilo Arriaga, who Ricardo accused of being a sellout, a lazy aristocrat, and betraying the main organizing committee (*junta*) to the St. Louis consul (which probably did not happen).<sup>5</sup> At the same moment, Ricardo also took aim at another prominent figure in Camilo's faction – Juana Gutierrez. Juana had apparently fooled around with her friend Elsa while in prison, and was therefore a "depraved and odious being" (203). Ricardo wrote that these two women, "dispossessed of all shame, had the run of the Galley at the Department of Women, catechizing the poor wretches in order to sacrifice them in the stench-filled altars of Sapphism", and his letter goes on to say that "Like a dead and decomposing animal, Doña Juana lives alone, loveless and angry, with no other company than her vices and ill deeds. Camilo Arriaga encourages [her] to write against us and against the Party because like all cowards, he hides behinds women's skirts to make his attacks!" (204). I remember thinking in 2006 how ridiculous it was for the angry exile to liken himself to Ricardo Flores Magon when he was acting like such an asshole, and have to laugh at myself in retrospect.

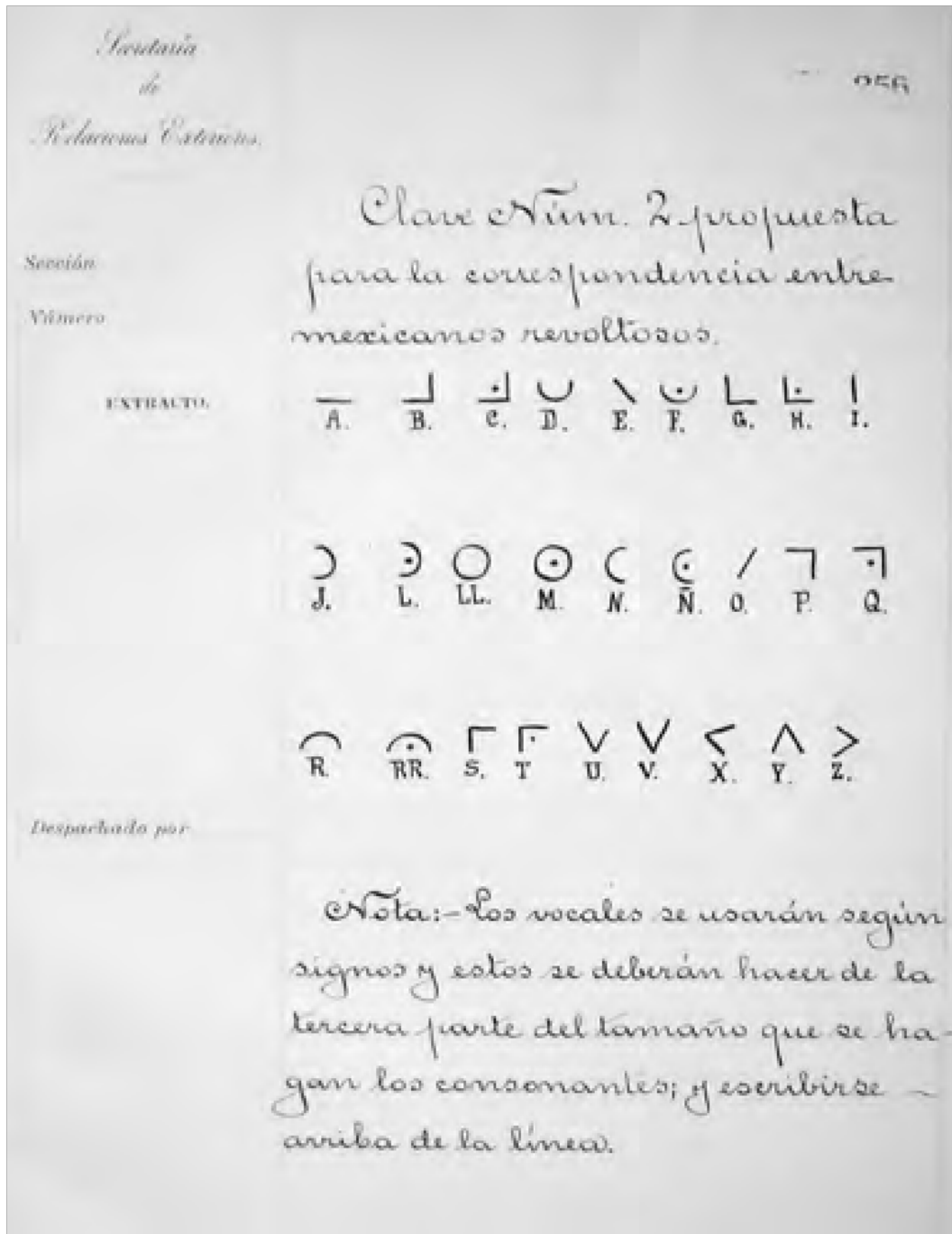
While it is understandable that many activists write off decidedly nonconstructive list-serve exchanges, as well as those on "comment threads", etc., as due to the medium of communication itself (anyone who has been on a list-serve, anarchist or not, can see that faceless instant messaging is not conducive to resolving disputes), the medium is not the only factor. Rather, the interplay of factors discussed above – suspicion and

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<sup>5</sup> Lomnitz (2014) analyzes this scenario in detail; see p. 200–204 in particular.







**Figure 6–1.** Surveillance and its artifacts, wherein anarchists have similar yet different fears, and express these in similar yet different ways. (top) A sticker reads “No Gods, No Masters, no Facebook”, a twist on the classic slogan. In Mexico activists use Facebook more judiciously than in England, where the sticker that “Likes” to riot Facebook-style (top left) is made with irony, nevertheless suggesting a very different sensibility. The clothing-patch from Mexico (left) reads “BE CAREFUL... YOU ARE BEING WATCHED”, and we can see here an example of the @ being used to make the word “watched” gender-neutral. (bottom left) U.S. Ministry of Foreign Relations’ report on one of the secret codes used in correspondence by the PLM, circa 1905, borrowed from Lomnitz (2014, 225). The “We Like This” sticker was made in London, U.K. during the 2010 student strike; I got the patch in D.F. in 2011; the top sticker I saw in D.F. that same year, yet the photo I provide is borrowed from the Internet: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nierox/5149406>, access 098 (accessed February 29, 2016).

resentment engendered by self-sacrifice, and the overlap of careful eyes for sufficient commitment to the cause with careful eyes for spies, can play out just as colourfully in letters written by hand that arrive with two weeks delay. With respect to the main question at hand here, the discursive slippage (apparently timeless) between “informant/spy” and more diffuse political improprieties, it is significant to note that the accusations of “agent of the state” and “evil feminist/sinful lesbian” (comparable as both enact disconcerting autonomy vis-à-vis men) in practice often replace each other in activist argument. In this their interchangeability serves to buttress both accusations as well as their attendant logic.

This operation can occur with respect to a single activist in question or with respect to a group of activists tarnished by association. In the first instance, subtle implications or outright statements suggest that the activist in question is a divisive feminist *because* she is a spy, and/or *must be* a spy due to her divisive feminism. In the second instance Activist A is more likely an informant – or, at the very least, certainly not a “true” anarchist — by virtue of his holding company with Activist B, and if Activist B defends Activist A it is obviously because she is easily manipulated as a lonely, angry lesbian, itself an ethical transgression which in any case means that she, herself, cannot possibly be a “true” anarchist.

In each of these categorical instances, at least two different things are always happening at once, albeit in shifting proportion: 1) Activists sincerely believe that a given questionable identity, practice or political position is indicative of possible spy status and are acting accordingly; 2) Activists are motivated due to their own identities, practices and political positions to denounce various other identities, practices and political positions and, knowing very well the superior rhetorical weight of attributing spy status vs. denouncing a given identity, practice or political position, are acting accordingly. In the examples above, gendered identities, practices and political positions are both salient and displaced and it is the dominant group (men) that mobilizes spy rhetoric. Note however that the same operation applies to other axes of difference and is also accessed by those marginalized in social movement circles to challenge activists in socially dominant positions, albeit with less secure effects. In all cases, disputes are informed by *a priori* notions of the political and a buried ranking of political priorities, which overlap with the dynamics of class distinction in general, and subcultural distinction in particular. In this, the displacement of struggles over the political to the discursive register of spy/not spy not only masks activists’ complex agendas vis-à-vis each other, but allows activists themselves to avoid facing their own less noble agendas, preoccupations, prejudices and blind spots.

When the *gachupín* gatekeeper at the Via Campesina camp in Cancun did not let my friends from Oaxaca across the fence while letting me move around freely, it was clearly because I appeared less “suspicious” due to being a white foreigner, whereas my friends were Mexican and therefore “suspicious”. While in this case I believe the gatekeeper was truly afraid of infiltrators (as opposed to disingenuously referencing them to mask a no-Mexicans policy), and while there is arguably some rational basis

to the idea that infiltrators in this case would more likely be Mexican men than white women, the fact remains that my friends were denied entry to the Via camp on the basis of their race. The *gachupín* gatekeeper referenced the fact that they were not formally affiliated with any organization, but neither was I. Moreover, it is worth wondering if my friends would have received the same treatment if they had piercings, Sin Dios T-shirts and spoke proper anarchist lingo with *chilango* accents. In other words, maybe as Mexicans they were particularly suspicious on account of their “popular” appearance, in which a mix of indigenous features, the wrong taste in clothing style and unknown rural accents led to exclusion on the basis of their lacking both mainstream cultural capital and *subcultural* capital at the same time, and the overlap of each/both with a compounded racism (they were not only Mexican vs. white but perceived as low-class/indigenous Mexican vs. respectable Mexican). When I put it to the gatekeeper this way she became flustered for a moment before stiffening into the righteous posture of a bureaucrat flanked by “Verbal Violence Will Not Be Tolerated” posters, then curtly admonished me that “everyone’s safety is at stake”, that she “had no power in the matter”, and didn’t I know that “just yesterday they had to kick out two spies who were carrying pistols?” – peoples’ very lives were at stake.

As usual, there are a few things going on here at once. First of all, the gatekeeper is sincerely worried about infiltrators with pistols and wants to do her job properly. If she doubted herself for a moment (becoming flustered) however, it is because all *gringo* and *gachupín* activists, however deficient they may be, are capable of noticing that Mexicans being forbidden entry to a social justice camp in Mexico is arguably problematic, and no solidarity activist is bound to feel particularly comfortable with the idea that they denied entry to two Mexican activists on account of racism. Nor do they want their solidarity activist friends hearing about such a thing. If the gatekeeper actually backed down when I challenged her on this point, it would be tantamount to admitting racism, and among most white solidarity activists the only thing worse than *being* racist is *looking* racist. The safest thing for the gatekeeper to do in order to protect her *own* reputation at this point is to stick with her original line, and suggest in no uncertain terms that if I persist then I am effectively putting peoples very lives in danger. When peoples’ very lives are at stake it is no time to worry about details, including the experience of two insignificant Mexicans. It is best to let it slide – for the sake of everyone’s security. Changing the register of an argument from one around “good politics” to one around spies and therefore peoples’ “very lives” always effects a certain “veto power”: the normal terms of debate are legitimately suspended, an executive decision is warranted, and there will be no further discussion.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, here the “discussion” which will go no further is both the discussion of whether my

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<sup>6</sup> Readers familiar with Schmitt (1985 [1922]); Agamben (1998) recognize, perhaps since my first mention of the state of exception in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, that I play here with the vocabulary and concept of sovereignty (see also Chapter 3 of this work): Just as (only) the sovereign can invoke the state of exception (☒ veto power), so can any autonomist – or perhaps only the most powerful among them. The parallels and inversions between “sovereignty” and (anarchist) “autonomy”



friends will be allowed in, as well as any discussion of the possibility that the gatekeeper is acting out of racial prejudice.

This same phenomenon can be discerned in contexts as diverse as Mexico City and Montreal, where “security concerns” mediate racial prejudices and misrecognized class interest in a variety of similar ways. When I send my white working class friends and family who say they are interested in “getting involved” to the local PIRG, and the staff keep the gate by making their first question “Are you a cop?”, with the inevitable effect that these newbies will never return, it is true that the PIRG staff is acting somewhat out of a legitimate fear of police infiltration. It is also true that the markers which are signaling “potential cop” to the staff are precisely those that mark them as working class – the wrong shoes and lingo, the “straight” haircut, the casual countenance: the equivalent combined lack of both mainstream cultural capital and subcultural capital that made my friends from Oaxaca suspicious in Cancun. The contents are different but the form of interaction is the same. The service of surveillance discourse in the misrecognition of capital – the insidious overlap of the two – also happens in a variety of other indirect ways that are even harder to recognize. The “suspicious” nature of the jetsetting graduate student, for example, who travels on account of grants disbursed by the state and whose establishment-based research is possibly threatening must also be understood in a variety of ways. First of all, it is true that the research activity is possibly threatening, and discerning activists must act accordingly. Secondly, inasmuch as these students are picked out for relying on grants, therefore being amenable to the interests of power from whence the grants come, “dirty money” with “strings attached” is being located in a very specific site at the expense of others.

When activists point to grants as “dirty money” with “strings attached” the unstated comparison is with other monies and with activists who have money to travel on other accounts, such as those of their professional middle class parents or ones stocked by well-paying jobs that such families, replete with social and cultural capital, provide. It shouldn’t be considered a coincidence that the majority of times I have been challenged on my politics for accepting grants – be it the Fulbright or some other – the persons challenging me are rarely the low-earning, non-University-educated working class Mexicans or U.S. Americans I know (who one might figure hold some resentment over the differential opportunity of our lives). Instead it is usually a middle or upper class university student drop-out who claims to speak in their name, and has developed his or her CV, earning potential, and capacity to fly around engaged in cosmopolitan activist activities on account of a sizeable original sum of capital, perhaps invested early on in one of those I-can-afford-to-pay-to-work Third World Volunteer Experiences. This capital is also “dirty money” and, disbursed via the bourgeois family with all of its attendant expectations, also comes with “strings attached”. The bourgeois subject is understood to transcend his or her material circumstances, however, whereas

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beg greater attention, and the register of “very lives” parallel to the biopolitical state (Foucault 1997) suggests transfer with Agamben’s political “life” (1998).

the upwardly mobile working class or Third World student is considered hopelessly ensnared. Latin American students studying in the United States on scholarship echo my own frustrations. All of us are continually told by respectable white Leftists that we are “selling out” by living on scholarships, wherein “dirty money” effectively stands in for money not inherited from bourgeois parents who manage powerful currencies and whose hands are always very clean.

The double action of capital and fear in ensuring “security” is not confined to instances in which activists who are structurally privileged mobilize suspicion against their subaltern equivalents, but can also go the other way. When my white male working class friends are turned away from the PIRG as potential cops, it is not merely on account of class markers but due to their being white and male as well – a scruffy, poorly-spoken man of colour, white woman, or woman of colour would not be read as a cop so quickly. As usual, there is some rational scaffolding here – more cops in Quebec are white men than black women – and yet due to the fact that suspicion is specifically attached to the white working class men as opposed to white bourgeois men, this on the part of PIRG staff who were women and people of colour of the professional middle class, the logic of triage here cannot simply be read as that of innocent and subaltern subjects subverting dominant power (that of the “white male” simply put). Inasmuch as his exclusion is read in such simplistic a fashion, the symbolic order that aligns capital with “good politics” is disguised in a gesture that protects PIRG staff from police, one which “for the sake of everyone’s security” should simply not be questioned. This is just one example of dominant interests and subaltern resistance being mixed up together, all mediated by “security” discourse to result in thicketts that are difficult to tease apart – many more abound.

Consider, for example, the mobilization of “cop” among anarchafeminists in a discussion following the *congreso anarquista*. When we held our final meeting after the *plenaria*, where we set a time for a follow-up meeting the next Friday to plan the actions and workshops we had not yet had a chance to discuss, some women including myself inquired as to where the email list we had gathered the day before was. Over forty people were present on the first day, including many “new faces”, and the second email sign-up sheet we had just passed around was not nearly as long. A conversation ensued in which some of the women present, including some “hardcore” Spanish feminists, said that we should not use that first sheet to send invitations to the next meeting because it included the emails of the three men present that day. Other women suggested using the long list but stating clearly in the invitation that only women were invited to the ongoing meetings and workshops. After some back and forth around this dilemma, one of the Spanish anarchafeminists interrupted to say “Anyways I think one of those guys was a cop”. In other words, this is no mere matter of three guys respecting an invitation to a non-mixed space; by using the long list we are putting peoples’ “very lives” at risk. There was no further discussion. And while it is true that one of those guys was possibly – even likely – a cop, it is worth wondering as to who benefits most from the trade-off. At least twenty anarcho-curious women, some of whom had lugged

themselves and their young children over that day while their angry husbands waited at home, were expendable for the sake of “our own security”, which could also mean the comfortable familiarity and purity of the existing clique.

Consider, finally, the layers of complexity involved in the following, decidedly more Anglo-American, example. In 2010 a Balkan anarchist, living in the United States, came to Toronto to participate in the activities leading up to the G20 summit, where he was invited to a house party fundraiser organized by No One is Illegal activists and other G20 organizers.<sup>7</sup> He called up some Bosnian friends in town and they all went together. At some point the DJ started playing Balkan music, which this group of friends recognized and enjoys, so they started jumping up and down and bouncing around having a fabulous time dancing, at which point they were interrupted by a group of very serious-looking white women who wanted to have a word with them. Were they cops? The guys were taken aback – why did the activists think they were cops? The activists explained that it is easy to tell because they obviously didn’t “fit in”: They had “straight-edge haircuts”, were dressed “weird” (a little too square), and weren’t dancing the way everyone else was. The guys explained that they are from the Balkans, and that this is how Balkan people dance to Balkan music, and why should it matter what their clothes and hair are like?

The activists were not convinced. They faltered regarding the argument that the Balkan men are cops, but in any case they were “making people feel uncomfortable”. They changed tack, saying that the men’s dancing was “aggressive” and making queer women at the party “feel unsafe in the space”. They explained that as party organizers it was their responsibility to make sure everyone feels “included” and that it is not okay for a bunch of tall “agro” white guys to be alienating queer women and people of colour. The Balkan anarchist who had brought the group to the party got upset at this point – wouldn’t a bunch of “anti-racist anarchists” care about being “inclusive” of the Bosnian guys? “Why is it that they should not be able to dance like Balkan people do?”, he contested, “And especially to Balkan music!”. “They are not being aggressive” he said, “they are having fun!”. He then ventured to say that the activists conducting this intervention were being racist themselves. The activists found this suggestion offensive – “You’re not *black*”, they said, “and you trying to play the victim here with this reverseracism bullshit, and trivializing the violence faced by people of colour in the process, is completely inappropriate. I’m afraid that we *must* ask you all to leave.” And so it happened that activists at a party co-organized by members of No One is Illegal kicked out some of the only people present who were actually refugees.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Note that in this case I was not present during the incident, but that this story was related to me by the Balkan anarchist in question.

<sup>8</sup> The activists’ recognition of the “square” white male as authority figure, including potential cop, is further illustrated by what transpired when the excluded Bosnians decided to enact some poetic justice – they stood outside the door and asked approaching activists for identification (which never happens at anarchist parties), as well as for a 10\$ entrance fee (which didn’t exist), and activists so

This example is very layered, and also somewhat unique as here the invocation of “cop” was a first-line response as opposed to a last-resort, discussion continued after the “cop” accusation, and the activists themselves outline what lay beneath: here as well, we have activists locating a lack of appropriate (sub)cultural capital – “square” hair and clothing, which along with male whiteness is easily rendered “cop”. Another crucial factor was the fact that the bodily exuberance of the Balkan men was a problem in and of itself. What made these white men “agro” was their way of dancing – they were not as self-contained as the activist dancers of Toronto. Here the fact that the white men are Balkan refugees elucidates more clearly, perhaps, a certain phenomenon within the Anglo-American anarchist scene whereby “cultural difference” and “marked racial difference” are elided. It is difficult for the activists to imagine that someone who is “white” could be “culturally different” generally speaking, or embody “difference” of value in particular.<sup>9</sup> The difference embodied by queer women and women of colour is of more value inasmuch as their feeling of “safety in the space” takes priority over the Balkan men’s “safety in the space” and can indeed trump their permission to be in the space at all.

In the English-speaking anarchist world, the discourse of “safe space”, which I explore further in Chapter 8, has a specific valence and history, largely developed in the context of developing a “community-based approach” to sexual assault, which includes women activists having the right to remove aggressors from movement spaces for the sake of everyone’s “safety” including that of the survivor herself. If the Mexican anarchafeminists at the *Congreso* had been *gringos*, for example, they would have referenced “safe space” in their demand, and the demand itself would have probably been different: Instead of asking the man to not be physically abusive, to speak quietly while negotiating co-parenting, and to leave the *congreso* but speak to his position if he likes on the way out, invocations of “safe space” would possibly involve his removal, temporary or permanent, from the entire anarchist public sphere by means of a structured “accountability process” (often involving a “confidentiality agreement”) evocative of those proliferating in neoliberal institutions (see e.g. Strathern 2000).

The dynamics around “safe space” in Anglo anarchist scenes are complex and presently the subject of much heated debate – one can just imagine how Mr. NE-FAC might respond. Women activists who organize around rape culture within the anarchist scene continually face defensive retorts that revolve around the possibility of “false accusations”, and struggle hard to insist that a woman should be taken at her word when it comes to such matters.<sup>10</sup> North American anarchist feminists face

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willingly deferred (even though they were entering a *residential* venue) that the Bosnians made 110\$ in fifteen minutes.

<sup>9</sup> This is true of most anthropologists as well; see further discussion in Chapter 9.

<sup>10</sup> Much existing critique of “safe space” consists of men concerned about their social license being impinged in some way, e.g., <https://medium.com/@aristoNYC/social-justice-bullies-the-authoritarianismof-millennial-social-justice-6bdb5ad3c9d3>. Here, important critical questions about “safe space” and “identity politics”, some of which I share myself in this work, are brought to align

a situation whereby Kristian Williams can write an essay criticizing the politics of (feminist) denunciation around sexual assault and denounce feminists who disagree at one and the same time, while himself publishing a pamphlet on how to identify and call-out a different category of undesirable – cops – the only salient difference between “rapists” and “cops” being that “cops” hurt men as much or more than women, and thus actually deserve our attention.

Given all of this, it might appear irresponsible to first mention “safe space” with reference to the example above, in which it is used to eject refugees from a party simply for dancing. Yet some of the impasses in current “safe space” debates might be better engaged by exploring the margins and extensions of its use: “Safe space”, like “cop”, is often extrapolated to articulate with a variety of misrecognized categorical decisions regarding who is a “true comrade” and who is not. No discussion of “policing the boundaries” within the anarchist scenes of North America can go without addressing “safe space”, because its rhetorical power is such that when even an accusation of “cop” does not definitively decide who is “out” and who is “in”, an invocation of “safe space” can. In other words, even when the tables are turned – the denouncing accusers women of colour, and the suspicious subjects “agro white boys” who make them feel uncomfortable for a multiplicity of reasons (including some very valid ones), the argument focuses on whether the men belong in the space at all, and is carried out in the register of “cop/very lives” with a fallback to a more diffuse discourse that is still underpinned by “basic safety”. Arguments of all sorts around who has a right to come to the anarchist party slide easily into the high-stakes register of protecting basic safety that both “cop” and “safe space” inaugurate, and wherein contestations over the definition of “good politics” vs. “bad” and that of the proper revolutionary subject (“queer women of colour” vs. “authentic refugee”) are worked out in a displaced and mediated fashion.

This last example is also especially important as it highlights the necessity of addressing exclusions from “anarchism” on cultural bases (including styles of dancing), which is the subject of the next chapter. While “anarchist culture” everywhere includes the constellation of suspicion and displacement I have so far been discussing, where “anarchist culture” overlaps with “local culture” – the classic “culture” of anthropology – the resultant mix is always particular and unique, and the possibilities for misrecognition of interest even greater. I have already suggested above, albeit briefly, ways in which “security culture” differ in Mexico and Quebec. In the next chapter we consider the experiences of Mexicans in *Gringolandia* as opposed to the movements of clueless *gringos* in Mexico. The chapter focuses specifically on the “local culture” of anarchism in Anglo America, partly because any in-depth inquiry into “local culture” must pick a place, and partially because the Anglo American anarchist scene is the anarchist

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with a reactionary patriarchal politics (and/or fall back on liberal arguments for “free speech”). White complaints around antiracist “safe space” are also often similarly related to the defense of existing white privilege. I am wary of being read to lend weight to such positions, yet also wary of the fact that equivalent concern among activists tends to shut down important critical questioning around “safe space” and “accountability processes” in general.

place that I know best: The operation of excluding people from anarchism on the basis of culture is much more subtle than someone yelling “Cop!”, hinging, as culture tends to, on questions of body language and facial expression, concepts of hygiene, senses of humour, forms of play, ways of dancing, and many other embodied phenomena, as opposed to official discourse. While a parallel inquiry regarding comparable cultural contests over anarchism in Mexico could be developed as well, I feel most confident teasing apart the manners of North American anarchist culture, where my mother tongue is spoken and where I have ethnographic experience broad enough to be able to locate a clear pattern of what I call “Anglo American” anarchist culture in scenes as diverse as those of Montreal, New York, Texas and California (and which finds close cousin in the scenes of the other English-speaking world, England itself). In the North American realm of “good politics” and ensuring “safety”, a certain kind of boundary policing and another kind of sovereignty have particular importance – that of the self.

# Chapter 7 – The Diversity of Consensus

Wherever we find anarchism we find the anarchist self, and yet the anarchist self changes from place to place. While it is possible to sketch out something of an anarchist culture that transcends borders and places – what I have been calling the “anarchist world” – the anarchist self is always local and particular: The self is always a complex of desires, manners, ideas, aspirations and embodied values, some conscious, some not, which necessarily betrays its origins – both where and how it grew up. We may say with confidence, for example, that anarchists most everywhere reject the majority vote – an ideological position – but it is also true that in no two places is “consensus process” the same. The ideological position interacts with local cultural codes, styles of speech, body language and emotional expression, unspoken rules about eye contact and laughter, place-based ideas around whose voice(s) matter more, and even culturally distinct notions around what counts as “agreement”. Similarly, to use an example from Chapter 4, anarchists across the Americas are interested in “horizontality” but the differences between the everyday practices of “horizontality” and “*horizontalidad*” are different, this largely because local and particular economic, political, social and cultural conditions create particular kinds of people, particular kinds of selves, and particular versions of anarchists.

Inevitably then, any inquiry into the anarchist self must pick a place, or at least a certain cultural region, whose contours are always blurry but nonetheless present, which for our purposes will be English-speaking North America. As I have said, this is the anarchist place that I know best, where I catch all the sideways remarks, where I am best positioned to note the subtleties of self. But I also focus on the English-speaking anarchist activists of North America because they are the most likely to forget they hail from a very particular place. As per our discussions in Chapters 4 and 5, most of these anarchists are also white, and thus suffer from the annoying “epistemological habit” of forgetting that they, too, are embodied and have only partial knowledge. Furthermore, whether they are white or not, people from the United States tend to proceed as if they are the nexus of the universe around which the entire world turns – and this goes for the “anarchist world” too. Finally, the bourgeoisie is ever-famous for universalizing its experience and desire, and the university student activists in North America who are drawn to anarchism (and read ethnographies such as this one) are more bourgeois than they may like to believe.

For these reasons and more, the next two chapters are devoted especially to them, not because they may be approached as examples of “anarchists” generally speaking, but with view toward their specific difference. Mexicans and indigenous people among “others” (Others) continue to appear in these stories, but the focus is toward those “others” inhabiting English-speaking North American anarchist places, such as the paperless migrants, travelling ex-pats, political refugees and graduate students of the La Otra collective, for example. In this exercise, the words and practices of Mexican participants and indigenous interlocutors, movement critiques by diverse local activists of colour, and the experiences of white working class people on the borders of the movement will all be positioned as foils that throw into relief the particular culture of the North American anarchist intelligentsia.

While the North American anarchist self can be approached from various directions, I broach the subject by beginning with a discussion of “consensus process” – the main topic of this present chapter. Some special attention should be given to consensus process in any case; as outlined in Chapter 1, being into some form of “consensus” vs. voting is a basic requirement for anarchist belonging most everywhere. Indeed when it comes to who is “in” and who is “out” of the anarchist category, perhaps the main thing besides being a “cop” that can land an activist squarely in the category of “non-anarchist” is his or her failure to respect the value of consensus process. Ideas around “consensus” have thus been key to both anarchists’ self-understanding and ethnographic analyses that posit anarchists as prefiguring non-hierarchical or “horizontal” relations. In this view, anarchist collectives (or “nodes”) are egalitarian by virtue of the fact that they use consensus process to make decisions, whereas the “network” is assumed to be egalitarian since it is merely a decentralized, and therefore nonhierarchical, web of these same collectives (see e.g. Graeber 2009; Maeckelburgh 2009). Inevitably perhaps, discourses, practices, and arguments around “consensus” serve both to manage and mask contradictions between theory and practice (or the real and the ideal), as well as latent and overt conflict between differently positioned activists, much like we find in the operations of displacement we find in praxes of “security”.

## **The Self of “Good Politics”**

Let’s begin with a site of anarchist culture and knowledge production that I have so far paid little attention – the academic anarchist conference. Academic anarchists cannot stand in for all anarchists, but observing the form and content of academic anarchists’ discussions about anarchism can tell us something about the anarchism being produced today, and their activity serves well to throw into relief the contours of the middle-class anarchist self in North America. The anarchists that attend such conferences are professionals of anarchism, and no one is more concerned to present a proper self than the professional, because that’s what professionalism is all about.



In 2008 I attended the Renewing the Anarchist Tradition (RAT) conference that happens annually in Vermont. Like all academic conferences that have “anarchism” in the title, the event drew a mix of professors who have a purely academic relationship with anarchism and activist practitioners who are in the process of academicization. At this particular conference the balance appeared to be swayed towards the once-anti-globalization-street-militants, now-grad-student-and-suffering-cognitive-dissonance category. As they (we) proceeded to make use of the conference to justify being both anarchists and academics at once with reference to “discursive terrains”, “ontologies of resistance”, and “floating signifiers” all while dressed in neater-than-usual outfits I couldn’t help but notice that the acronym RAT was far from a coincidence. In this play of tongue in cheek, the filth of the street is symbolically retrieved (while practically fixed in place) at the very same moment the participants wash it all off and position themselves as transcendent subjects of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> This dynamic was also discernible during the panel session activities. The program pamphlet inviting me to a workshop called “The Everyday Anarchist”, for example, suggested we might “take lifestyle seriously as a significant aspect of anarchist politics and identity”. “Everyday anarchism,” the blurb elaborated, means “working against hierarchy in our personal relationships”, “refraining from consumption practices that promote cruelty” and “being part of an anarchist subculture that is identifiable by its stylistic markers.” As I arrived, one of the coanimators introduced the workshop saying “How we live, what we buy, how we dress, what media we use and what we eat are all practices that stitch together a narrative of the self. They are communicative acts, propaganda by the deed. People not involved in politically radical movements can start by constructing a lifestyle that expresses what they believe in.”<sup>2</sup>

The other co-animator continued on to say that, “It’s important when we talk about identity like this, to differentiate between identities that are choiceful and identities that are not. I can’t reject being white or middle-class, these are not choiceful, but I can choose to identify as an anarchist, and I can reject things that aren’t anarchist. It’s these choices that are important. We live in collective houses not because our parents did, but because we are trying to be strictly different. It’s important to see how we can live the ideals of anarchism through things we *can* control, through the things we *choose* to be associated with, or not...” After framing the topic along these lines, the two animators said they wanted to “foster a forum for discussion” and suggested we start with questions: “Like where are we at?” asked the first animator”, “As for me, I used to be a vegetarian, but it’s an ethics I have since moved away from, and am now more into the idea of eating whole foods. I also ask myself new questions like: Should I travel by air? What about the question of fuel?”

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<sup>1</sup> Stalleybrass and White (1986) provide a compelling analysis of the bourgeois relationship to the rat.

<sup>2</sup> Note that “propaganda of the deed” is a recognizable phrase in the anarchist scene, associated with Errico Malatesta during his insurrectionist period. In general it meant to teach by example, yet the traditional reference was to armed rebellion, not stylistic markers.

Participants raised their hands; I paraphrase:

“Lately I been thinking about the issue of consumption, what we eat, and what it says about who we are – ‘we are what we eat’ right? Going vegan is something I would like to do, but I haven’t been successful yet, anyway, just a comment...”

“Yeah, I have been struggling with some of these questions a lot. Right now I live on campus and I have a meal plan, right? And it’s this horrible corporate cafeteria food, and I don’t believe in it but I eat it... I don’t actually have much control over it, and in the end, consumption is just a small aspect of being an anarchist I figure...”

“But, y’know, I am interested in this point about consumption. I want to *politicize* consumption. Living in consumer society is the product of our being in the capitalist economy, where it’s all about what you consume. The question comes down to ‘to buy or not to buy’...I mean not to judge anyone or anything, but it’s so important.”

“Yes, I think this is important, to remove ourselves from the cash-based economy, remove ourselves from the culture of consumerism, look for alternative ways to live in that sense.”

“It’s a tricky thing, you know, non-participation is powerful, like dumpster-diving and stuff, to show how much waste is, well, wasted...but so many traveler types come through our collective house and they just live off of us!”

“Yeah, although we should be careful not to judge...but it’s true that it’s one thing to dumpster-dive, like, because you need to, or are broke, or because you don’t want to work, and to do so as a specific *political statement*, I mean it’s all valid, but doesn’t it matter in terms of it being specifically anarchist? I’m not sure...”

Throughout the course of the workshop the discussion expanded somewhat, but certain patterns introduced here continued: At least 17 of the 25 participants offered preambles or disclaimers about not “judging” or “excluding” people and statements about how one must “respect anarchist self-identification”, and then went on to define anarchist lifestyle rather stringently, focusing mostly on “consumption” practices. After about an hour of this, the only person in the crowd who was not obviously a university student piped up. This misfit dressed in a rural outfit and trucker cap broke the smooth monotony by saying “Well, I’m a *bad* anarchist, I eat meat, I drive everywhere, y’know?”, at which point he started laughing. “And whatever,” he continued, “if we disagree about something for whatever reason, I think *that* in and of itself is important, I mean let’s have it out, instead this is just a pissing contest...!”

At this moment the rest of the workshop participants started to fidget and cast nervous looks around. The animator stepped into the circle holding up his hands: “Um... I think we can get bogged down in criticizing people. I will respond to the previous question first...”. He then directed himself to the person who spoke before this man, and then gave the floor to a new speaker who continued the pattern of disclaimers about how its bad to exclude people followed by exclusive definitions of anarchist identity. Meanwhile, workshop participants whispered among themselves about how the “bad anarchist” was “disruptive”.

When I asked various people after the workshop what was wrong with what he had said, the conversation turned immediately to *how* he had said it: He was sarcastic and vulgar (“pissing contests”), and when he said “I mean let’s have it out” he swooshed his hands out to the sides and above his head, made fists, and shook them around. The fact that he did it all with a smile on his face was irrelevant. In fact, rather than signify to the audience that he was in good spirits (i.e., was not actually about to swing those fists into someone’s face), the smile itself appeared to bother them – he was not taking the discussion “seriously”. All of this apparently compromised the “safety of the space”.

This exchange serves to introduce multiple key elements of the contemporary anarchist self in North America. First, the focus on ascetic consumer practices and veganism was not exceptional, and reflects the moral dilemmas of people who have substantial discretionary income, and therefore experience a relative burden of “choice” in their consumer habits. Note also how the translation of “choice” into “good politics” scratches the surface of speech in the one workshop participant’s comment whereby sifting through the trash for food may not count as anarchist if done out of necessity. Here Bourdieu’s (1984) argument that distance from material necessity defines “good taste”, appears all too salient, with the main difference being that the privilege of distance is misrecognized as “good politics” instead. Related to the last point and most relevant to the remainder of this chapter however, is how “good politics” is seen to reside in the way one represents oneself to others. Like anything else of value, “good politics” consists in recognition by others, and “good politics” only command respect and authority when they are communicated in ways that suggest one is the sort of person who would have “good politics” in the first place.

Here Bourdieu’s (1984) subtler concept of *habitus*, wherein cultural capital is internalized and embodied in a person’s manner, becomes the most useful. In the performance of “good politics” the content of what is said and the form in which it is communicated are equally important.<sup>3</sup> The person with “good politics” has a proper relationship to the self, that is, she sees the self as something to be constructed, stylized, and performed. The person with “good politics” is also a serious, self-contained, selfconscious person – one who represents the self in a “choiceful” manner. He or she literally embodies restraint and deliberation, suppressing emotional display and thus performing an overt display of objectivity and reflexivity, or a deliberative distance from one’s emotions and “baser” nature.

This brings us back to the “bad anarchist” mentioned earlier, who failed on every count. He admitted to eating meat and driving, but perhaps more importantly, he did not seem to feel guilty or self-conscious about it (unlike the apologetic university student with the meal plan). Neither was the bad anarchist self-contained in any way – he laughed, he exhibited multiple emotions, and even swung his hands in the air.

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<sup>3</sup> In Bourdieu’s scheme, *habitus* encompasses more than ‘manner’ as per the common-sense understanding; rather, he sees in ‘manner’ a whole embodied scheme of evaluation and propensities for action and behaviour, including those of “taste” (see Bourdieu cited in p.369–70 of this work; Swartz 1997).

Furthermore, he exposed the paradox of saying anarchist identity is meaningful because it is choiceful and exclusive while also continually saying its important to be “inclusive”. To use Erving Goffman’s (1959) phrase, he “created a scene” by exposing a dimension of the workshop that participants would prefer to misrecognize. Attendees were using the workshop primarily to establish their “good politics” vis-à-vis others present, and he pointed that out (“pissing contest”). In other words the “bad anarchist” broke the spirit of competition by pointing out ways in which he himself did not live up to all the stated ideals, thus creating room for others to do the same, which no one really wanted to do. However productive engaging the inherent tension might have been, it would have required “having it out”, and the highest priority for everyone else was “keeping it in”.

## The Diversity of Consensus

The self-contained self of “good politics” is something we proceed to unpack throughout the next two chapters. First I will address how the self-contained self is privileged within the common format(s) of formalized consensus process in anarchist circles in North America. As explained by Graeber (2009), the particular technologies of consensus used by North American anarchists today were largely inherited from feminists via the anti-nuclear movement (which had picked up various techniques from the Quakers), and now constitute a widely known repertoire. In Chapter 3 and elsewhere (Lagalis 2011a) I suggest the irony of anarchists rejecting both feminists and religion as reactionary after having integrated the insights of both. In any case we refer to this same set of specific “consensus” practices; Graeber’s (2009) detailed ethnographic treatment is a good resource for anyone left curious by my summary. Graeber (2009), by zeroing in on the “node” to illustrate North American consensus process in action, and Maeckelburgh (2009), by doing the same in Europe and expanding further on the “network”, offer a solid picture of what the formalized consensus process consists of, as well as how anarchists interpret the phenomenon and explicate its central importance. While some of the techniques used in the very large “spokescouncils” or “consultas” that Graeber (2009) and Maeckelburgh (2009) depict specifically reflect the organizational demands of very large meetings, even in the Rotten Grapefruit housing collective, whose meetings were the same size as La Otra’s, “consensus process” was formalized very much in the way Graeber and Maeckelburgh describe: Special silent signals were used to convey agreement (wavy fingers pointing up), disagreement (wavy fingers pointing down), to ask for clarification (a C-shape with one’s hand), and so on, while spontaneous sounds (laughter, groaning, sighing, verbal expression out of turn) were frowned upon, often literally.

A speakers-list was kept by a designated person while a designated facilitator animated the discussion, keeping track of specific proposals and checking to make sure they achieve “consensus”. As long as one person was strongly opposed (and “blocked” or

vetoed the decision) “consensus” was not in effect. Achieving “consensus” meant hearing a detractor out and modifying the proposal until the detractor was comfortable with it as well. Sometimes, when a proposal did not necessarily involve everyone at the house (for e.g. “Hey let’s go bring food to people working at the Homelessness Marathon!”), it was fine that only two thirds of the coop members were interested (eight people is enough to cook and carry food down the block).<sup>4</sup> Full consensus is always most important when the decision will necessarily affect everyone, (e.g. “Hey let’s change the rent from 300\$ to 350\$ to cover the installation of a wheatgrass lawn on the roof!”). Even then, however, full consensus was not necessarily the primary goal. Whenever an outcome of full consensus seemed hopeless, among the majority of those present there always remained the option of rolling one’s eyes to discreetly slot a detractor as a problematic person whose opinion was thus irrelevant, this usually followed by a suggestion that he or she create a separate “working group” to engage his or her concerns and/or alternative project – during which time project A could proceed without his or her specific consent.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, we also experimented with another figure – a “vibes-watcher”, whose job it was to encourage silent people to speak in order to ensure a “diversity” of voices.

Not every anarchist collective in North America will do all of this precisely the same way, but at least among English-speaking anarchists this sign-language and repertoire of technologies is widely recognized and implemented. As for the regulated set of invented hand signs, these might be understood as a sort of anarchist “Esperanto”. There is no person on earth who actually grew up speaking it as a first language, but it nonetheless serves to facilitate communication and cooperation among the cosmopolitan class of mobile activists discussed in Chapter 4.

As we have seen however, this set of practices and signs does not necessarily carry over to Latin America, where save for the facilitator herself, and perhaps a (sometimes-faux) speakers list if necessary, a lot of this consensus technology is covered by pre-existing body language. Likewise in our La Otra collective, which (except for myself, one other Quebecois woman and Stephane), consisted entirely of Mexicans, no special invented signals were necessary to convey agreement or disagreement because if people were not happy with the direction of the discussion they shook their heads, rolled their eyes, groaned, waved their index finger back and forth, or at the very least sat there frowning. If people were happy about the way a conversation was going, they smiled, laughed, or bent their index finger up and down, which is a silent “yes”

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<sup>4</sup> As Graeber (2013) points out, unanimity only matters if everyone in the group will be otherwise forced to comply and participate in the decision, and/or if effecting a decision will necessarily require everyone’s participation.

<sup>5</sup> Encouraging minority opinions to “form their own working group” is so frequent that it has become an “inside joke” among participants, and/or is taken for granted as a necessary and valid practice. The legitimating logic appears to be: if the opinion is valid, the proponent will find support, and yet this does not account for opinions being “minority” on account of social exclusion and the particular demographics of the collectives in question (one might think back to the “bagged lilies” of Chapter 4).

gesture wellknown in Mexico, always useful when one's mouth is full or to communicate across a rowdy bar-room.<sup>6</sup> None of the meetings in Cancun, Caracas, or Mexico City represented here involved book-learned body-language unique to the anarchist scene. In other words, it is arguable that in the North American anarchist scene a formalized system of hand signals is necessary precisely because the participants involved do not otherwise speak with their hands and bodies, nor listen to the bodies of others, all being well-disciplined to not convey their emotions in immediate ways via spontaneous facial expression or other physical movements.

Culturally different rules around the interrupting someone when they are speaking also come into play in the diverse forms of consensus process. In our La Otra collective, if someone was *really* upset about how a conversation was going then he or she would hiss at whoever was speaking and proceed to offer a counterpoint, but if others wanted to hear the first person out, a chorus of "Shut up, let them finish!" would corral the interrupter back into silence. If no one interrupted the interrupter, it was because we all welcomed the interruption. This last accomplishes more or less what the "straw poll" does in the formalized consensus process of the English-speaking anarchist world, in which interrupting is generally unacceptable and in which the facilitator (or perhaps "vibes-watcher") instead asks for a quick show of hands to "get the feeling" of the room regarding the direction of discussion. A "vibes-watcher" would never be necessary at an Ici la otra meeting, where "the feeling of the room" was immediate, both in the sense of obvious right away, and unmediated. None of this should be taken to mean that Mexicans are always transparent about their thoughts and feelings – Mexicans have their own diverse and particular ways of coolly glossing over conflicts and differences – simply that a wider-range of body language being permitted in the public sphere does make it easier to "read a room".

Now, it is true that our La Otra collective did not do marvelously well at achieving "consensus" at every meeting, but neither did the Rotten Grapefruit house, whose turnover was even higher — in both cases there was room for informal power dynamics to prevail, the specific details of which I have contrasted in detail elsewhere (Lagalis 2010). Meanwhile, the facilitation of the "bad anarchist" ("Um...I think we can get bogged down in criticizing people, I will respond to the last question first.") also provides a good example of how the silencing of difference (class, racial, etc.) is easily misrecognized in discussions of etiquette, maintaining "healthy forums for discussion", "safety" and even "consensus" itself. The alternative Mexican custom of hissing and whistling does mean, for example, that sometimes men whistle over anarchofeminist women at *congresos*, but up north anarchists silence feminists by politely calling them racist, or perhaps scatter them with the help of armed security (as was the case at the Law and Disorder conference). The *gringos* do not actually have one up on the

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<sup>6</sup> My friends explain that this finger gesture can be traced back to Chespirito from the *El Chavo del Ocho* series (1971), from whom it was originally copied. It has taken hold to the extent that within my social circles there are at least some people who use it that do not know where it originally came from, whereas in certain regions and among older generations it is not necessarily used at all.

Mexicans here. In my experience, the main difference between collectives like Ici la otra and ones like the Rotten Grapefruit house is that while the power relations of the predominant society inflect both, in the latter case the phenomenon is compounded by the power dynamics engendered by formalized consensus itself: Special formalized consensus process does not necessarily make for more consensus, but it does work to make professional middle class white people feel at home and comfortable at the expense of everyone else.

It also usually involves yet another shift of caring labour for the women involved. As we may gather from the stories so far, it is usually women who do the lion's share of the social labour involved in facilitating, animating, and "vibes-watching" anarchist meetings. Indeed one of the (only) ways that women can and do exert informal power within the node and the network is by assuming the gendered role of facilitator or minutetaker, which leads to a certain amount of control over meeting outcomes and institutional memory.

As I noted in Chapter 4, Marianne Maeckelburgh "realized quickly that by taking on the more visible tasks, like facilitating meetings or giving trainings", she "became more recognized and connected within the wider movement network." (2009, 25). "When I went to open meetings and participated like everyone else," she elaborates, "I gained access to what was said during the meeting and in the pub afterwards, but when I facilitated the meetings myself, I gained insight into how the agenda was constructed, how movement actors perceived the ideal meeting and what kind of compromises were made in the negotiation between real and ideal." (ibid.) It is important to note for our current purposes, however, that some version of facilitation as gendered labour prevails from Montreal to Mexico City to Caracas – whether women are *default* facilitators in informal consensus processes or *de jure* ones in the realm of North American formalized consensus, a gendered pattern presents fairly clearly throughout the anarchist world. The racialized/class character of formalized consensus process in North America is much more difficult to tease out. This is partly because, as is often the case, dynamics of race and class are themselves hard to tease apart, and because it is precisely in their overlap or "intersection" that a lot of the action happens.

As soon as the dust had settled on the "Battle of Seattle", activists of colour (and a few white activists in conversation with them) began critiquing the consensus process of the anti-globalization movement as exclusive, elitist, and as serving to perpetuate white power within the social movements itself. "When labor people or African American people have to organize within the consensus model they are uncomfortable with it and the culture that comes with it", says Paul Engler (in Tarleton 2001). Rajah (2000), for his part, pointed out that "the reality is that certain individuals play roles (whether by choice or not) that are similar to *de facto* traditional leadership roles". In other words, consensus process doesn't actually prevent leaders, but makes sure that these *de facto* leaders are white. Other critics observed that the longer hours involved in consensus process means that working people (which in the U.S. is often equated with people of colour) are indirectly excluded (Treloar 2003). For her part, Larimore-Hall (2000)

points out that consensus-decision-making, along with veganism and “not raising your voice in meetings”, are white cultural norms that alienate people of colour. These are just a few examples of the material in print; I have also witnessed or been a participant in many similar arguments, either live and in person or on the (always lively) listserves.

The response is not usually very generous, and usually includes accusing the racialized complainer of “authoritarianism” along the following lines: “Well you are obviously just some sectarian Marxist who simply prefers voting to consensus process and are pulling a race card to monkeywrench our democratic project.” Alternative, more thoughtful responses in defense of consensus process include Francesca Polletta’s essay “How Participatory Democracy Became White: Culture and Organizational Choice” (2005), and David Graeber’s “Some Remarks on Consensus” (2013), which works off of Polletta’s essay (see also Juris 2013)<sup>7</sup>. Both discuss how consensus process became historically associated with whiteness due to complex factional politics within the SNCC (The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) during the civil rights movement, yet both ultimately offer the same refrain: “None of those who challenged consensus did so in the name of a *different* form of direct democracy” (Graeber 2013). Graeber also points out in the same piece that most pre-colonial indigenous social organization involved consensus process: if anything is “white” it is the concept and practice of the majority vote.

These historical shifts and patterns may be true, but so far no response points toward practical interventions that would effectively respond to the grievances voiced by activists of colour alive today, such as those cited above. Perhaps I myself think it important to not dismiss these critiques as “vertical” manipulation, and rather think we should work to develop some practical solution, because I actually relate to many of them. Significantly, this fact suggests that although the debate within the movement always unfolds in terms of race, the alienating aspects of formalized consensus process have both a racial *and* a class character, both of which I explore below. By adding a class component to the conversation, I hope to change the debate somewhat by throwing my weight behind both the white working class people like the “bad anarchist” and working class people of colour who feel uncomfortable and out of place at white middle class anarchist meetings.

One comment by a white working class movement drop-out that captures many salient points (and may remind us of the “bad anarchist” out of place at the RAT conference), goes as follows: “Those guys are just a bunch of snobs and fake-ass politicians, they never say what they really think, they’re just play-acting at being better than

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<sup>7</sup> Juris (2013) recounts a certain exception to this rule (these do exist), wherein white middle class anarchists did not complain or interfere with the leadership role of people of colour in the organization of the first U.S. social forum, rather deciding to respect their leadership as well as their decision to make decisions by voting. Note that Juris’ related discussion and questioning of movement politics around race and class in the United States partly dovetails with my own analysis in Chapters 8 and 9 of this work, where I elaborate movement inconsistencies around “race and class” in detail and provide a partial explanation.



other people with their fancy bullshit lingo.” It is nothing new to say that feigned neutrality and its prerequisite subjectivity are a bourgeois phenomenon (which working class people simply call “being fake”). University educated elites, in particular, assume a less personal viewpoint than ordinary people and interrupt their own narratives to give evaluative statements cast in an impersonal style (including the ubiquitous “disclaimer”), this being a performance of reflexivity which serves to reconstitute their personal viewpoint as that of an objective third party (see e.g. Labov 1970, Belanoff 1993, Skeggs 2002).<sup>8</sup> Working class speakers, on the other hand, are more likely to express their viewpoints as such and are not trained to have as much affective restraint, which allows their emotions to be more transparent both to themselves and others (see e.g. Fay and Tokarczyk 1993). There are various overlapping explanations for this, including Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of *habitus* mentioned above, wherein performed “disinterestedness” correlates with a “life of economic ease”. Various studies also show how a posture of objectivity is refined through academic instruction (e.g. Johnson 1993). Analyses such as those of Erving Goffman (1959) and Norbert Elias (1994 [1969]), on the other hand, illustrate how performed neutrality is a talent learned by the privileged to acquire and preserve prestige, and proceed to focus on how this game of reputation transforms everyday life into a theatre of calculated self-presentations. Elias’s (1994) particular elaboration on the correlation of bodily self-containment and “the civilizing process” of modern statehood is something we will return to later.

Regardless of the particular explanation however, the salient point here is that the performance of objectivity and emotional restraint that is entirely normal in bourgeois sociality is highly esteemed in movement spaces: Whether in workshops, meetings, assemblies, or spokescouncils, participants are encouraged to suspend their personal interests and consider the common good, as are they discouraged from betraying feelings of anger or frustration in the interests of maintaining a “safe space” for the exchange of ideas. Joking, sarcasm and other forms of humour are discouraged for the same reason. In recent years, the request for advance “trigger warnings” adds a further need for speech to be reflexive and premeditated.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile it is nothing new for facilitators to encourage participants to be succinct, clear, and efficient in their communication, (to speak, basically, in verbal “thesis statements”), so as to not “waste time”. As a result, when ordinary people speak in these venues, their contributions are often dismissed as incoherent, self-interested or overly emotional.

To make matters worse, the highly-codified nature of activist meetings (governed as they are by speakers-lists, university-educated facilitators, “vibes-watchers”, minute-takers, formal agendas and well-contained, formalized body language) tends, in and of itself, to stir up negative feelings among ordinary people. Many feel uncomfortable

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of typical activist disclaimers would be: “I realize this could be interpreted to sound (*x*) but...”, or “In no way do I mean to trivialize the struggles faced by (*x* category of oppressed person) yet I wish to explore...”.

<sup>9</sup> “Trigger Warnings” are meant to advise traumatized persons present that something “triggering” of a post traumatic response may occur; see Chapter 8 for further discussion.

or frustrated because they are afraid they will not speak properly or be taken seriously; they know they lack the authority to speak in public (see e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Charlesworth 2000), and this venue is a Habermasian “public” if there ever was one (Habermas 1989; cf. Fraser 1992). Graeber (2013) points out that “the power to block is like giving the power to take on the role of Supreme Court...to anyone who has the courage to stand up in front of the entire group to use it”.<sup>10</sup> While his intended point is that the “block” is not often abused, an important rejoinder here is that the children of lawyers are more likely to make use of “blocks” whereas the children of janitors are more likely to not have the courage to speak, much less “block” a proposal (and the ones that do, are generally cast aside as “wing nuts”).<sup>11</sup> Needless to say, these discrepancies in participation are exacerbated rather than resolved by introductory workshops, lessons and pamphlets regarding meeting rules and “process” (cf. Maeckelburgh 2009, 164–170), and the result tends toward the few working class participants who show up either falling silent completely, speaking but not being heard, using humour to break the tension of formality or getting angry, none of which tend to work out in their favour.

Anger presents a specific problem. Beyond indicating a lack of self-restraint (as do laughter and tears), it is marked as “violence” due to the fact that in upper class life, conflict is always displaced to behind the scenes, be it removed to the “private sphere” or to governments or institutions thereof that wield violence on one’s behalf. Consider, for example, how being able to call a lawyer on ones behalf allows the caller to think of herself as not being physically violent simply because the police or security guards who ultimately effect the decisions of lawyers are different people than her. (Note also that the people who lawyers and bureaucrats deploy with sticks and guns are of a lower class than them, reinforcing further the associations of upper class/non-violent and lower class/violent.) Furthermore, because those with economic power can make bureaucrats, lawyers and miscellaneous formal grievance procedures work for them, they do not have as much *reason* to get angry, nor do they *need* to get angry or display emotions of any sort in order to secure their interests. The opposite is true for people without class power.

When people living in material poverty face a problem, huge stakes necessarily hang in the balance – without that \$500, for example, the daughter will die, or someone will be evicted from their home. Such precariousness necessarily involves emotional swings – feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, joy and relief that tend to replace each other suddenly as there is no economic means to mediate, or institutional force to soften, the fickle force of fate (which, on top of everything, does not tend to swing in poor people’s favour). Furthermore, there is no need to hide these emotions. Negative emotions are the most immanent expression of injury, and the level of injury, real or potential, is

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<sup>10</sup> Graeber (2013) is a web article, hence there is no page number provided (see bibliography).

<sup>11</sup> Regarding activists’ defining popular intrusion as “wing nut” see also Graeber (2009, 343–50).

what serves to persuade others to help participate in resolving the problem at hand. If something doesn't seem to really bother someone, what's the problem?

It is important to note here that people without class power (i.e. institutional backing) *must* resolve conflicts via direct verbal communication and/or by directly exerting pressure by withholding resources or aid, sabotage (e.g. slashing a client's tires who refuses to pay you), and/or, in extreme cases, direct physical violence or the threat thereof. Whichever the case may be, the process generally involves communication and cooperation among persons who must appeal to one another to join forces, decide what measures must be taken, and carry them out, which is necessarily done by the means of emotional display — not to mention “consensus processes”.<sup>12</sup> Recent studies in psychology (e.g. Kraus, Côté and Keltner 2010) suggest that lower class people are significantly better at reading facial emotional expression than are wealthier people, and their interpretation agrees with my own – lower class people actually need to be able to read others' emotions for practical operations of cooperation and conflict on an everyday, ongoing, basis, whereas wealthier people can simply pay to make problems go away.<sup>13</sup>

Along these lines, it is important to recognize that while whiteness does involve the epistemological habit of feeling everywhere and nowhere at once (see Chapter 4 of this work, Thompson 2010), the particular fact that bourgeois alienation and longing (white and otherwise) revolve around the particular concept of “authenticity” (☒ truth) is arguably best explained by the fact that the bourgeois are continually lying to themselves and others about what they think and feel. They lie to themselves about this as well, euphemizing their dishonesty and attributing it positive valence with vocabulary such as “tact”, “discretion” and “professionalism” itself. Meanwhile,

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<sup>12</sup> Here we may think back to Chapter 4, where my tradesworker friend found “autonomous direct action” (the “gravel maneuver”) entirely obvious.

<sup>13</sup> Kraus, Côté and Keltner (2010) discover, based on the results of seven different studies, that “[R]elative to lower-class individuals, upper-class individuals have been shown to be less cognizant of others [and] worse at identifying the emotions that others feel” (both in photographs and in live interaction). Upperclass individuals are “more disengaged during social interactions—for example, checking their cell phones or doodling on a questionnaire—compared with their lower-class peers” (Piff et al. 2012). Kraus, Piff and Keltner (2011) also find that “upper-class rank perceptions trigger a focus away from the context toward the self...” (248), which supports my argument throughout Chapters 8 and 9 regarding the middle class anarchist self. Beyond the question of ability (and desire) to read the emotions of others, the seven studies are said to reveal “that upper-class individuals behave more unethically than lower-class individuals. In studies 1 and 2, upper-class individuals were more likely to break the law while driving, relative to lowerclass individuals. In follow-up laboratory studies, upper-class individuals were more likely to exhibit unethical decision-making tendencies (study 3), take valued goods from others (study 4), lie in a negotiation (study 5), cheat to increase their chances of winning a prize (study 6), and endorse unethical behavior at work (study 7) than were lower-class individuals. (Kraus, Piff and Keltner 2011, from abstract).

the always-attendant desire for “authenticity” (wherever it may be projected) reflects partial consciousness of dishonesty as a lynchpin of bourgeois life.<sup>14</sup>

The popular talent for consensus is not only true among white people of course. Clearly if my white working class friends and family, who have only a “culture of death” to show for themselves, can cooperate more effectively than their elite counterparts, surely popular “communities of colour” with their “cultures of life” (and lesser institutional backing) should be understood as practicing consensus almost all of the time.<sup>15</sup> While there are significant cultural and expressive differences between white working class people and a great diversity of others, the same being true among their bourgeois equivalents (as I specifically examine further below), it is no coincidence, for example, that the word Mexicans often use for the composite of bourgeois characteristics that I throw into relief above is *apretado*. Literally *apretar* means to squeeze, tighten, constrict or push, whereas in reference to a person it is a fairly literal equivalent to “uptight” and includes “vain”, “presumptuous”, and “stuck-up” in its family

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<sup>14</sup> Academic accounts of white/bourgeois longing for “authenticity” are plenty and include Thompson (2010) cited in Chapter 4 of this work. Bourgeois subjects also talk about their own longing for authenticity (as well as that of their peers). I remember listening to my teenager bourgeois friends sitting in the park discussing their search for authenticity at length (“I just feel like there is no authenticity in my life”; “I want to learn how to live authentically”; “I just want to live something authentic.”) Later when we began university and discovered that longing for “authenticity” reflects elite white anxiety, they stopped voicing this collection of comments (yet concentrated on pointing out similar instances of elite white anxiety among their peers, much as Thompson [2010] does), all this being in line with the bourgeois relationship to the self discussed in the next chapter of this work: Wanting to enjoy the rewards of “good politics” more than actually wanting to “live authentically”, they felt it was best to “keep it in” regarding their previous lamenting of authenticity in their own lives, thus trading in authenticity itself for a projected self-image as authentic anti-racists. As Skeggs (2004) writes, “it is the rarity of integrity [among the bourgeois] that makes it in such demand, for it is one of the cultural practices that is difficult for the accumulative self to access, the prosthetic self to play with, or the omnivore to taste” (186). Authenticity and integrity “are ethical qualities that cannot be easily exchanged; they may be one aspect of cultural capital that cannot be harnessed by those intent on increasing their value at the expense of others...” (ibid.). Note that bourgeois associations of low class position and “authenticity” are also clear in the frustrating statements people of colour endure as to being an “inauthentic” black or Indian, for e.g., due to not also being economically impoverished (see e.g. Patrick Johnson 2005, 134–5; Simpson 2015, 127; Cattelino 2008). Such formulations are clearly problematic, betray “authenticity” as a euphemism for class, and lead to the further problem wherein scholars of colour who otherwise advance “intersectional” analyses may feel entitled to dismiss discussions of their class (precisely because such discussions may be cast as challenges to their very “authenticity” as “people of colour”).

<sup>15</sup> I am only being the slightest bit facetious here, speaking to a contradiction in activist discourse that should be glaring. The less institutional backing/recourse a person or group of people have, the more they are compelled to cooperate among themselves, wherein (the extensive relationships of solidarity and support among) migrants without papers (“illegal immigrants”) constitute an illustrative example: Whereas the white working class friends and family I grew up with often do not have leases, credit cards, health or dental insurance, basic government health care (the related identification card cannot be procured without a home address), access to lawyers, access to institutional grievance procedures, bank accounts, or drivers licenses, paper-less migrants also do not have Social Insurance Numbers or citizenship/residency papers or visas, making even more cooperation necessary.

of meanings: Mexicans notice the confluence of class power and self-containment as well.<sup>16</sup>

I take the time to elaborate on these points because it is important to observe how all of this plays out in miniature in movement spaces, including meetings governed by formalized consensus process: People from lower class backgrounds have angry looks on their faces when they are feeling angry and perhaps raise their voices when wanting to impress a point, whereas those from classier backgrounds keep smiles on their faces while they are criticizing. Middle class participants shush the expressive participants when they get angry (often with reference to the importance of “non-violent communication”), and yet this suppression of conflict in the public arena is almost always accompanied by stealth campaigns of revenge in private (calling in one’s lawyers), which do not register on the middle class activists’ radar as “violence” the way raising one’s voice does.<sup>17</sup> In other words, activists’ scrutiny of anger as “violent”, vis-à-vis a lack of scrutiny towards the channeling of violence in upper class life that allows activists to consider themselves “non-violent” on the basis of calm facial expression in the first place, must be seen as a laundering of bourgeois sociality as “good politics”. We should always keep in mind how this slip is both unfortunate and ironic inasmuch as the lower class expressive orientation both emerges from, and is better adapted to, the “autonomous self-management” anarchists aim to manifest.

Meanwhile, it is no coincidence that the performance of objectivity, emotional restraint, and lack of spontaneous or pre-existing body language that characterizes North American formalized consensus process are promoted by wealthy white people in particular. Nor is it a coincidence that the Mexican epithet *apretado* referring to “uptight” snobs is often associated with foreigners, and specifically British or American ones at that.<sup>18</sup> bell hooks’s analysis of dynamics in her classroom is entirely relevant here:

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<sup>16</sup> While here I am largely working off of my own experience being around and listening to my Mexican friends, see also Portilla’s *Fenomenología del relajo* (1984). According to Portilla (who himself tends to favour the *apretado* over the *relajiento*), a *relajiento* is a person without a future who does not take anything seriously. *Relajientos* are good company because of their sense of humour and willingness to engage in conversation at any time. Because of their lack of seriousness, according to the author, they suppress the possibility of creating their future and disrupt the formation of a true Mexican community (3941). Portilla goes on to explain that the *apretado*, according to popular speech, is a person who conveys a spirit of seriousness. He is upperclass, a snob, and is often associated with being a foreigner, mainly British or American. *Apretados* lack a sense of humor and see themselves as embodying the highest values of society. Because they see themselves as embodying values, and not sharing values as a community, they are incapable of dialogue (87–95). Note further that another word used in Mexico to convey a similar composite is “*fresa*” (lit. strawberry), which involves specific race/class associations as well as ones of class/gender (along lines similar to those drawn by Willis [1977]). See Lagalisse (2010) for further discussion.

<sup>17</sup> In line with this general phenomenon, among “feminists” elite women will often urge the “strong”, “outspoken”, (working class) woman to “speak up” (for all concerned), protecting their own relationships with powerful men in the process (later throwing the outspoken woman under the bus if convenient). I discuss this in relation to my experience in the anarcho-hippie house in Lagalisse (2010).

<sup>18</sup> See Portilla 1984 (and my previous fn. 8)

“Several white women students complained that the atmosphere in the class was ‘too hostile’. They cited the noise level and the direct confrontations that took place in the room prior to class starting as an example of this hostility. Our response was to explain that what they perceived as hostility and aggression, we considered playful teasing and affectionate expressions of our pleasure at being together. We saw our tendency to talk loudly as a consequence of our often being in rooms where many people were speaking, as a consequence of cultural background: many of us were raised in families where individuals speak loudly. In their upbringing as white, middle-class females, the complaining students had been taught to identify loud and direct speech with anger. We explained that we did not identify loud or direct speech in this way and encouraged them to switch codes, to think of it as an affirming gesture. Once they switched codes, they not only began to have a more creative joyful experience in the class but also learned that silence and quiet speech can in some cultures indicate hostility and aggression.” (hooks 1997, 405)

The elite white male work (or “classic reference”) most amenable to hooks’ point here is that of Max Weber. His cultural analysis that associates increasing self-restraint with the rise of Puritanism, which “descended like a frost on Merrie old England” (1989, 168), is an important qualification to structural analyses such as those of Bourdieu (1984) and Elias (1994). In his famous treatise on “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” (1989), Weber describes how the “destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment” was “Puritanism’s most urgent task”, to be replaced by the “quiet self control which still distinguishes the best type of English or American gentlemen today” (119). The long-standing critique that the alienating trappings of formalized consensus process are “white” is therefore also correct – not all white people have the *habitus* of English gentlemen, but the vast majority of people who act like English gentlemen are indeed white. Furthermore, while working class people of colour articulate many complaints that are similar to those of white working class activists (both feel alienated by the sanction against “raising voices”, for example), when people of colour experience the repressive sanctions of white middle class anarchist meetings they do so by a racially dominant group that has oppressed them in ways both brutal and subtly insidious for at least five hundred years, which makes it even more intolerable. Add in a few whities making careless comments (be they romantic or negative) about “communities of colour” and really, who would want to stick around?

It is also true that there are activists of colour who are very well-versed and comfortable in the realm of formalized consensus process. These are people of colour who also have relatively little spontaneous body language, who have no problem effecting the restricted sign-Esperanto while keeping all other muscles, including those of the face, relaxed, pleasant and neutral. They are often sought-after facilitators – like women, people of colour are expected to do extra work as well, and in the name of antiracism



**Figure 7–1.** The couch behaviour of my elite waspy friends includes this sort of thing less often. Ici la otra collective, Montreal, 2007.

itself; they will no doubt conduct the meeting in a less racist fashion, so the logic goes. These activists of colour are continually annoyed with the surrounding wealthy whities as well (they still have to listen to their ill-informed comments regarding “communities of colour”) but they do not feel immediately anxious and ill-at-ease due to the basic features of bourgeois sociality. By and large, as might be expected, these are people of colour who were sent to private school when they were young, or who were otherwise effectively socialized from a young age in the professional culture of the (predominantly) white, wealthy, North American bourgeoisie. Ethnographically speaking, we should also note that the participation of such people of colour at meetings is partly why the “consensus = white” formulation is not compelling for many white anarchists.

It does sometimes appear that the failure of many critics of colour to articulate the class component of the problem makes it easier for white middle class activists to dismiss their critique. Ethnographers stumble in the same place. Maeckelburgh notices that the public sphere of the global justice movement “maintains as part of the rules of engagement a severely logical and emotionless style of discussion” but attributes this to “western rationalism” *tout court* noting that it may be subject to “feminist and ‘southern’ critiques” but not ones of class (Maeckelbergh 2009, 145).<sup>19</sup> Of course we shouldn’t be surprised at the slip, because the one thing activist critics of colour and white ethnographers generally have in common is class power. Poor people of colour and poor white people do not have access to the online and print publishing in which the debate takes place (almost by definition), and neither do they have much to report, as they have hardly been present within the movement in the first place.

In any case the most important thing to notice here is that there are no absolutes or facile equations governing the problem. The culture of North American formalized consensus process is not merely a phenomenon of class (we can all remember at least one meeting where someone like the “bad anarchist” took up a *lot* more space) and neither is it simply a “white thing”. Furthermore, while I have not sustained a gender analysis throughout this chapter, at this point it should be clear how the sanction against anger applies disproportionately to women, and that all appearances of the “emotionless” anarchist self are most easily performed by men – not because men are more rational, but because they are expected to be, and interpreted as such (see e.g. Lutz 1990; Hercus 1999).

Indeed if we implement an intersectional analysis (yet still insist on quantification and ranking) we might end up with a scheme something like this: Rich white people are the only ones who feel genuinely comfortable with the anarchists’ formalized consensus process; whereas rich people of colour struggle with feelings of ambivalence and frustration but often integrate to some degree; whereas poor white men experience

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<sup>19</sup> Graeber addresses class in passing: “there was a fine line between creating a ‘safe’ environment...and playing the role of the gracious upper-middle-class hostess, who is expected to perform the endless work of smoothing over differences, and maintain a constant agreeable façade so as to keep the business of sociality running effectively.” (2009, 332–3, see also fn.19 on same page). Juris (2013) also addresses class in passing.



it as a hostile environment yet sometimes integrate to some degree as well; whereas white women from a working class background are virtually absent (much to my loneliness); whereas poor men of colour likewise experience a double-whammy of hostility and rarely return (if they ever walk in the door in the first place); whereas women of colour are alienated and reasonably pissed off at all of the above, and of course it is no coincidence that they struggle with stereotypes of themselves as “angry”. Angry black women, angry latin@s, angry marked-racialized-gender-category-of-your-choosing, and maybe even “crazy angry trans woman” to boot.<sup>20</sup>

Pointing out that consensus process is not historically white by citing examples from colonial accounts of pre-Colombian tribes, or even by pointing to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Zapatistas, for that matter, does nothing to correct this persistent problem, either with respect to white working class people or the people of colour of every class who are alive in English-speaking North America today. While it is important to appreciate Graeber’s (2013) main point, which is that North American formalized consensus process should not stand in for consensus process most generally, as we go forward it might be more appropriate and practical to consider the consensus processes that already exist, and are closer to home, in the cultural milieus of present-day African Americans, the white working class, or Mexican migrants such as those in the La Otra collective, among others. One would think that anarchist activists nominally interested in a global social revolution would be interested in learning these different living languages of consensus. Furthermore, the practical realities of transnational organizing mean that if anarchists are interested in doing solidarity work with their favourite indigenous group in Oaxaca or Chiapas, for example, they will probably only meet them via anarchists in Mexico City, and so it might be good to pay attention to how those folks do their meetings. Instead, we see white middle class anarchists go on about “taking lead” from “communities of colour” and then go on to imply that people in these communities are incapable of collective organization unless Marxists organize them into tree-shaped command structures. Instead, we have a social movement based on the ideal of “consensus” where “consensus” will never be found among (racist and sexist) white working class people, wherein people of colour “can’t do it” either, wherein the imagined experts are indigenous people and their assemblies that anarchists have no experience with, so they continue to base their “consensus process” on a Quaker-cum-Puritan dinner party instead. I continue to unpack this particular mess in *Anarchoindigenism Take II*, but it will help to first discuss the consensus on diversity, just as we have discussed the diversity of consensus.

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<sup>20</sup> On this last, see e.g. <http://www.ravishly.com/2015/03/30/crazy-trans-woman-syndrome>.

## Chapter 8 – The Consensus on Diversity

Anarchists in English-speaking North America care tremendously about “diversity”. Anarchists love biodiversity, cultural diversity, diverse struggles, and of course a “diversity of tactics”: anarchists don’t mind if others want to stage a peaceful march as long as others don’t mind if anarchists actually try to shut down the summit (see also Thompson 2010). Diversity is very important, multiplicity being one of the rhizome’s seductive aspects. Maeckelburgh (2009) has also “witnessed no space of this movement where diversity was not valued, at least in principle” (130). She goes on to explain, however, that “horizontality” only works when “there is a preceding selfexclusion” (185), that is, only in “spaces where only those who believe in horizontality get involved” (ibid.). Furthermore, “not all diversities are acceptable; the diversity that is given expression in the movement is a diversity that expresses many viewpoints, but largely from the same side of the political spectrum” (133).

Diversity always has its limits. Underneath “diversity” there is usually a unity that underpins it – sometimes it’s the neoliberal multicultural state, but in this case it is “anarchism” itself. Just as anarchists “take lead” from women of colour (but only if they are Zapatistas as opposed to PRI candidates), and “take lead” from indigenous people (only if these take lead from anarchism), anarchists are interested in including diverse people in their movement, as long as they are all anarchists. As I have said in regard to the previous examples, insofar as anarchism is “against all forms of domination” this is not necessarily a bad thing – if there were no specific political project propping up “diversity” then what is to stop a Nazi from articulating himself as a diverse, marginalized and oppressed social minority? The problem is that anarchists can and do describe anyone they don’t want to listen to as a “non-anarchist” and therefore not worthy of engaging in dialogue with in the first place. They practically have to. Precisely because anarchists identify as being committed to diversity, the only instance in which they can openly justify excluding a “diverse” person’s viewpoint is when they can accuse the opponent of not respecting diversity him or herself (which is partly why the complex of “security culture” comes to manage so many conflicts instead).

For anarchists (rhizomatic) “diversity” is always a conjugation of non-hierarchy, or the opposite of tree-shaped things. It is no coincidence that when collectives break up, or throw someone out, or no longer want to work with X other collective, one or more persons call the other faction “authoritarian” (or “*protagonista*” or “*vertical/vertical*”). When Colectivo Libertad broke up, for example, both sides told me the other

had behaved in an “authoritarian manner”, that is, they were hypocrites and not true anarchists. Anyone with experience with anarchist collectives will confirm that this sort of thing is typical and happens regardless of whatever the specific conflict might have been. It is arguable, however, that the family of “authoritarian” epithets are hurled around more freely and forcefully when the underlying grounds for conflict are inadmissible based on key principles ostensibly shared in common: When a *manarchist* (in Spain, in Canada, of those who “talk the talk”) does not want to listen to a feminist critique of his actions, for example, he knows he cannot speak against a gendered critique of power *per se* because the fact that gendered domination is bad is a key principle shared by everyone in the movement. Therefore the feminist critique must be cast as liberal, authoritarian, racist, or not respecting of “diversity” in some other way – the rhetorical flourish of the comment threads found in Chapter 2 illustrate this point.

One becomes suspicious of this “diversity”, which as Maeckelburgh illustrates, is always qualified as “acceptable diversity”, though rarely out loud. Note that the example of “acceptable diversity” she offers is an affinity group of three travelers – a man who had been traveling around Europe staying in squats and two women who were protesthopping all summer, one of whom was a single mother accompanied by her 12 year-old son: “They were all either students or intentionally unemployed, living off the money they had saved and surviving by not spending very much, using tactics like hitch-hiking and ‘skipping’ food [‘dumpster-diving’ in North America].” — Given that Maeckelbergh presents these three members as coming from “different backgrounds” and going outside their “comfort zone” in working together (44–5), it should be clear that the anarchist commitment to diversity does not necessarily do what it says it does. Combined with an explicit statement or *de facto* assumption that *anarchism is what anarchists already do*, the caveat that everyone be “from the same side of the political spectrum” allows for the unrecognized exclusion (presented as “self-exclusion”) of anyone who does not share the specific lifestyles and desires of a particular white middle class demographic, and encourages us to see diversity where there is none: We are distracted from the fact that anyone who is significantly different from the middle-to-upper class university student who speaks three languages and gets a thrill from eating out of the garbage often quickly drops out of the movement, as does the woman accused of being a racist for trying to defend her right to speak, as does the non-elite who suffocates on “consensus process”, as does the person of colour whose critique of white dominance is dismissed as Marxist sectarianism in disguise. Of course none of this is supposed to be happening, and less distracted anarchists, particularly those of the “intersectionality” faction, are upset about it. Some lament the failure of “outreach” while others counter that we should position ourselves “in solidarity with struggles rooted in frontline communities”, but everyone nonetheless talks about being “inclusive”, and so far the best answer is to operationalize “anti-oppression” in movement spaces.



**Figure 8–1.** Flag made by persons of the intersectionality faction. Note that a purple version of the anarchist flag (above) is meant to signify “anarchafeminism”, here complemented by symbols referring to race, class and animal rights struggles. The added phrase is a play on the (subculturally) famous quote by Emma Goldman: “If I can’t dance, it’s not my revolution”.

Originating in the fields of education and social work in the United States, “anti-oppression” is a phrase and praxis peculiar to the English-speaking North American left that can be found ranging from the liberal “non-profit” milieu to anarchist scenes proper.<sup>1</sup> Whereas originally concerned with the marginalization/inclusion of groups within state institutions, in the classroom, etc., an “anti-oppression approach” in autonomist movements means concern for marginalization/inclusion within the movement itself. (Both concerns are always present; for e.g., most anarchists pragmatically support the extension of rights to non-status immigrants and transgender people seeking healthcare, although they are “against” the state in principle). “Anti-oppression” is a phrase usually heard among anarchists who are university students (like “intersectionality”, they hear and read about it in school) or those who move in the world of community organizations; it is heard less frequently, for example, among anarchist street punks. It is also found among a whole range of left-leaning North American activists and intellectuals who do not necessarily qualify as part of the anarchist world at all. When it comes to the anarchist self, place matters precisely because other people around anarchists inflect anarchist self-making projects.<sup>2</sup>

Among university student anarchists and “progressive” middle class peers, a combination of consensus process and anti-oppression is considered to be a useful mix for protecting “diversity” within the movement, and ensuring the inclusion of marginal voices, or the voices of those “most affected” by various systems of oppression. Those arguably “most affected” often complain about anti-oppression’s unfulfilled promises, however. In this chapter I engage with ongoing internal movement debates around antioppression, contribute my own ethnographic analysis of the “anti-oppression workshop”, and offer testimonies around anti-oppression on the part of both my Mexican activist friends and my white working class ones, whose critiques, like those around “consensus”, dovetail in unexpected ways.

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<sup>1</sup> A search for “anti-oppression” within academic publishing will mostly find articles in social work and education (advocating its implementation in institutional reform). See e.g. Barnoff (2007) and Kumashiro (2000), whose essays exemplify “the anti-oppression game” (a concept I develop in this chapter). McDonald and Coleman (1999) and McLaughlin (2005) advance criticisms that compliment my own, these based on study of “anti-oppression” in mainstream institutions (vs. among anarchists).

<sup>2</sup> When Maeckelburgh (2009) says that among horizontals, “structural discriminations have been addressed” inasmuch as “meetings are introduced with comments about anti-sexist or anti-racist behaviour” (164), we see a version of the approach, with its focus on making movement spaces themselves “inclusive”. Note that “anti-oppression” is not a phrase used in the UK and yet British anarchists recognize the game from my description (whereas Mexicans who have not lived north of the borders think I must be pulling their leg). The sister concept “safe space”, however, is used in the UK yet recognized to be an American import. The importance of place and “being around” can mean many things, including the specific exchange between activist cultures in the US and UK due to sharing a language and mobile cosmopolitans.

## A Conversation

In 2011 when I was in Mexico City I ran into my ex, Damian – the one who Carlo told I was cheating; the one who was later deported. We got to talking about our last La Otra meeting, when he yelled at Carlo, when Carlo began to cry, when people stopped talking about sexism because Carlo drew our attention to Damian’s verbal “violence” instead. Damian had a few things to say.

“The problem up there is that you can’t express yourself at all... And they call it civilized — they even say it like that: ‘*We don’t do that here cause we’re civilized*’ Imagine! And yet you can’t challenge it because of the very fact that it’s all said *very* nicely... That’s why I was so mad at Carlo when he complained about me yelling in that meeting, because back here its *normal*, back when we were activists here [in Mexico City] we used to yell at each other all the time! And all of a sudden he pulls that on me!? That it was not okay to *yell*? It’s like he’s become one of them...Or maybe he played it on purpose? ‘Cause he knew the game, he’d been there longer, and I hadn’t figured it out yet. When you know the game you have the tools necessary (*la herramienta*). And its all supposedly to avoid violence, but the game is violent too...It’s just a different kind of violence — exile (*destierro*) — and that’s the worst that can happen! In the villages (*pueblos*) banishment is the worst punishment right? So you can just feel it: everyone is *afraid*... You could get left out! People stop talking to you, they don’t even necessarily tell you why. Maybe you never learn, all you know is that you are *out*. And so no one talks. It makes everyone passive. You dont say what you think — you cant! And if you are trying so hard to not offend anyone you cant do anything in the end. Instead of the question being about whether something will work, its about whether it sounds politically correct according to their fucked up system of values. And if you know how to work it (*manejarlo*), it can be a way to get power, but if you don’t then you’re fucked...”

“Don’t get me wrong” he continued, “here we got issues (*pedos*) too, our own challenges, ones that come from a *lack* of power instead of too much of it – we drink too much, we’re disorganized, oftentimes we just cause ruckus (*echar desmadre*) to vent our rage, and yeah, there’s real violence. It’s not as if we’re the shit (*los chingones*) or anything, but up there the problem is really heavy (*cabrón*) because they feel they’re so superior for being civilized, and yet this in and of itself is violent too, just harder to identify, but there it is, the logic of the system that they use to reproduce...make their own little hierarchy...”

As he speaks, he draws with zig-zagging fingers the shape of stairs, or perhaps the side of a very bumpy pyramid, upwards towards the sky. When he can’t reach any higher he lets his hand fall and continues: “Here it’s different, here we speak real strong, and direct, like ‘Yknow what? Go fuck yourself! (*¿Sabes que? ¡Chinga tu madre!*)’, we scream and yell and shit, but up there...if people get in someones face (*sobresaltan*) they label you “crazy”, like pretty much anyone in the lower class for example...”

At this point I interrupted him because his narrative had just intersected with my own experience, and I wanted to tell him so. I said that I felt similarly, that in my case I had not experienced it as racism, but as elitism, along the lines of what he had just said, but that clearly both things had been happening at once. I summarized a working draft on “consensus” (that now forms the previous chapter of this work). I also said that the fact that he had just complained about all of this in terms of a “game” was fabulous, because after “consensus” I wanted to take on “the anti-oppression game”. While I knew that activists up north sometimes refer to certain aspects of the game as “oppression olympics”, the fact that he, as a relative outsider, pin-pointed the specific logic of a *game* very much validated my line of thought. He said it had to be a sign, that it was no coincidence that we had run into each other that day. Damian, after all, was always the one to encourage me to defend “magic” eight years and five chapters ago. We continued to speak for some time, comparing what the game looked like from each of our perspectives, during which time he added the following:

“...Y’know I used to go to *Resto Plat* (a soup kitchen in Montreal) often enough, and I remember my activist friends asking me why on earth I would go there, after all I didn’t *have* to go there, I had other ways [to eat]. They kept saying the guys there were “crazy”. Why? Cause they talk loud and laugh? Cause they’re silly, talk vulgar (*hablan puras groserías*) and like to fuck around (*hacer desmadre*)? The truth is that I felt better there with those guys than with those fake smiling activists and all their fancy political training (*formación política*)... Besides, those guys (at *Resto Plat*) got a perspective on society too, they see what the fuck is up, and they talk about it too, just not in the same way. They say shit straight up, like you say, and more like I’m used to...Oh yeah and that’s the other thing the activists would say besides “they’re crazy”, they say that “they’re *racist*”, and yeah, they *are* racist! And real up front about it too...but y’see I think this is better because then you can *talk back*. Or not. It’s up to you to decide. In a way it’s...weird, but in a way it’s more respectful, cause they talk to you on your level, on their level, I mean like you’re on the same level... But when people’s prejudices are all nicely tucked away (*bien escondidita*), you can’t respond. They (the activists) talk in this language, a logic in which you don’t enter, *can’t* enter. And the activists think they’re better than others, better than us (Mexicans), precisely because they’re all so very ‘civilized’ in this particular way? Now *that’s* racist, but it’s harder to articulate how, you can’t explain it to them in the terms of their own discourse...”

It’s true, you can’t. Neither can one explain it well in academic discourse, which is also polite by definition, and yet I am going to try anyway. Along with Carmen of Chapter 5, who mimics the “anti-racist” foreigner by closing up and curling in her body, Damian is my second friend to complain about courtesy as racism, and we think we’ve figured out the activists’ game.

## The Anti-Oppression Game

As outlined in Chapter 5, anarchists of the “intersectionality” camp work to “articulate diverse struggles” by “privileging the perspectives of those most affected” by “multiple axes of oppression”.<sup>3</sup> The logic behind these statements is rarely explained in detail as it is taken for granted, but their triple rationale emerges in bits and pieces in myriad conversations, arguments, workshops, speeches and so on: 1) those who experience a given oppression are more aware of how it functions and therefore will have deeper insight into how to overturn it; 2) engaging the needs and insights of people who suffer *intersecting* axes of oppression will address the needs of those who experience *singular* oppressions, as opposed to vice versa; 3) oppressed people share “cultures of resistance” or “communities” from which we can learn better ways of relating to one another and the earth (e.g., women’s active listening and communication style, indigenous peoples’ relationships with the land, etc.).

When the last person to speak at the Everyday Anarchist workshop at RAT described in the previous chapter said “What about, y’know, queer, anti-racist, feminist identity? These things are part of being an anarchist but no one has spoken of that...”, this is the scheme she was getting at. While the Everyday Anarchists didn’t quite have time to get there, I started my discussion of the anarchist self with this virtually all-white and upper class group and their (arguably related) lack of attention to these concerns for a specific reason: In order to grasp the anti-oppression game it helps to understand that it is elaborated by the self-contained anarchist who “keeps it in”. Both involve bluffing, but while anyone can play a proper anarchist self if they have a good poker face, the antioppression game is a trump game that requires specific insider knowledge and considerable skill as well. As Damian notes, one must be trained and have the specific “tools” required. The anti-oppression game is arguably the Bridge of all prestige games, and another hidden unity underwriting anarchists’ “diversity”.

The anarchist system of knowledge-values around “those most affected” means, for example, that while the proper anarchist selves of the Everyday Anarchist workshop may distinguish themselves in line with Bourdieu’s (1984) argument regarding class distinction in general, as we move forward we will need a much more dynamic, anthropological notion of capital and its forms, wherein the substance of these and processes of conversion between them are context specific (see also Warren 1998, and Ch. 4, fn. 9

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<sup>3</sup> I use quotation marks as these are catch phrases, ubiquitous in activist speech, print and e-media, as Google will confirm. One sentence I quoted earlier that serves to capture this logic and involves an illustrative use of key words is the following: [Our project is to] “link mass mobilizations and direct action against global capitalism to the on-the-ground, day-to-day struggles against colonialism, poverty, racism, police brutality and displacement, rooted in frontline communities and long-standing struggles for dignity and survival” – this is copied from an activist friend’s Facebook “status update”, which I happened to see while procrastinating to avoid writing this very paragraph; it had accrued 54 “likes” from other activist friends in less than three hours.



of this work). As Andrea Smith has noted in regard to this field, here “cultural capital” is bestowed to those who seem “to be the most oppressed” (Smith 2013, 263).

There’s no perfect way to render the field of this game in Bourdieu’s language, but we might say that in the anti-oppressive activist subculture, dominant social, cultural, and economic capital largely retain their value, but certain regimes of symbolic capital are inverted. In other words, the legible symbolic markers of rank (e.g., skin colour, features of maleness) in social hierarchies characterizing the dominant society (e.g. white supremacy, patriarchy) are nominally inverted, but because the dynamics of social interrelation within the subculture continue to be informed by the power complexes of the dominant culture, the results are somewhat unpredictable. For example, in a “controlled” situation, in a given debate between a person of colour and a white person the racialized identity of the person of colour should function in their favour as a tie-breaker. Yet of course the situation is never entirely controlled, and in practice the overarching symbolic capital of whiteness and the latent prejudice of the audience may qualify this outcome, especially if the white person has mastery of the rhetorical tools powerful in the dominant society (i.e., mainstream cultural capital). In any case it is important to note that in the activists’ imaginary-ideal social hierarchies are purposely inverted, ostensibly to compensate for the prevailing trend in the other direction, and that this is well-known by all involved.

This collective knowledge structures the action of activists seeking “good politics” (i.e., good standing in the anarchist scene) in a number of ways. First, if someone “looks” like they have an experience of oppression, (for e.g., is visibly queer, a person of colour, a woman, etc.), this will automatically lend him or her certain authority because it means that this person has “privileged insight as to how to overturn systems of domination” and is part of a “community of resistance”, which goes a long way in signifying “good politics” in and of itself.

Alternatively, one may specifically point out one’s experience of oppression to this effect (and if one can claim experience of multiple intersecting oppressions, even better). We may call this “playing one’s own cards”, which often sounds like this: “As an (*x* category of oppressed person) I think that...”, or, more strongly, “As the *only* (*x* category of oppressed person) in the room, I feel that...”. Playing one’s cards may work to win an argument or advance one’s idea in an assembly, for example. Note the argument may also be a very good one, and yet, at the same time, one that might not pass if it were not accompanied by some good cards. This is why, as Andrea Smith says, in these settings activists “with more privilege...develop new heretofore unknown forms of oppression from which they suffer[ed]” (2013, 264).

Secondly, if one cannot claim experiences of oppression, or even if one can, one can also gain “good politics” by framing one’s speech or position in an argument as “in solidarity with” people who can and do. This is what we might call “playing a solidarity card”, and often sounds like this: “in solidarity with X”, or “keeping a Y analysis in mind”, “I think we should do Z”. Note that this means that white “anti-racists”, for example, can benefit from playing a “race card” to acquire immunity as much as a

person of colour, often even more so, especially if they are more familiar with the game. Third, and of utmost importance, the action of activists seeking “good politics” is structured by the game insomuch as they must be constantly guessing as best they can when, how, and by whom the above plays might be made. One does not want to get caught on the wrong side of “good politics” by allowing the conditions for someone to call racism, sexism, etc. This means keeping in mind who could technically draw on an oppressed identity to authorize themselves or someone else. It also means being attentive to who has a history of doing so and regarding which identities specifically, who knows the rules of the game, who does not, and so on. It also means maintaining a careful, tentative stance at all times, and phrasing ones speech in such a way as to be able to “test the waters” and reverse course if necessary depending on subtle cues.<sup>4</sup> The game is as much about “preventing a play” (avoiding being “called out” in activist lingo) as about having high cards oneself.<sup>5</sup> Consider the following examples of preventing plays, in ascending complexity:

1. Two white activists are alone. One says “Indian” instead of “indigenous person” and the other says nothing. Later on in the presence of a person of colour the first white person says “Indian” again. This time the other white person quickly corrects him. (He cannot let it slide because if the person of colour calls racism before he does, he may likewise be judged as having “bad politics” for not having intervened.)
2. Three white male anarchists are alone. One calls another a “pussy” and the third party laughs. Later on the first man says “pussy” again now in front of the third party and his white woman friend, and the third party quickly points out that this is a sexist thing to say. (This is merely the gender-equivalent of the first example.) His white woman friend agrees with him and says it is unacceptable for anyone to use this word, yet when the same white woman friend and the third party later hear a woman from Mexico say “pussy” they do not correct her. (Other people might say later that they are racist if they are heard correcting a migrant woman of colour’s speech.)
3. A highly educated Egyptian refugee, two Canadian people of colour, and one white person are chatting in the hallway of a community organization. The Egyptian says that “Native Americans were primitives when they were colonized” whereas “Egypt was a highly advanced civilization”. The other people of colour

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the academic feminists of Chapter 5 who reserve the right to say, “That is not what I meant”, in case important persons disagree, are playing the very same game; “academic work clearly reveals its discursive mirroring of the subject formation of the middle-classes” (Stalleybrass and White 1986, 192; 191–4 *passim*; see also Chapter 9 of this work, and Skeggs 2002 regarding the class form/content of the reflexive text).

<sup>5</sup> Regarding “call-out culture” see for e.g. internal critiques by Ahmad (2015), Kristian Williams (2014).

laugh, exchange glances, and roll their eyes. (As no indigenous person is present the people of colour may laugh, but make sure to roll their eyes to indicate to each other and anyone watching that they did, in fact, recognize the presence of “bad politics”.) The white person maintains a neutral expression until the two people of colour smile at her as well, then finally smiles back. (The white person follows their lead, because if she laughs first and the people of colour decide *not* to, they may call *both* her and the Egyptian racist. Neither does the white person take initiative in challenging the Egyptian, because in parallel to the example above, the people of colour may say, either right away or later to others, that she is a racist white person because she condescends to Egyptian refugees.)

4. Following a dispute among co-workers at a non-profit organization, one of the parties in the dispute – two persons of colour – offer money to an acquaintance who is a woman of colour to be the official conflict mediator, who then tells the other party – a white woman – that if she does not accept her as the mediator she will not receive her overtime pay. Having thus secured the contract, the mediator cancels the mediation “in the interests of everyone’s safety” and announces that the private investigation that she conducted instead has determined that the person at fault in the conflict is the white woman. A diversity of activists who are privy to the story say in private conversations that this was a “clear abuse of power,” but none challenge the mediator, the organization, or the other party in public. (This is “because the mediator is a woman of colour”, various white activists explained; “no one would *believe* she was not a good mediator because she is part *indigenous*”, and “if we contest her actions people will call *us* racist, especially because the other party was white”.)

These examples concern one or two axes only. The anarchist milieu officially recognizes many forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, cisgender privilege/transphobia, ableism, ageism, fatphobia and so on – some of these no doubt being the “heretofore unknown forms” that Smith (2013, 264) discusses. This means that most activists can usually lay claim to one oppressed identity or another, so the dynamics and calculations required to successfully make or prevent plays are often exponentially more complex and have less linear results. Rather than draw up a cumbersome (yet still reductive)  $42 \times 42$  chart that still only accounts for all possible *two*-party combinations of speakers and listeners, I will summarize by saying that, based on a decade-long period of recording such interactions, the guidelines that activists apparently keep in mind include the following scheme, which is by no means exhaustive but includes selected pair groupings for the purpose of illustration. The scheme represents extrapolations that activists make on the basis of observing their peers’ activity and which they read/write back onto the world: The people on “top” do not necessarily have more power (or “win”, where “winning” means getting what one is after *at any given moment*); rather, players know that the activist scene’s system

of knowledge-value around “those most affected” is nominally stacked in their favour, and take this into account in their own vying for “good politics”:

1. “Trans\* person of colour” beats “trans\* person” or “person of colour” alone;
2. “person of colour” and “white trans person” often need a tie-breaker;
3. “indigenous person of colour” beats “non-indigenous person of colour”;
4. “trans person” or “person of colour” beats “(cisgendered) queer woman”;
5. “queer white woman with a disability” beats “queer white man”;
6. “woman” in the singular beats “(cisgendered) queer white man”, but
7. everything else mentioned above in the singular beats “woman”;
8. “Woman” beats “working class man”;
9. “Working class woman” only beats “woman” if the latter in the singular; 10) Any of the above beats “straight white cisgendered man”.

Because this ethnography has not focused exclusively on the North American anarchist scene, we have not seen in these pages extensive examples of all of the above permutations and combinations, but we have seen enough.<sup>6</sup> We have seen various instances in which “person of colour” trumps “woman”, for example. It should also be clear how “indigenous woman” doesn’t necessarily “win” by virtue of being close to the top of the chart. Rather, Magdalena dies unattended in a hospital hallway while both Carlo and Mr. NEFAC secure *their* operational goals precisely by mobilizing the “person of colour” vs. “woman” game-pair in their favour. Once in a while “woman of colour” does win however – it is only possible to kick dancing Bosnian refugees out of a No One Is Illegal party with reference to the importance of feelings of “safety” among queer women of colour because it is self-evident to everyone (else) there that in this particular context these concerns have priority over those of white male refugees. The high standing of “trans” in the scheme may raise some questions as I have only dealt in passing with North American queer and trans politics, but note that the foreigner activists of Chapter 5 who felt free to suggest that Mexicans are “really” transgender

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<sup>6</sup> Beyond the examples provided throughout this work, note that the argument that takes place in the Facebook comment thread included in Appendix C serves well to illustrate various aspects of the game, including activist understandings of “diversity”, “anti-oppression” and “intersectionality”, as well as the practice of enunciating self-identities to garner authority, generally mobilizing the identity-ranking scheme I illustrate in list form above. The comment thread argument concerns whether it is racist to use the phrase “poly” to refer to people who practice “polyamory” (see Chapter 1), because “poly” is supposed to belong to Polynesians instead.

while being careful to not impose feminism on these same “people of colour” are acting in line with this scheme.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, those “working class guys only care about getting fat rims for their SUVs”, says Stephane, and the idea that “people of colour” have a more valuable perspective than “the poor”, can be discerned in the fact that the consensus-as-exclusive debate has revolved exclusively around race: Both poor people and people of colour are absent in movement spaces, but it’s the absence of people of colour that activists are concerned about. The fact that “indigenous person” beats “person of colour” has everything to do with settler anarchoindigenism of course, and we must remember that as with all game-pairs, the privileged subject in each does not necessarily come out on top. Most of the time they are simply shown the most courtesy, while ultimately everyone loses.

## The Insult of Courtesy

Game players’ preoccupation with impressing others by performing “good politics” does not necessarily involve, and indeed even preempts, practical acts of solidarity. Sara Ahmed (2004) has similarly discussed white anti-racism as an “unhappy performative” – a statement that does not do what it says it does, and one which serves primarily to (re)authorize race and class privilege by casting into relief an educated, selfconscious white identity vis-à-vis poor whites. The difference between the antioppression game and the simpler anti-racism game (if I may) that Ahmed (2004) discusses is that in the anti-oppression game there are *many* oppressions to avoid in order to be seen as having “good politics”, and this goes for people of colour too. So, alongside “good rich anti-racist whites” valorizing themselves vis-à-vis “bad poor racist whites” we also have, for example, “good rich anti-sexist whites” and “good rich anti-sexist people of colour” valorizing themselves vis-à-vis “bad poor sexist whites”.

Note that while in the dominant culture it is much more common to find “good rich anti-sexist whites” valorizing themselves vis-à-vis “bad, poor sexist people of colour” (this being a key aspect of colonial logic), the inverted regime of symbolic capital that defines the anti-oppression game means that people of colour are to be shown special respect (superficial courtesy) and so at least on the level of speech (overtly) the poor white man is made to carry all the negative value of the poor in general, as well as the negativity which is otherwise specifically pinned to the “uncivilized” person of colour.

This does not mean that the people of colour, women, and other oppressed groups who deserve courtesy are benefitting in the long run. The “respect” of courtesy is always superficial, and arguably a genre of symbolic violence, inasmuch as reluctance

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<sup>7</sup> I hope to address the Anglo American politics of “trans\* allies” versus “Trans Exclusive Radical Feminists” (mentioned in passing in Chapter 5), and specific inconsistencies in activists’ “intersectional” analyses that behold axes of “race, class, gender and sexuality” in a further work.

to challenge ‘highly identified’ people actually constitutes and perpetuates oppression of themselves and others in at least three ways.

First, it is arguable that in order to combat systems of oppression one must be willing to recognize oppressive words and actions on the part of anyone who propagates them (and in all cases do more than simply “call them out”).

Second, in an insidious way, the very act of elevating highly identified persons beyond critique perpetuates the devaluation of oppressed interlocutors precisely by refusing to allow them to *be* interlocutors, instead forcing them into the role of silent props in the play of “good politics”. This is what Damian is getting at when he says he prefers someone who says his or her racist thoughts out loud to someone who “keeps it in”. In the first case at least he can “talk back”: While the content of what someone is saying may insulting, the form of engagement is “more respectful” because it is dialogical; he is being treated as being “on the same level”. Damian cannot stand in for all racialized subjects, some of whom say they prefer silent politeness to insulting honesty, yet neither is Damian exceptional. When Carmen says that the foreigner who assumes a silent, closed and inwardly facing stance in order to not appear racist is being racist in the process, she is getting at precisely the same thing.

Third, the courtesy that results from fear of being cast on the wrong side of “good politics” subtly interacts with a pre-existing courtesy towards the oppressed Other inasmuch as they are generally treated as less than moral persons: their subjectification as Other means they may not be treated as rational. For example, when both persons of colour and the white person did not challenge the Egyptian mentioned earlier for having said that indigenous people are “primitives”, it was partly because there were no indigenous people present at the time (no one to impress) so why bother? But it is also because of a buried notion that challenging the Egyptian would not be fair because he “can’t be expected to know any better”. No activist would ever acknowledge this out loud of course (many do not even realize the contradiction). But, as in the above example, if activists let highly-identified persons “get away” with less than “good politics” because they are afraid that they *themselves* will be called oppressive for calling them oppressive, it is because this dynamic is common. And it is common because disguised beneath the subcultural “authority” (the face-value of the card) of highly identified people lies a mainstream paternalism: Ordinary immigrants of colour, indigenous women, black people, what-have-you, cannot be expected to be as cosmopolitan as “we” properly-educated activists, to have as much knowledge as “we” do, or perhaps even the rational capacity to assimilate our sophisticated analysis. The consecration of revolutionary subjects always involves this equal and opposite movement in the other direction. Because their perfection must remain unsullied, they cannot be treated as a moral person.

Andrea Smith’s (2008) discussion of how indigenous women are treated by (non-indigenous) activists dovetails with my own; as one woman she interviewed explained, “Well what I have found is that when you are working with Leftists, it’s rare that you’ll find a person who’s evolved enough to treat you like a real person instead of a romantic

icon. And I'd do an experiment with coming out with the most bizarre shit, and no one would call me on it because they didn't want to offend me. But that's not what it is to work in coalition." (Yvonne Denis in Smith [2008], 222). These leftists Smith refers to could be almost any one of my white activist friends – I've heard Mohawk activists around Montreal make similar remarks, often right before or after sending a newbie who "wants to get involved" to the very same campus activists, who serve well as a "filter". White campus anarchists do often make themselves useful, yet their particular "recognition" of indigenous difference can be as insulting as the "recognition" offered by the Canadian state. As Audra Simpson (2015) points out, indigenous subjects (must) navigate "identity within and against recognition" by instantiating "refusals" characterized by a "quadrupleness" of consciousness and "an endless play": "I am me, I am what you think I am, and I'm who the person to the right of me thinks I am, and you are full of shit, and then maybe I will tell you to your face".

Meanwhile, as I recently explained the premise of this chapter to a white Occupy Wall Street organizer, she stopped me to say, "This is just like what happened once when we went over to Occupy Brooklyn and there was this black guy who was going on and on about how he wanted to organize a 'toast', which according to his description was like this super-misogynist spoken-word slam-down kinda thing, and I was sitting there like 'is he joking?...I think he must be joking...' but no one said anything cause he was the authentic Brooklyn black guy or whatever, and I think to most people it didn't even occur to them that it was a joke...I remember when we next saw him at a meeting some of the people who had been there went up to him and said they would like to invite him to do his 'toast' and he just cracked up and shook his head."

It is easier to laugh than to cry of course. No doubt the idiocy of the white activists was sort of funny, but we might also imagine how insulting it is for the 'toast' man that the activists a) have no trouble believing that he is extremely misogynistic (even though they would strategically avoid calling people of colour sexist out loud in most circumstances), and b) do not consider him worthy of dialogue, that is, they consider it inappropriate to challenge him. As for me, I have no idea what it is like to be an indigenous woman or a black man, but perhaps I have noticed this problem whereas so many other white middle class activists do not because I have experienced a certain equivalent along class lines: Class does not rank as high in terms of courtesy-demand, but once in a while an activist who both a) knows I have a working class background and b) is concerned about being "classist" (see discussion below) will turn into a smiling and nodding yes-man in my presence.

Those of us on the courtesy-receiving end can always tell when this is happening, and I, too, often respond by "coming up with the most bizarre shit": One time I actually went on testing the limits for twenty minutes until I actually tried, "Y'know Pete Seeger is my father," and they went silent – a few smiles.<sup>8</sup> Here they at first a) couldn't tell

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<sup>8</sup> Pete Seeger is a folk musician who recorded versions of many songs and anthems from U.S. labour history, is well-known to the activists in question, and unlikely to be my father for a variety of reasons.

that I was joking, then b) couldn't find it within themselves to challenge me, and as usual neither of these reflected well on the activists in question. Stances, principles and narratives are indeed always revealed in moments of "refusal". The recognitions and recognizers that I refuse here are hardly analogous to those facing the Mohawks in Simpson's (2015) work, but I doubt it is a coincidence that we similarly relish "*enjoyment in the reveal*" (107). It is significant that the similar response of the black man, indigenous woman, and white working class woman to courteous activists (despite so many differences between us) is often to enter a joking mode: If they refuse to engage in dialogue with us, we refuse to engage them in dialogue. If they refuse to take us seriously, we refuse to be serious. In a situation like this, our best shot is to try to make the activists' very politeness work against them: we retain dignity by marking their courtesy as insult in both the form and content of the joke.<sup>9</sup>

Here it is tempting to follow Bakhtin (1984), noticing that while polite activists are concerned to embody the perfected completion of their political formation ("good politics"), the jokers interact with them in a "grotesque" fashion, challenging the form and content of their politeness at once. We might also follow Radcliffe-Brown (1940), who observed that "joking relationships" tend to manage social tensions among relative status equals, vs. the "avoidance relationships" that pertain to authority, noticing that the jokers not only challenge the respectful avoidance of polite activists with their laughter, but the logic of hierarchy itself. I return to these more theoretical questions in the next and final chapter.

**Figure 8–2.** This poem by Everton Sylvester and its punch line serve well to illustrate the joking sensibility I aim to describe above. Taken from "*ALOUD – Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Café*" (1994).

**“WELL?”**

— *Everton Sylvester (1994)*

I got cash in fuck-you quantities  
Now what?  
that makes you uncomfortable?  
Fuck you  
and the Range Rover you drove in on  
Fuck your Saab convertible  
And fuck your twice weekly trips to the analyst  
Stoopid motherfuck.  
Fuck the Hamptons, Maine,  
and fly-infested South of France.

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<sup>9</sup> Here we may note a parallel with how the *relajiento* positions himself vis-à-vis the *apretado* (see Chapter 7 of this work, fn. 10; Portilla 1984). Note also that Díaz Barriga (1997) provides a compelling argument that Oscar Lewis' informants, on which his classic work regarding the "culture of poverty" is based (1959), were joking with him all the while (along precisely these lines and for precisely the same reason).



I am paid,  
Asshole  
Got more cash than god can count  
So why don't you just ... die?  
Choke to death on your damn designer  
bagel from Balducci's  
low cholesterol, naturally.

Fuck your big old Sunday NY Times  
Fuck the Wall Street Journal and Newsweek and the lot  
including Nation, Village Voice, Guardian  
and the rest.

Stupid set o' privileged motherfuckers  
think its fashionable to have  
"an alternative view".

And Fuck, if you can  
your pencil thin  
Evian drinking  
calorie counting  
caffeine limiting  
sodium sparing  
Nutrasweet sweetening  
rear-view mirror preening  
carrot nibbling, bunny

Go drown in a lake of Diet Coke, Fucker.

I got cash  
What else matters?  
Slave!  
Fuck your fencing, screw your squash Yo,  
Piss on your polo and your Pavarotti.  
Fuck all that shit you call music and pretend to enjoy  
I got cash,  
megacash.

Unhappy with that?  
Oh, go sit on your ski rack.  
Money talks, you little pussy  
And let your politically correct pals know  
that I think you're a dick also  
Neutered asshole!

And your idea of multiculturalism...  
Japanese restaurant on Monday

Indian on Tuesday  
And on Wednesday, Carribean.  
“Not too spicy please.”  
Well,  
I got stash on stash.  
And it ain’t nouveau cash  
Money’s in ma family for generations  
Ma great great grandfather made the bag  
selling European slaves  
in Africa.  
I got cash motherfucker.  
And you can’t tell whether or not I’m joking  
Can you?  
Dumb fuck!

## Settler Anarchoindigenism Take II

We will be returning to the anti-oppression game below, but now is also a good time for few more words on settler anarchoindigenism. Beyond corroborating Smith’s (2008) point that anarchist “settler allies” are not acting “in solidarity” by acting like simpering yes-men, I should like to point out more specifically how the game’s combined logic of compulsive self-presentation and identity-ranking serves to pre-empt practically useful coalition work with indigenous peoples’ movements. This following brief anecdote cannot stand in for all movements of anarchist solidarity activism with indigenous peoples (some of which are certainly more substantial) but it does give us a glimpse of the anarchist solidarity organizing that *doesn’t* happen.

In 2009 I attended a workshop organized by activists in Montreal called “Indigenous Solidarity Organizing from a No Borders Perspective”, which began with three non-indigenous animators of colour explaining to a group of twenty, mostly white, middle class activists how radical indigenist critiques of the sovereign Western nation-state jive well with anarchist critiques of the same. With reference to the Two-Row Wampum they went on to further explain how the critical positions towards “borders” in both anarchist and indigenous imaginaries jive well with their own logic of solidarity with non-status immigrants.<sup>10</sup> Consider the combination of various logics and practices discussed in *Settler Anarchoindigenism Take I* with those of the game: Indigenous communities represent anarchist-values-in-action (and if they do not they are not truly “indigenous”). Meanwhile Turtle Island (North America) is colonized by white settlers who oppress indigenous people, whereas migrants do not because migrants are

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<sup>10</sup> The Two-Row Wampum is a Wampum belt/treaty between the Haudenoshonee and early settlers (1613), whose two rows, evoking two canoes passing alongside one another in a river, are meant to signify their peaceful co-existence.

oppressed by white settlers too. Activists' general agreement that migrants should get to move around freely is no doubt a good thing, and no doubt white Canadian politicians oppress indigenous people more so than exploited Mexican fruit-pickers, yet note the differential treatment of Mexican fruit-pickers and white fishermen:

When the introductory presentation at the workshop was over the group began to discuss concrete examples of bad colonial settlers and immediately focused on poor whites, including certain ex-fishermen on welfare in Newfoundland: There are simply no more fish to catch off the coast of Newfoundland, and the Canadian government is sick of paying welfare to these ex-fishermen, so the state has decided to deny them welfare to coerce them into moving up to northern Quebec to work on hydroelectric dam projects which would, as it so happens, flood hundreds of hectares of Cree land.

The activists proceeded to discuss at length how these fishermen-cum-dam builders were colonial settlers and had to be made to understand that they had no right to go up north and destroy Cree land. Consciousness-raising workshops for the exfishermen were proposed, as well as scolding in the form of picketing. Although this was not meant to be an organizing meeting *per se* but rather a space for reflection, it is nonetheless significant that reflections centered on the lack of "good politics" among poor white fishermen, and the few references made to possible organizing strategies focused on correcting these fishermen by means of 'proper education'. Workshop attendees therefore established their "good politics" vis-à-vis one another by collectively distinguishing themselves from the bad, white, male, working class fishermen; attendees could thus go home feeling like good "settler allies".

If the activists were more interested in stopping the dam than performing antiracist "good settler" selves (and this goes for the people of colour present as well), they might have been capable of imagining that the Newfoundland fishermen were likely pretty upset about their welfare having been taken away, and probably didn't want to be shipped hundreds of miles away to build dams and flood the forest no matter whose forest it was. Not because of settler-shame, but because being shipped far away from one's family and friends to do back-breaking manual labour sucks. The fact that the fishermen no doubt wanted to avoid all of this dam-building business even more than workshop attendees – and that this potentiated a possible coalition – could not even be conceived, however. This is partly because no one at these workshops has much idea what sustained back-breaking manual labour feels like, but also because "good politics" is imagined as prerequisite to any subversive political act, and "good politics" rests on transcending material concerns, or, at the very least, material sacrifice as opposed to material gain. "Good politics" is always about denying the body, denying its existence, its feelings, its suffering and pleasure. Here the fishermen are conceptual equivalents to those people who dumpster-dive out of necessity, versus the ones who do it choicefully and thus achieve recognition of proper radical self-hood.

Related to this last point, even if it occurred to one of the activists to pursue a possible alliance with the fishermen, no one would pipe up and say so because to do so would contradict game values: To point out that the forced displacement of New-

foundland welfare recipients shares features with the forced displacement of Mexican farmers (neo-liberalism, for example) is generally “not okay”. Precisely because the more affected by oppression people are ☒ the better subversive knowledge/community of resistance (value) they have, to propose that the experience of (less oppressed) working class whites be in some parallel with that of (more oppressed) “migrants from the Global South” could be read as saying whites ☒ Mexican migrants, and that whites are therefore “good”, and that would be racist.

In other words, when Andrea Smith writes that “often a reluctance to expand one’s set of coalition partners in progressive circles is the reluctance to be associated with certain groups” (Smith 2008, 203), she is brushing up against another aspect of the antioppression game, or what she calls “privilege politics” in her later essay (Smith 2013), and could once again be talking about any of my activist friends. Friends such as those who, for example, preferred to hang out at the barricades in Six Nations in 2006 (coming home with valuable pictures of themselves alongside Mohawk warriors) instead of pounding the pavement in the neighboring settler community of Caledonia. Not that anarchists and folks at Six Nations shouldn’t be friends. But white “anti-racist” allies in particular might consider using their positioning to work on the increasingly angry white side of the barricades if their image as “anti-racist” were not, in fact, getting in the way. They don’t want to be associated with angry white settlers, and yet they don’t want to “have it out” with them either.

Smith’s (2008) “prolineal genealogy” of an “unlikely alliance” between Evangelical Christians and native peoples (premised on certain shared ideas and positionalities vis-à-vis the prison-industrial complex and within the “reproductive rights” debate) could also be a model for my point regarding the potential “unlikely alliance” among Newfoundland fishermen and Cree people, and how both white anarchists and those of colour fail to even think of it in the first place. One native activist that Smith cites, who, as it happens, was part of the coalition that successfully struggled against the James Bay dam in Northern Quebec, explains that, “We got friends, and we should look to them wherever we can find them. We don’t have to necessarily assume that they will only be found among people of colour. We should not assume things...To what extent do you really want to make friends with people you really don’t like but maybe we’ll make friends now and settle our differences later, after the victory?” (Ewen in Smith 2008, 202). “Just as we must not presume that we cannot work with unlikely allies, we must not presume that we should always work with people who are perceived to be our likely allies”, says Smith (2008, 200).

Smith does well to speak to her readers this way, because within the contemporary Left everyone knows that poor white people cannot possibly be “like” poor migrant Mexicans or native people (and that to say they are, in the absence of 500 pages of compelling exposition such as Smith provides, is simply “not okay”). And yet why are alliances among Christians and native women, or poor white fishermen and Cree people, considered “unlikely” in the first place? Many activists will point to historical cases of antagonism (which then become the “fundamental antagonism”) between such

groups (as if the interests of poor Mexicans and groups of native people north of the borders have always been “fundamentally” articulated). These arguments do not bear out. In fact, such groups are considered “unlikely allies” largely because of a certain quantitative equivalence that Leftists generally observe between “race”, “gender” and “class” (among other “axes” of oppression), which is taken for granted among anarchists and other Leftists of the “intersectionality” camp, and which is taught in the anti-oppression workshop.

## The Anti-Oppression Workshop as Self-Technology

The anti-oppression game, with all of its unwritten schemes, tacit assumptions, quick mental calculations, delicate speech, proper lingo, expressive restraint and memorization that are required to play ‘successfully’, may seem difficult, even exhausting, to manage. Indeed for outsiders who find themselves on the field without having warmed up, like Damian, or myself fifteen years ago, it *is* impossible to manage, and makes navigating the activist scene feel something like walking through a mine field (“Everyone is *afraid*... People stop talking to you, they don’t even necessarily tell you why!”) The most avid players, however, do not have trouble keeping all the necessary calculations in mind, nor find any of it particularly strange. Once in a while activists speaking privately do express exasperation regarding the “identity politics in the scene”, referring precisely to this business, but even they rarely challenge it in public (because, of course, this would put into question their own “good politics”), and are thus generally resigned to this state of affairs.

Because the anti-oppression game is merely a left-wing elaboration upon the upper class management of the self and appearances, (as some activists say with a sigh “just how the world works”), they simply do not register it as particularly odd, founded in a specific class culture, possible to change, or even as a “game” at all because its logic is simply an extension of life in general.<sup>11</sup> As Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once observed (and as cited by many an anthropologist), “Water is the last thing a fish notices.” As for the rest of us who do not grow up living and breathing its logic of value, we must make do with the anti-oppression workshop.

As has been mentioned, miniature workshops and summary guidelines on antioppression are offered alongside general assemblies and spokescouncils. But the antioppression workshop proper is a session of a few hours, or perhaps a “weekend retreat”, where activists go to learn how to be anti-oppressive in depth. The workshop varies

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<sup>11</sup> See Skeggs (2011) regarding the ways in which bourgeois elites universalize this system of value practices (the game) and analytically project it onto others, yet how autonomist working class value practices are entirely distinct, and distinct in specific ways that make them bad (anti-oppression) game-players. Skeggs (2002; 2004; 2011) has effectively mapped out the contours of the game of “good politics” as it is played in the academy and other mainstream publics, whereas I seek to demonstrate that the same prerogatives of the (reflexive, appropriative) bourgeois self that she describes overdetermine social relations even within certain anarchist anti-capitalist social scenes.

somewhat in form, but generally involves some arrangement of the following key components: an introductory lecture, discussion of oppression at the hands of persons absent from the room, confessional speech on the part of those considered “privileged” vis-à-vis other participants, and pedagogical games that involve quantification. This extrapolation is based on ten years experience with anti-oppression workshops, study groups and reading circles, first as a “participant” and later as a “participant-observer”, in venues ranging from the Rotten Grapefruit house and various Anglophone anarchist collectives to non-profits and campus PIRGs. The main examples given below are from English-speaking Montreal, yet sporadic experience throughout the same decade with anti-oppression discourse and events in the U.S.A. and R.O.C. suggests a pattern throughout English-speaking North America, which is where most Anglophone activists in Montreal come from.

The anti-oppression workshop begins with an introductory lecture to frame “oppression” in general or a specific oppression in question. Note that single-oppression workshops are mostly commonly devoted to racism, followed by heterosexism/ transphobia, sexism and ableism, these followed by fatphobia and class, this order largely corresponding to the game scheme above. The introductory lecture generally invites us to be reflexive or “question ourselves”, and reminds us that we are to create and maintain a “safe space” for those “most affected”. Of course those “most affected” will rarely be present at a single-oppression workshop (people of colour rarely go to white activist workshops on anti-racism, for example), but when the topic is “multiple and intersecting” oppressions in general, there are usually a few “most affected” people of some sort in the room, and it is these peoples’ “safety” that “safe space” is (supposedly) directed to.

Once all of this has been established, the animator will often propose games of quantification to follow, which are intended to teach us how privileged/oppressed we are. These games might include spatial exercises (“take one step forward if you are a man, one step back if you are a woman”) or other equivalence-making objects of measurement (“everyone who is white gets a gold bead, all people of colour please take a brown bead”). These games are largely for the pedagogical benefit of the privileged people who end up with lots of shiny gold beads, because again, people who are oppressed usually already know it. While these exercises are intended to educate us about our standing out there in the dominant society, they also quickly and efficiently illustrate who is “most affected” in the room, and therefore who has a right to be or feel “safe” throughout the rest of the workshop itself.

Once we know how privileged/oppressed we are, the workshop generally continues with talking activities, ranging from structured “go-arounds” and timed groupwork to more free-form conversation. Regardless of the structure, similar patterns always emerge. The privileged people with shiny beads talk about themselves as well as oppressive third parties, whereas the oppressed people only talk about oppressive third parties (if they talk at all). The privileged people who talk about themselves are those who engage in confessional speech, wherein they alternate between talking about mo-

ments when they were not racist (or tried not to be) vs. other people who were, and times when they *were* racist and felt bad about it vs. other people who were also racist but didn't feel as guilty as them. The same thing goes for other "axes". Men of all colours including white will lay out the same spread regarding guilt and shame at an "antisexism" workshop for example. The correspondence between workshop form and content concerning speech as a reflexive display of self, and the locus of oppression in general, encourages activists to determine whether or not people are oppressive based on what they say as opposed to what they do. Consider, for example, the valuation of words over actions, or the abstract over the concrete, in the following workshop discussion (2008):

In a conversation about racism, the group of otherwise diverse university student participants were discussing someone who lent a friend without immigration papers their SIN number (SSN in the United States). The lender had said it "was the right thing to do, he is my friend after all." The participants then proceeded to discuss how this was problematic because "people shouldn't be helping [non-status immigrants] because they are *friends*," but rather as an "act of political solidarity". Participants then went on to discuss the classic, and understandably infuriating, set of statements on the part of people who insist they are not racist/homophobic (etc.) because "I have friends who are black/queer (etc.)". They then proceeded to explain how "being a *friend* is different than being an *ally*", and so on.

One of the most critical people who spoke for a long time, in this case a wealthy woman of colour, cited Edward Said (1978) twice while talking about the difference between "solidarity" and "charity", and was subsequently described during the workshop break as having "really good politics". The month before, this woman told a non-status immigrant that she could not lend him *her* SIN because she earned too much money and it would make her pay too much tax (the workshop participants including this woman did not know that I happened to know this other man). In this anti-oppression workshop doing something that is of concrete help to a person without papers was "bad politics" because of the wrong set of words accompanying it, whereas doing nothing useful but having a good abstract analysis is "good politics".<sup>12</sup>

There are many other examples of ways in which proper linguistic framing translates into "good politics". For example, I have heard it discussed that interrupting a racist comment by interjecting, "Stop being such an asshole" is not "anti-racist" *per se*; rather,

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<sup>12</sup> An alternate example of how activists may couch their personal interest as the greater good (often without realizing it) involves an anarcho-hippie roommate, who later betrayed the fact that he simply did not like cats, yet in the house meeting concerning the issue he elaborated a political speech organized around 3<sup>rd</sup> person arguments regarding how "pets are part of capitalist culture", and suggested that if a potential house member were to keep and continue caring for her cat (as opposed to disposing of it), this would amount to unacceptable animal abuse. As A.K. Thompson (2010) has suggested, and as I elaborate in detail in the next and final chapter, despite commitments to "direct action" activists judge words and activities based on what they are understood to *mean* as opposed to what they actually accomplish or *do*, with "direct action" thus falling back into the realm of representation.

in order for the interruption to be properly “anti-racist” it must sound something like this: “I am not comfortable with your use of the word  $x$  because I feel it makes the space unsafe for people of colour”.

Furthermore, a sophisticated confessional deconstruction of not-acting (or not interrupting) after the fact (for example, “I realize what I did was sexist”) is often considered “good politics” more so than acting, but without the proper accompanying speech. If we compare this anti-oppression workshop with the Everyday Anarchist and the Indigenous Solidarity Organizing from a No Borders Perspective workshops discussed above, we can note how interrupting a racist comment with “Stop being an asshole” or lending a friend one’s SIN number is not “good politics” for the same reason dumpster-diving or resisting displacement out of personal need is not “good politics”. These acts are not done with explicit “choicefulness” (or at least are not framed as such) and therefore do not communicate (constitute) the detached and reflexive bourgeois self (see Skeggs 2002). Similarly, the Edward Said expert, the apologetic sexist, and the student with the meal plan all emerge unscathed because they articulate elaborate justification, citing and reiterating their bourgeois self-detachment (“reflexivity”) in multiple ways in both the form and content of their choicefully-framed speeches about choiceful action.

In other words, all of the bourgeois cultural traits of careful self-presentation, affective restraint, and tentative codes of speech both characterize and are encouraged by the form and content of the anti-oppression workshop, while the games involved provide guidelines around who, specifically, should receive the lion’s share of courtesy. Whereas in the oppressive outside world participants might otherwise be most concerned about performing a reflexive and proper self in front of powerful straight white men, in the antioppressive workshop participants learn to perform a proper self in front of his opposite.

Furthermore, beyond the focus on proper vs. improper form and content of speech acts, the anti-oppression workshop also privileges the self-determining bourgeois subject via its focus on the proper enunciation of identity and its focus on managerial counting and arranging of others, tendencies which are also further cultivated by the workshops themselves. Class is also a structuring absence in the content of anti-oppression quantification games (as well as their form), whereas “most affected” participants generally complain that their form/content does not do justice to their own “axis” of oppression either. Let’s look carefully then at the quantification games and the kind of complaining they engender before tackling the trickier topic of identity.

The quantifying privilege games communicate choices that have already been made about what “counts” as privilege or oppression as well as whose privilege or oppression “counts”. Quantifying anti-oppression materials frequently shared online and used as pedagogical aids in workshops, such as Peggy McIntosh’s “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” (1989) and the many adaptations thereof, for example, involve specific checklists outlining what “counts” as privilege, and likewise suggest who “counts” as oppressed: The former pertains to what experiences are on the list, the latter has to do with whose backpack we are unpacking or who “counts” as an oppressed subject



of interest. (The white privilege backpack has since been matched with male privilege backpacks, class privilege backpacks, cisgender privilege backpacks and all can be found online).<sup>13</sup> Beyond these two counting procedures there is a third math problem: the experiences of oppression/privilege on the list, when represented by shiny versus brown beads, are rendered equivalent units.

Note that inasmuch as activists only discuss one backpack at a time (at singlebackpack workshops, for example) it doesn't necessarily matter that oppression list items will include arguably false equivalents such as (a) "I am not likely to be randomly shot in the head by a police officer on my way to work in the morning" and, (b) "I can easily find band-aids that match my skin colour" The pedagogical point is that people with (white) privilege will be able to check off (a), (b), (c) and more, whereas the person of colour does not end up with as many checked boxes or shiny beads. Therefore white privilege exists. The rendering of experiences of oppression into equivalent standardized units becomes a problem, however, as soon as activists with different backpacks begin to contrast their lists, not to mention begin to invent new satchels and duffel bags containing other lists to be compared (all of which the epistemological regime of the anti-oppression game compels them to do), or as soon as one list or game is used to measure "oppression in general". One such bead game included the following "even-handed" mix of questions, for example:

1) Can you easily find clothes that fit you? (fatphobia); 2) Do most of your academic courses focus on people of your gender? (sexism); 3) Does the name on your ID match your gender? (transphobia); 4) Can you easily find products appropriate for your hair? (racism); 5) Can you easily access the metro [subway]? (ableism); 6) Do you have financial wealth and support networks? (class). This exercise suggests that the oppression of the wealthy white kid who can't find flattering clothes and finds the metro uncomfortable is quantitatively equivalent with the wealthy trans woman of colour with dangerously misleading ID cards, and also suggests that both are more oppressed than the (hypothetical, because never present) low class white guy who would end up with 5/6 beads even if he can't afford to take the metro or shop for clothes in the first place, not to mention register in academic courses. The problem of such oppression-quantification should be clear, and I will return to explain this pitfall in some depth in Chapter 9. For now this last point deserves some attention.

The fact that (hypothetical) poor participants often end up with the most privilege beads is related to their status at the bottom end of the game-scheme, which in turn has to do with how the activists define oppression in the first place. Anti-oppressive activists will rarely offer a specific definition even in workshops devoted to the subject because it is taken for granted among all involved. The working definition becomes clear

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<sup>13</sup> As but one example, see "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack II" regarding "straight and cisgender privilege", [http://njdc.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/invisible\\_knapsack2a.pdf](http://njdc.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/invisible_knapsack2a.pdf) (accessed July 29, 2015). The level of activist interest in particular backpacks/oppressions, the number of workshops generally devoted to them, and differentials in workshop attendance all generally correspond with the game scheme.

through myriad conversations, however, especially conversations wherein someone like myself points out the class problem with bead distribution in games such as the one described above: If asked directly about their lack of attention to how class mediates one's answers to all of the questions asked, activists will often respond by saying that being in a lower class position is "not a form of oppression" because it is "not associated with a biological trait", or "is a matter of luck" (or even "choice").

What is happening here is that activists regard a low class position as being either a result of something that *is* problematic (e.g., racism) that they already have workshops for, or is otherwise due to personal failure. In this sense the capitalist myth of meritocracy is clearly informing their analysis, wherein class hierarchy *itself* is not questioned: Rather than problematizing the role of the academy in class reproduction, for example, they are concerned about the representation-distribution of marginalized people in course content. Rather than being concerned about subway and garment workers making a tiny fraction of the salary of university professors, they are concerned about "marginalized" people gaining access to comfortable subways and flattering garments.

Anti-oppression praxis focuses on disproportionate "inclusion" and "access" for "marginalized groups" in (bourgeois) society in general and student activist collectives in particular, wherein class hierarchy is taken for granted. I have responded to comments about class being a matter of "luck", for example, by saying, "Really? And what if I said that Black people are just unlucky to be born Black, I mean hey, not everyone can be white right?" The activist I am speaking to is always outraged and blurts out something like "But that's not the *same!*"

It is not the "same" simply because anti-oppressive activists view the very existence of racial hierarchy as a problem in and of itself. They would never accuse people of colour who criticize it for "being jealous of white people", as if there should always exist a privileged category of "white" and the only salient question is who gets to be part of it. The same "anti-capitalist" activists approach class as if it will always be there, and the only salient question is how many otherwise-oppressed people get to be part of the upper ranks. If someone like me tries to point this out we are always told we are "jealous", "bitter", "resentful", have "chips on the shoulder" or "feel sorry for ourselves" (exactly as Marxists told women and racialized people fifty years ago).

The inconsistencies around "class" in the anti-oppression game do not end there. I was once told by an anti-oppressive activist that I had "working class privilege" because, "you don't have to worry about pissing off your parents because they don't pay your rent", and because "activists expect working class people to be prejudiced and ignorant, so you don't have to work as hard to impress them." This is like saying that women under patriarchy are lucky because men think they are 'flaky' and so won't be too surprised if they're not that intelligent. Meanwhile, the leaflets on class that do exist, for e.g. "How to be a Class Ally" or "Social Class Privilege Checklist", appear to have originated as leaflets on race (with certain race-specific items removed and "class" inserted wherever "race" used to be), which focus on "exclusion" faced by working class people in society at large, how to be "inclusive" of working class people

in social movement spaces, and how to go about “respecting” others’ working class “identity”.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, after the quantification exercise in the workshop described above, the fat white kid continued to talk about subway escalators, the trans woman of colour was rightfully upset about her score and began to argue that being trans should “count” for more, miscellaneous white participants started congratulating themselves for calling someone racist on Facebook, and everyone else wanted to go home as soon as possible. Of course this is when it is time to start complaining about other people. Complaining about other people during the subsequent talking activities is important because fighting over privilege beads or discussing oppression at the hands of other people in the room might lead to anger or other emotional displays, and like the laughing “bad anarchist”, the boisterous Serbian dancers and my “uncivilized” Mexican friends, people who cry or yell or screw up their faces in confusing ways at anti-oppression workshops make participants feel “unsafe”.

The safest thing to do, of course, is to complain about poor people, because they are the one kind of oppressed person that is never there. This is what workshop participants usually do, and for more than just this reason. It appears to happen partially because anti-oppression focuses on locating and correcting oppression in the routine activities and interactions of daily life as opposed to engaging systemic analyses that would call for collective action (see also Smith 2013). The activists come into contact with construction workers, transit workers, janitors and employees sitting behind socialservices windows in their daily life more than they interact with lawyers, bankers, and CEOs (unless they are parents or other relatives). It is perhaps inevitable that they have more examples on hand of unpleasant oppressive interactions with the first set of labourers just mentioned: The condominium company that has decided to buy up and demolish the activist woman’s house is hidden somewhere far away, but the construction worker who whistles at her while she rides her bike reminds her of his close and annoying presence every morning.

Of course, complaining about the low-class Other plays out differently in the case of otherwise diversely oppressed bourgeois activists. When bourgeois white men complain to other bourgeois white men about racist and sexist poor white people (ideally in front

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<sup>14</sup> For examples of checklists and tips on being an “ally”, including a “class ally”, see e.g. [http://cultivate.coop/coop-wiki/images/a/a5/Anti-Oppression\\_%27Zine.pdf](http://cultivate.coop/coop-wiki/images/a/a5/Anti-Oppression_%27Zine.pdf), July 5, 2013. The “How to be a Class Ally” and “Social Class Privilege Checklist” pamphlets I mention above constitute more extensive versions of those found in this link, were published by the same group a few years earlier, and can be found in Appendix D of this work. These pamphlets were distributed and used in the anarchohippie or “Rotten Grapefruit” house, and also surfaced at other moments during my fieldwork, as well as other similar documents. Note that during my period of research, I presented these lists to a diversity of working class people, most of whom were offended by at least 25 % of the items on the lists, and who proceeded to laugh at and modify the other 75% of entries, usually asking, at some point, a question along the lines of: “What rich fucktard with his head up his ass wrote this wack-ass shit?” They also often made comments such as: “But this is just about how to *present* yourself as an anti-capitalist to your friends, not about actually being one!”

of people of colour), we see a fairly simple example of what Ahmed (2004) calls the making of “good whites” via non-performative anti-racism. When bourgeois women or people of colour complain about racist and sexist poor white people in similar contexts, perhaps in the very same conversation, the motives are more complex, and (slightly) more forgivable. They too seek to distinguish themselves and seek selfhood at the expense of those who are fixed in place as non-reflexive, (in some ways more so, because historically they have been fixed in place themselves and so must constantly work to remind others that they have selves too). They too seek to avoid expressive face-to-face conflict, partially because they too are rich people who are used to having others do this dirty and unsafe work, but also partially because the face-to-face conflict would involve engaging an oppressor (along at least one “axis”) in always unfairly-stacked argument: When talking to the annoying white guy, or annoying white woman, or annoying man of colour about racism or sexism, it is always easier to draw upon examples of poor white women and men who said or did offensive things who are not there to talk back, than it is to use an example that involves something the interlocutor him or herself yesterday, who would inevitably and immediately turn into a defensive asshole or a blubbing yes-man or some incredibly annoying combination of the two. Consider the dynamics of evasion and complaining about other people in the following anti-oppression reading circle I attended every few weeks for eight months (2008–9), for example. While this all-white group was originally organized to discuss oppressions in the plural, when it came time for someone to propose readings and topics for the next meeting (we took turns), the activists almost always chose racism. It was perhaps not a bad thing that we wanted to educate ourselves about the civil rights movement and settler colonialism, but most participants appeared to consider themselves “non-oppressive” simply for having done so. As in the workshop described above where we discussed sharing SIN numbers, careful attention was devoted to ways to avoid sounding ignorant (and thus being oppressive) when speaking with people of colour, rather than brainstorming either collective or individual action that would be of practical help or would ultimately dismantle white supremacy.

Most relevant to my present point, however, was that everyone was interested in talking about racism not because we were all particularly concerned about white supremacy, but rather because if we started talking about gender, class or sexuality everyone felt uncomfortable because there was a person of the oppressed category present in the room. The times that class, heterosexism, and patriarchy *did* come up, a person of the oppressed category in question would push the discussion farther than the others wanted it to go (which was never very far), or would speak of oppressive behaviour of other people who were present (examples abounded), all of which stirred up emotion and expressive display thereof, which made the participants feel “unsafe” (always a direct quote).

Even when conversation did not involve direct confrontation, the participants holding the relevant bead of privilege were always visibly uncomfortable, ‘walking on eggshells’ as they spoke, only to complain later about “not being able to speak freely”.

Note how this supports Andrea Smith's observation that anti-oppressive subjects "often present very nervously. Did they speak to all their privileges? Did they properly confess? Or will someone in the audience notice a mistake and question whether they have in fact become a fully developed anti-racist subject?" (2013, 267, see also 263). In the workshop that I discuss the -isms that were touchy were everything *but* race, but this was precisely because the audience was all white, yet at least one person present was "most affected" by every other relevant -ism.

The group discussed class only once, a topic on which I was specifically asked to present because I was the only "most affected" person around. Part of the reason antioppression workshops on class are not often offered is because while properly-reflexive (bourgeois) people of colour and women can be found to educate their white male counterparts regarding proper vocabulary and verbal framing of (non)action, equivalent "classism" workshops would require bourgeois working class animators, and those do not exist. The closest equivalents around are upwardly mobile people like me, and of course if activists aren't interested in what we have to say they reference the mobility itself to silence us: "Whatever, you're a Ph.D. student, you can't speak for the working class anymore than I can." Meanwhile, if ever we agree to talk about "class privilege" with such activists it usually unfolds as follows, and so we never bother to do it more than once.

As readings for the group I suggested the preface and the chapter by O'Dair in "Working Class Women in the Academy" (1993), the short book "Thinking Class – Sketches from a Cultural Worker" by Joanna Kadi (1996), and a zine (which I photocopied for everyone) called "Educating Who About What? The Circle-A and its Parasites" which was a working-class critique of the anarchist scene I had picked up at the London Anarchist Bookfair two years before (see Chapter 4). I suggested that while reading, the group might work to extrapolate critiques of the academy as they may apply to activist contexts, that they might take note of problematics of race versus class, and different approaches to the distinction when reading (the white woman) O'Dair (1993) and (the woman of colour) Kadi (1996), and that they should also pay special attention to the relationship of form and content in the pieces, particularly the different styles of expression in the working class zine, Kadi's book written for the layperson, and the academic volume. I was hoping to make the point that respecting the knowledge of working class people meant going beyond appreciating (bourgeois) commentaries on the topic in emotionless "objective" style. It was important to learn to recognize knowledge outside this form (I already had my argument regarding self-containment and expressivity that I present in these chapters fairly well worked out).

In any case, I was extremely optimistic. The whole thing went entirely over their heads, and the first thing someone said at our next meeting was that the working class zine was "very violent". The style of the zine was "rude" and "extreme" and altogether "too angry" – "how do they expect anyone to take them seriously when they are so crude?" Furthermore, they had all immediately zeroed in on the "dick-sucking" metaphor the zine-writers use here and there to refer to how middle class activists suck

up to power, and proceeded to focus exclusively on the fact that these working class guys were homophobic and sexist.

Having decided that this reading suggestion was inappropriate, reading group members proceeded to ignore the other readings as well and conducted their own discussion, during which time they focused at length on whether it was “classist” to say “Have a nice day!” to a supermarket cashier. After all, how could someone possibly have a nice day stuck behind a cash? I interrupted to suggest that perhaps instead of worrying about what words to say to the underpaid cashier, maybe they should “consider tipping her fifty bucks if you’re so concerned about her having a nice day”. At this point some very convoluted references to “solidarity” over “charity” were invoked, just as they were by the Edward Said expert cited above.

In the anti-oppression workshop collective practical action tends to be ignored in favour of developing individual talking behaviours, while individual practical action is always dismissed as a “piece-meal solution” or “charity” (as if participants are more interested in collective action). After pointing out this paradox I suggested that if the participants really felt bad about their “class privilege” then they should really give some of it away and proposed drawing up a contract with which they could sign over half of their inheritances to my family members that were on state welfare – “Not the whole thing,” I said, “just half, y’know, to level things out”. Not one reading group member was interested, and later on some participants said that I was “aggressive”, that I made people “feel unsafe”, and even that I had “mental health issues”. As Damian explained, “anyone who gets in their face gets labeled crazy”.

## “Safe Space”

I tell the story above partly to illustrate how “safety” is mobile — often the “safe space” of the people with the privilege beads themselves becomes the most important. This has been said before with regard to race, wherein white activists’ invocation of “safe space” has more to do with their own comfort, as well as their privileged frame of reference in which “safety” is possible and a lived experience most of the time (Smith 2013, Leonardo and Porter 2010). “Safe space” has colonial overtones in more than one way. A retired guerrilla from Bangladesh, upon moving to London and encountering “safe space” among local anarchists, had the following to say: “Oh! What a *surprise!* [roaring laughter] The British anarchists are concerned about ‘*Health and Safety!*’ [more roaring laughter]”. These are the classic justification for colonial civilizing missions.

Ultimately “safe space” has no particular racial belonging, however. It is moving around. Sometimes women of colour manage to invoke “safe space” in their favour, for example, such as when the two women effectively got rid of the Bosnian dancers by deploying it. In another case, a trans man of colour applied it against me – the other time that I myself was dubbed “unsafe” (besides the inheritance-sharing moment) was

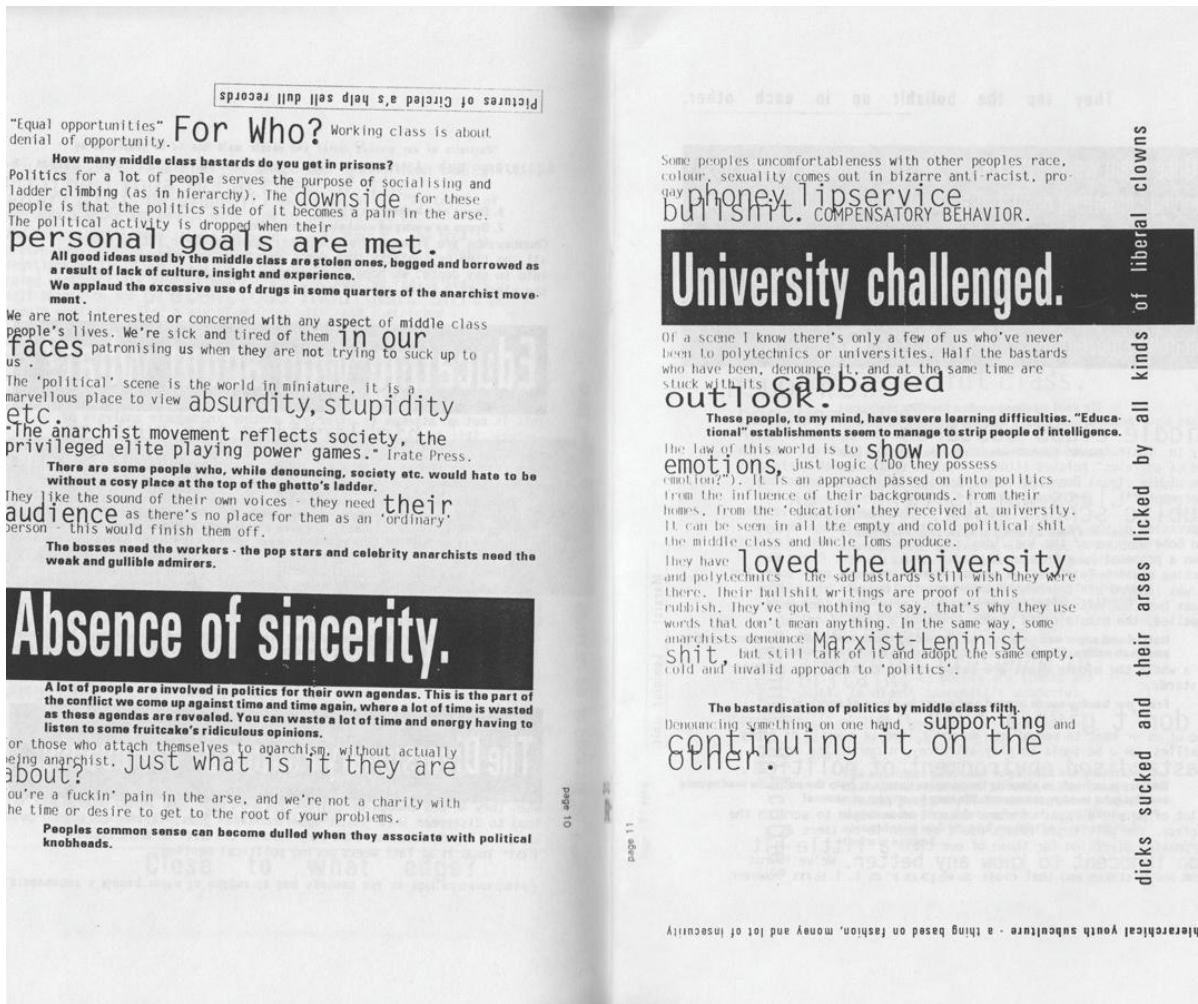


Figure 8-3. Excerpt from the zine considered violent by anti-oppression reading group members.

when I drew a diagonal line through a non-profit paycheck and scribbled on it “This is not what I am owed” because my \$1000 in overtime was missing. The Finance Coordinator later described this act as a “racially motivated physical attack on his person,” inasmuch as the “cheque was a proxy for his body”.

Sometimes “safe space” is used to prevent male perpetrators of sexual assault from entering activist spaces; sometimes “safe space” is used to avoid talking about elitism (I had quit the non-profit on this basis, and the complaint I filed was apparently inconvenient). White people invoke “safe space” against each other; women of all colours including white invoke it against men; trans people invoke it against cisgendered people; feminists invoke it against trans people. Much like the privilege backpacks that started with the white one but then proliferated, “safe space” began largely as a feminist project but has proliferated, now available to any activist who “knows the rules” and “has the tools” required to deploy it for the purposes of “exile” – the “worst punishment”, emphasizes Damian. The only feature that is truly universal to all of the cases is that *the “safe space” invoker does not wish to experience open conflict with, or be in bodily proximity to, someone else* who is said to be “unsafe” as a consequence.

A variety of North American university professors and students are currently voicing concern about how “safe space” is being mobilized on the level of formal university politics, alongside demands for obligatory “trigger warnings” on syllabi and so on.<sup>15</sup> All of this has been long in coming, emerging from the social laboratories of the student activist Left, which is continually borrowing from bourgeois institutional culture and creating new modified forms. Whereas ten years ago “safety” was already in usage in the student activist scene, when I returned from Mexico in 2011 a new phrase had become ubiquitous in the English-speaking anarchist Left on both sides of the Atlantic – the “accountability process” mentioned in the last chapter. The accountability process determines whether someone is “safe” or not, and/or is applied to people who have been dubbed “unsafe” (oppressive) by a well-connected activist.

According to many activists who support the “accountability process”, the phenomenon is inspired by INCITE!, a woman of colour collective that has sought to develop community responses to domestic violence and other problems in lieu of calling the (racist and dangerous) police, which anarchists don’t think is a good idea either, though for different reasons. Other (whiter) calls for comparable “community-based responses”, such as the zine published by the “Philly Stands Up” collective called *A Stand*

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<sup>15</sup> Recent web articles that discuss the “trigger warning” phenomenon in academic contexts include Smith (2014); Dunt (2015); Shulevitz (2015). The ways in which activist “safety” entitlements are articulated with discursive recourse to “trauma” (“trauma triggers”) warrants more attention, and is something I will explore in a further work (see also Lagalisse 2016). For now it is simply important to notice that bourgeois rights to “safety” are legitimated and naturalized through medicalization: Nothing can possibly be wrong with “healing”. Trauma and its healing are certainly physiologically “real”, and yet middle-class therapeutic discourses and everyday common sense around “self-care”, “mobilizing resources” and “setting boundaries” serve to legitimize massive disproportions of wealth at one and the same time. See also Chapter 9, fn. 14.



*Up Start Up: Confronting Sexual Assault With Transformative Justice*, also circulated widely during the preceding decade.<sup>16</sup> No matter the source of inspiration, in the hands of elite university student activists, the “accountability process” has come to articulate with their own cultural logic of “good politics” and particular idea of “safety” with strange and diverse effects. Note how the two phrases “safe space” and “accountability process” almost always come in combination, such as in the following example:

A white, male, and relatively famous friend of mine was recently confronted during a public lecture at a university by a group of activists who said he made the space “unsafe” on account of his known friendship with a woman who is known to have been part of a group that critiqued a certain “accountability process” regarding a sexual assault case two years earlier. This charge of “unsafe”-by-3.5 degrees of separation was considered tenuous by some activists present (although experience would suggest this is only because the guy in question was famous/ had “cred”), and an hour later he received an email profusely apologizing and assuring him that the collective would be applying an “accountability process” to the persons responsible for making *him* feel unsafe. This sort of thing has become normal. Other university professors have every reason to believe that “accountability processes” will be applied to them in the future, and not just by their own institutional superiors and granting agencies: The students are learning well.

Of course whether the deployment of “safe space” works or not has everything to do with the player’s level of knowledge around the game in general, but also a variety of uncontrollable *x* factors: Like “going for control” in a game of Hearts, one must hope they have made all the necessary calculations and counted everyone’s cards before making the big gamble, and even then, it might not work. Most importantly, one must

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<sup>16</sup> Regarding INCITE! see Smith (2005), Chapter 7. The Philly Stands Up zine (circa 2005) explains that “accountability is not only a critical mechanism for justice; it is a powerful tool of transformation” (20). Note how the priorities of “safety”, education, and internal commitment illustrated above as well as institutional vocabulary can be discerned within its pages; transformative justice models “must be able to support survivor safety and healing, maintain ongoing accountability and transformation for people who abuse, build bystander and community accountability, and redefine community and social norms.” Transformative justice organizing includes such things as “strategic relationships, methods of individual and collective healing, mechanisms of accountability, organizational and community infrastructure to support collective action, opportunities for individual and collective consciousness-raising or political education, strong internal commitments to the collective and larger process.” (23) The zine can be found at: <http://www.phillystandsup.com/PDFS/A%20Stand%20Up%20Start%20Up.PDF> (Accessed March 12, 2016). See also “Taking Risks: Implementing Grassroots Community Accountability Structures” published by CARA (Communities Against Rape and Abuse) and the other entries in the 111 page compilation *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Partner Abuse in Activist Communities*, at <https://lgbt.wisc.edu/documents/Revolution-starts-at-home.pdf> (Accessed March 12, 2016). While I refer to the “accountability process” only in passing, I encourage those specifically studying this phenomenon to explore a possible relationship between the felt need for formalized structures enforcing “accountability” and a tendency among bourgeois subjects to be relatively “unaccountable” (insincere) with themselves and each other in interpersonal relations (see Ch. 7, fn. 14; Ch. 9 fn. 19), this perhaps being one of many contributing factors beyond the bourgeois predilection for formality itself (see Chapter 9).

make sure they have a lot of well-placed activist friends. One “axis” of difference that arguably characterizes all instances of “safe space” is that all of the otherwise-diverse people that talk about it and deploy it are university-educated and well-versed in the culture of bourgeois institutions, but this is no more foolproof than calling it specifically white: The application of “safe space”, just like the anti-oppression game itself, can be learned. Neither Carlo or I, for example, grew up living and breathing its logic of value, but have ultimately managed to figure it out and use it against people at times. In the end no one is safe from “safe space”.

## “Particularities of Class”

When I tell my anti-oppressive friends to cough up their class privilege by way of the inheritance-sharing contract and they refuse to do so, we stumble across a certain “particularity of class” – a refrain often heard in reference to the unsatisfying “race, class, gender” trio, yet one that is never satisfyingly elaborated.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps because of my own “intersectional” experience, most of the arguments put forward regarding the “particularity of class” appear immediately and obviously wrong. Let’s consider a typical sample argument as to the “particularity of class” for the sake of illustration; in the words of Slavoj Žižek:

What the series race-gender-class obfuscates is the different logic of the political space in the case of class: While anti-racist and anti-sexist struggle are guided by the striving for the full recognition of the other, the class struggle aims at overcoming and subduing, annihilating even, the other – even if not a direct physical annihilation, it aims at wiping out the others socio-political role and function. In other words, while it is logical to say that anti-racism wants all races to be allowed to freely assert and deploy their cultural, political and economic strivings, it is obviously meaningless to say that the aim of the proletarian class struggle is to allow the bourgeoisie to fully assert its identity and goals. In one case, we have a “horizontal” logic of the recognition of different identities, while, in the other case, we have the logic of the struggle with an antagonist. (Žižek, 2012, 33–4)

Many others who argue for the “particularity of class” do so along similar lines (see for e.g. Harvey 1993). Over and over we see repeated the idea that other “otherness” is

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<sup>17</sup> Activists themselves are engaged in this argument; see e.g. this “Class War University” webpage regarding “intersectionality and class” (<http://classwaru.tumblr.com/post/85228193397/critiques-ofintersectionality-privilege-and>); two examples of articles regarding the “particularity of class” by activist writers are “Insurrections at the intersections: feminism, intersectionality and anarchism” by the Worker’s Solidarity Movement (<http://www.wsm.ie/c/insurrections-intersections-feminism-intersectionality-andanarchism>) and “Class Struggle and Intersectionality: Isn’t Class Special?” by Anonymous Writing (<https://automaticwriting1.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/class-struggle-and-intersectionality-isnt-classspecial/>)

“socially constructed” but class is “objective”. It is disappointing to see such smart guys suggest that class is an “objective” reality whereas gender and race are “socially constructed” (and therefore somehow not “objective” realities) and that as a consequence their undoing is simply a matter of “recognition”. It is clear to anyone who is not a white man that all of these social hierarchies have both objective and subjective components: This really shouldn’t be so hard for the Marxists to understand; it was David Harvey’s Youtube class on Capital Vol. I that taught me about dialectics in the first place.

This being said, the guys are obviously on to something – if class, race, and gender are of the same order, then what is the equivalent of handing over one’s inheritance? Peeling off one’s skin or genitals and swapping? Even if that were possible, it is no equivalent – patriarchy and white supremacy would simply be “most affecting” the new bearer of marked body parts. As I will explore further in the next chapter, Žižek almost (but not quite) nails this problem: It is not true that “anti-racism wants all races to be allowed to freely assert...their strivings”, as if races would survive racism: Different skin colours *will* survive racism, but “races” will not (“races” are a product of “racism”), and inasmuch as “white people” are the holders of skin-colour-related power in our white supremacist society rather than simply people with fair skin, anti-racism is most definitely about doing away with an antagonist as well. The same goes for gender. A diversity of feminists have long insisted they are not interested in equal “strivings” for “men” and “women” as much as doing away with the antagonistic system that positions them as “women” in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

Except wait. This is not true of all feminists. Some feminists just want more money and power of the existing system to be distributed among women. These are the bourgeois feminists or “white feminists” that people like to complain about. And not all people of colour are looking to completely dismantle the existing system either, but are likewise rather concerned to have the spoils of wealth, institutional power, and rights within the existing system distributed more evenly across people with different skin colours: Žižek’s main analytical problem is that his *subject of action* is anti-racism (or anti-sexism). “Anti-racism wants...”. Words are not subjects of action. “Anti-racism” does not want anything. People want stuff, and sometimes they use phrases like “anti-racism”, or “the particularity of class”, for that matter, to try to get it. Sometimes, therefore, it is absolutely true that (someone who talks about) “anti-racism” is simply seeking more evenly distributed recognition within the system, but sometimes he or she is organized in Zapatista or Black Power movements that are not about rights or recognition at all. Same thing goes for gender.

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<sup>18</sup> de Beauvoir (2009 [1949]) advocated the “equal striving” of women as self-determining “transcendent subjects”, yet most feminist analyses since, including most feminist work cited in this text (see Chapter 5), are not working within this tradition (in conversation with infuriating existentialist interlocutors) and rather put into question the (original, claimed) transcendence of the (white, bourgeois) male.

In other words, one of the persistent pitfalls facing the “class vs. identity” debate is that “identity” is used to refer to both categories of practice and categories of analysis in the case of both activists and academics, who both use the word to alternately connote tacit affinities, explicit affiliations, almost all forms of connectedness as well as all processes of differentiation, self-identification as well as identification by others (see Brubaker and Cooper 2000). With regard to social movements, the phrase “identity movements” has come to refer to people doing almost anything as long as those people are arguably gendered or racialized or sexualized in some way: mothers who start neighborhood soup kitchens in Mexico City, delegations of lawyers at the United Nations, Kurdish women carrying machine guns, Zapatista women and Slut-walk organizers are all considered “women’s movements” (even if the moms at the soup kitchen do not understand themselves as a “women’s movement”) and, by extension, are “identity” movements.

Likewise, it is possible, even encouraged, to call all of these people “people of colour” (even if the people involved do not understand themselves as such). Because all these people and their movements are informed by their amount of economic power as well as their gender and race we could call them all “class” movements of one sort or another too but we don’t: One of the particularities of “class” is that within the contemporary Left, neither activists nor academics are allowed to *attribute* class to subjects the way we are currently allowed to *attribute* races and genders.

I may write that Magdalena, for example, is a “woman of colour” without any attention to her own self-identification and successfully publish the piece in a prominent journal of women’s studies (Lagalis 2011). But if I write that someone is of one class or another in the absence of their own explicit self-identification, the hairsplitting begins and by the time various reviewers, editors and supervisory committee members are done the text is ten times longer than the standard publishable ten-thousand word article and “class” itself has become something like: “*patterns of culture correlated to collective experiences of material poverty vs. wealth and predicated on contingent positionalities vis-à-vis structures of power, which must be conceived in terms of polythetic categories overlapping along a spectrum rather than discrete mutually exclusive strata*”.

Of course the equivalent can always be said for “race” or “gender” but one is not compelled to say it. In other words, deducing a singular “particularity of class” based on Marxist theory inevitably involves some fundamental pitfalls, but neither is it necessary. Particularities of class vis-à-vis other categories of oppression are evident in practice all over the place.

All this and more becomes clear if we attempt to approach “class” and “identity” ethnographically. If we start with activity as opposed to words, we are less inclined to confuse lawyers, moms at soup kitchens, Zapatistas and Kurdish rebels as all the same thing. Proceeding ethnographically, or starting with activity, means paying attention to a given field of activity, assessing what people are doing and then asking why. For example: University student activists want to learn about “classism” to “respect working class identity” but can’t find non-university students to teach them the corresponding

etiquette they are sure must exist. Why should this be the case? People in other categories of oppression are presumed by activists to have epistemic advantages into the systems of oppression that “most affect” them, but the same does not hold regarding class – why? People in other categories of oppression cannot be asked to hand over a large chunk of their privilege and its source by simply signing on a dotted line, whereas rich people can – what is going on here? Ethnographically “class” and “identity” emerge subjectively and objectively all over the place in this game: Working class people are disproportionately cited as oppressive, university students are the ones talking about their identities, class ranks low on the knowledge/courtesy game scheme, and so on: Why should all of this be?

I follow these particularities of class in the following chapter where I proceed to offer at least partial answers to these questions. Following the particularities of class does not mean, as per Žižek’s formulation, that class is more particular. There are particular things about race and gender and heteronormativity (etc.) that are unique to each as well. Nor does following the particularities of class mean that class is the only thing we should care about, or that class is “more” important, that it should be higher on the game scheme, signifying that poor people are always innocent and good and necessarily have subversive knowledge and/or should be treated with courtesy as if they do. It does, however, tell us something about why the game and its particular scheme exist in the first place that we might not otherwise see: While racialized and gendered (and otherwise-othered) subjects do *not* necessarily simply seek more power and recognition in their movements, inasmuch as the activity of people in oppressed identity categories *does* articulate with the logic of property via the organizing initiatives of the state (including the academy), the imperatives of capital, and the basic logic of hierarchy itself, some identities are bound to become more valuable property than others.

I discovered the common articulation of all of these phenomena with the logic of property because I was sure that there was a logical and historical connection between the logic of “good manners” *itself* and the logic of “identity-as-card” *itself* beyond how these happened to combine to form the game, just as I was sure there was a logical and historical connection between the two public/private dichotomies that happened to combine to marginalize Magdalena. The etymological proximity of the words “property” and “propriety” was a clue much the way two appearances of “public/private” were in Magdalena’s case, and our next historical-theoretical adventure likewise pre-empts any notion of mere coincidence.

The biggest difference between the two analytical operations is that here the homology that originally appeared was not so much between two discourses, but was rather manifest on different scales of activity – some might be tempted to call it “fractal”. Here, a common morphology is found among the tendency to privilege words over action, the sanction against dancing and emotion, and the abstraction of experience into fixed and bounded identity-categories. This is the case inasmuch as in each instance performance of complete perfection is valued over a necessarily imperfect dialogic orientation, as is the complete-because-abstract self over the relational body, which itself

must be bounded, hemmed in and self-contained as much as possible. The value of abstraction over materiality, or transcendence over immanence, is replicated in part or in full within different orders of activity in both the ideological and physical domains of the game, and this resonance serves to constitute and naturalize the game all at the same time.

# Chapter 9 – Hierarchy, Property and “Intersectionality”

In the end, this work is a study in (and of) intersectionality. In Chapters 2 and 3 I carried out a certain intersectional analysis derived from the exclusion of Magdalena during her transnational speaking tour. In Chapters 4 and 5 the “axis” of class and a certain North/South “axis” are seen to striate those of race and gender, and we begin to discuss the theory of intersectionality itself. In Chapters 6 and 7 intersectional operations are continually performed as I constantly divide the anarchist world into raced, classed, and gendered subjects, and specifically analyze certain intersections of race and class in both North American anarchist ideology and culture. Finally, in Chapter 8, we see how activists operationalize intersectionality themselves: Some aspects of the anti-oppression game may be troubling, but clearly the activists are attempting to put into practice the theoretical insights of intersectionality which, in the activists’ defense (and as noted in Chapter 5), has been intensely theorized in academic literature yet without any specific proposed methodology.

## Movement Mathematics

It should be clear at this point that the anti-oppression game requires a fair amount of math. It is no coincidence that Damian complains by outlining a bumpy pyramid complete with perfect 90 degree angles, that activist blogs discussing intersectionality come complete with graphics of three dimensional Cartesian planes, or that the one time Andrea Smith (2013) uses the phrase “anti-oppression” in her article it is followed by the word “formula” (275).<sup>1</sup> Neither is it a coincidence that an activist holds up her fingers and counts them off while saying “I’m a woman, a person of colour, queer, and have a disability – if I were trans I’d have them *all*.” The social dynamics of anti-oppression are all about equivalence-making measurements which are then used to derive and attribute “more than” and “less than” values to specific speakers or participants: White fishermen on welfare are only poor (1) whereas migrant Mexicans are poor *and* racialized (2) and therefore *more* oppressed ( $2 > 1$ ); to suggest that they have some experience or interest in common is to *deny* the superior oppression and

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<sup>1</sup> See for e.g. the graphic that accompanies the article “Class Struggle and Intersectionality: Isn’t Class Special?” mentioned in the last chapter (<https://automaticwriting1.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/classstruggle-and-intersectionality-isnt-class-special/>).

subversive value of Mexican migrants, and this is what makes the statement racist. The anti-oppression workshop teaches participants to think like this, even if they did not before. In other words, in the activists' operationalization of intersectionality people teach each other, and then treat each other, according to the logic of linear equations. Consider the following samples:

Let  $x$  be the kind of oppression and/or empty "privilege backpack" held by activist and carry a relative (arbitrary) number value derived from the gamescheme (e.g. racism = 5, sexism = 3, poverty = 1); let  $n$  represent the standard unit of cited oppression-experience (bead), or 1; then  $y$  represents total oppression/ "epistemological authority" deserved (courtesy shown):

$$x1(n + n) + x2(n) + x3(n) = y$$

Or, insomuch as activists are against an "additive approach" (Fellows and Razack 1989) and rather recognize that each intersectional identity is unique, i.e. is more than the sum of its parts, the addition is replaced with a multiplier effect (note that in this second operation, the  $y$ -values will tend to be larger, as will the discrepancy between results):

$$((x1(n + n)) \times x2(n)) \times ((x2(n) \times x3(n)) \times ((x3(n) \times (x1(n+n))) = y$$

Understanding algebra is not necessary in order to grasp my basic argument nor for successful game-play (like the first-language speaker, the natural player does not know the rules of her own grammar), but these formulas should be of interest since activists and the scholars that mobilize them are intrigued by chaos and complexity theories, and use the notion of the dynamic non-linear "open system" to describe the movement itself. These equations do not regard an open system. They are linear. They are not even simple calculus, which is characterized by differential equations within which the passage of time ( $\Delta t$ ) is integrated: Whereas one's knowledge is related to stuff that happens over time, in the activist linear equation knowledge is atemporal, attached to abstract properties.

In fact, women do not have special insight into the workings of patriarchy because they were born with vaginas or because their birth certificates say "F", but rather because of a whole bunch of stuff that happens to them over time due to the fact that they were born with vaginas or have "F"s on their documents. Anything that happens over *time* requires a *differential* equation, and any such equation that involves more than one variable (and its derivatives), such as learning behaviour in humans surely does, will be a non-linear partial differential equation, which brings us to the realm of non-linear dynamics, chaos and complexity theories, which all concern things-in-motion — temporal things like growth, change, processes; in short, "doing" rather than "being".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of non-linear partial differential equations are Einstein's field equations, the Schrodinger equation, as well as the Navier-Stokes equations that govern convection (fluid dynamics),



Simple linear equations like the samples I provide above cannot possibly represent any ontology (insert: “the wave”) of social relations, or reality, much less provide any bearing on how much “knowledge” someone has, which is not a quantifiable entity in the first place. Note that my point does not serve to deny the basic and general concept that working class, gendered and/or racialized people have particular insight to the systems of power that fuck them over, but it does problematize the idea that one can algebraically calculate with any sort of precision exactly how much oppression one faces and how much insight one has. Even in Newton’s universe there are too many variables to deal with (the equation would rest unsolvable). And as life sciences since the 1980s have been telling us, dynamic systems are chaotic or non-linear anyway: Their nondeterminacy goes far beyond the “noise” or “margin of error” one must presume due to imperfect measurement. This epiphany has also been registered in the social sciences in that we now recognize and emphasize “contingency” – a key aspect of the “post-modern” turn, which has complicated arguments for (linear) dialectics ever since. Even if all possible axes of power, emergent oppressed identities, and every other possible relevant institutional, economic and political factor could be accounted for there would still be “contingency” inasmuch as reality outside of the lab will always exceed its possible representation with calculus or Euclidean geometry (or Hegelian or Marxian dialectics by extension).

In other words, the power relations among activists cannot be rendered with any algebraic formula, nor can the activity of activists who refer to such formulas. The salient point is rather that activists mentally refer to these in the first place, and build pedagogical games based on them (and then mentally refer to them even more). The same activists and scholars thereof who refer to dynamic non-linear complexity as an overarching theoretical metaphor for the movement are, in their everyday relations with others, still operating largely according to simple atemporal algebra. This, even though according to current understandings of non-linear dynamics, such atemporal algebra cannot be expected to offer even an approximate result for the values they are seeking. Of course this managerial counting and arranging of selves and others is not playing out well for anyone involved: No matter what  $y$  value someone ends up with they feel it is wrong, and they are right because the unique mess of lived experience cannot be captured with so many  $ns$  and  $xs$ . Yet the practical response so far is to re-qualify or invent new  $x$  values or cite missing  $ns$ , such as the trans woman of colour did vis-à-vis the fat white kid in the workshop described earlier.

This is not the fault of “intersectionality” *per se*. Its vocabulary of “axes” and “cross-sections” certainly reflects and sparks the Cartesian imagination, but it is arguable that intersectionality has not been delivered complete with algebraic formulas to follow for a reason: The point is not what can be captured by ever-proliferating axes, the point is

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which efforts to solve led to early modelings of chaos. One accessible source explaining non-linearity is Campbell, Crutchfield, Farmer and Jen (1985); Gleick (2008, p. 57–80) also well explains the non-linear equation to the non-mathematician, as well as linearity vs. non-linearity in nature, with reference to the logistic difference equation that (nominally) explains population dynamics in ecology.

the excess or remainder that will always exist. The whole point was that the experience of black women, the original intersectional subject, *cannot* be derived by analyzing race alone, then gender alone, then finally by statistically compounding the results. When Hull, Scott and Smith (1982) say that *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, but Some of us are Brave* they are pointing to the fact that Black women are uniquely situated; their lives and struggles are more than the sum of two empty backpacks. And furthermore, that one should not deign to know what it means to be “black” or a “woman” in the singular without attention to the meaning of each in the case of Black women.

In this sense, a principal insight of intersectionality *itself* is that experience cannot be reduced to mutually exclusive categories of analysis (race and gender, for example), and that even if we multiplied ever-greater numbers of categories to arrive at an evergreater number of cross-sections, we will never be able to quite predict what one’s experience has been or what their insight will be. When Bernice Reagon Johnson (1983) points at white lesbian feminists and their “barred room” saying “you don’t really want Black folks, you are just looking for yourself with a little colour to it” (1983, 356) she is saying, among other things, the following: that white women will have to actually interact with real-life Black women to find out who Black women are and what they are dealing with, what “woman” is by extension, and how to work out some kind of feminist coalition, because no abstract definition (of woman or anything else) is going to do it, and so no matter what it is going to be messy: In her words, “people who think that the only ‘woman-identified’ women there are are lesbian women give me a big problem, cause I would have to leave too many of my folk out cause they ain’t gonna take that for one second. *And if they came in they would be homophobic.* And you’ll have to challenge them about it. Can you handle it?” (359).

The map is never the territory, so we will actually have to “walk asking questions” the way the Zapatistas suggest, inevitably engaging some juicy arguments along the way, to find where and how our paths might coincide. These intersections of *experience* are certainly there to be found, as Damian and I found in our conversation. As Jacqui Alexander puts it, “the principle is quite simple....*everything in the universe is interconnected!*” (2005, 6). And yet the activists in my study revert to the “will to divide and separate” that “resides in the archeologies of dominance” (ibid.). The revolutionary insight of intersectionality has been reduced to exchanging a (+) for a (×) in the same linear equation. In Deleuzian terms one might say that the intersectional line of flight has been re-territorialized faster than one can say “nomadic war machine of renewal” (once again and as always). Non-linear mathematics and juicy arguments with homophobic Black dudes are just a bit too much to handle.

Both of these things are understandable, together and separately. Regarding the mathematics, there is, first of all, the simple fact that most everyone in the “civilized” Western world has been brought up to read the world as an assemblage of Cartesian planes – Sergi the carpenter took the Cartesian plane entirely for granted until he showed birds-eye-view diagrams of rooms to the indigenous youth in his workshop,

for example. Even Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and fans must resort to the notion of the non-binary rhizome residing on a “plane” in order to imagine its non-hierarchical aspect (e.g. Sterpka 2013).

Our Cartesian socialization goes beyond any question of modern educational techniques; the  $x$  and  $y$  grid has been architecturally written into and onto our world to a certain naturalizing effect. When I tell my friend who grew up in a village in Oaxaca to meet me on the corner of Independencia and Morelos (main streets in Oaxaca City) and he looks at me like I’m from outer space it’s because I *am* – I understand my whereabouts by constantly triangulating between signs on 90 degree street corners and imagining what my trajectory would look like if I were looking down on the city from above, on a two-dimensional map. Independencia and Morelos is “one down and two over”. My friend who did not grow up literally surrounded by a Cartesian grid orients himself from the ground; he points up and over to a church tower and says “How about next to the red church?”

Of course it is no coincidence that the Cartesian plane has been written into our world and that our world has been built onto one. Besides the fact that linear calculus makes modern physics possible and constitutes both the symbolic and practical genesis of the “scientific West”, the Cartesian plane is a legibility-making instrument that has been fundamental to the rise of the modern nation-state (see Scott 2005). Modern subjects must be semantically localized and find-able by statistical grids just as they must be physically localized and find-able by government and its agencies according to grids of street addresses. Bureaucracies rank us and slot us into categories that are themselves ranked; educational institutions order us by identification numbers and rank us according to numerical grades; we each reside in a certain “tax bracket”. The grid is so ubiquitous that we hardly see it anymore, and have come to take for granted that the linear mathematical relationships used to govern us reflect the order of the universe itself. While Foucault (2009 [1978]) never focused specifically on calculus, this mathematical orientation is clearly a key feature of the well-disciplined subject of modern governmentality and indeed the “individual” itself: linear mathematical relationships presume singular dimensions and whole terms.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is

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<sup>3</sup> Here I indicate certain ways in which the logic of individualism and its “governmentality” as studied by Foucault (2009 [1978]) intersect in practice with the mathematical impulse of the Enlightenment (and its Dialectic) as suggested in Chapter 3 of this work, and as put forth by Adorno and Horkheimer (2002 [1987]): Mathematics has a special role in forming the “Enlightened” subjectivity they likewise explain, saying that “When in mathematics the unknown becomes the unknown quantity in an equation, it is made into something long familiar before any value has been assigned...even what cannot be assimilated, the insoluble and irrational, is fenced in by mathematical theorems.” (18); “The equation of mind and world is finally resolved, but only in the sense that both sides cancel out. The reduction of thought to a mathematical apparatus condemns the world to be its own measure. What appears as the triumph of subjectivity, the subjection of all existing things to logical formalism, is bought with the obedient subordination of reason to what is immediately at hand. To grasp *existing things as such, not merely to note their abstract spatialtemporal relationships by which they can then be seized, but, on the contrary, to think of them as surface, as mediated conceptual moments which are only fulfilled by revealing their*

entirely understandable that anarchists re-territorialize “intersectionality” within the horizons of linear algebra, but as we shall explore further below, to do so is to recuperate the liberatory impulse of black feminists and their revolutionary ideas within the domesticating logic of the state.

First, however, we should note that while propensity for Cartesian operations and their social inscription by the state partially explains why activists are inclined to rank and compare based on equivalence-making units (the anti-oppression privilege games mirror institutional application forms likewise concerned with “diversity”), none of this explains why activists rank oppressed identities in the order that they do. A linear mathematical impulse may explain why two oppressions are worth more than one, whether by adding or multiplying, but it does not explain why “indigenous” and “trans” rank higher than “woman” or “poor”, nor why the activists make use of privilege mathematics for the specific purpose of looking good in front of each other, nor why it should be so hard for white activists to handle challenging a homophobic black dude, for that matter.

A certain holistic explanation for all of this can be found, however, by considering another specific way in which the practice of “intersectionality” has come to articulate directly and indirectly with the logic of the state: by articulating with the interdependent logics of property and rights, together and separately.

## The Self-Proprietor

Modern subjective rights are modeled on property rights. Whereas rights had been reciprocal (with one person’s specific right connoting another’s specific obligation), with the rise of modern liberalism rights are reconceived as something identified with, and owned by, the person – a property of the person in both the semiotic and legal sense

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*social, historical, and human meaning* — this whole aspiration of knowledge is abandoned.” (20, italics mine). This is the very same aspiration abandoned in the rendering of “intersectionality” as atemporal algebra, as I continue to explain throughout my discussion below. Adorno and Horkheimer (2002 [1987]) do not, however, explore how the specific rendering of *processes* (“rates of change”,  $\Delta t$ ) into  $x$  values that occurs in the shift from algebra to calculus will inevitably have an important relationship to the impulse of reification, which within Marxism is generally attributed to the logic of capitalism *per se* (I hope to explore this topic). Note that the “ethnographic listening” which allowed me to notice the naturalized mathematics among intersectionality practitioners (I am swimming in the same sea) I owe in part to Rodney Needham’s study of “Skulls and Causality” (1976), which illustrates how anthropologists’ theorizing of headhunting is informed by tropes of classical physics: the anthropologist presumes that the skull is imagined by headhunters to carry “energy” simply because “energy” is the imagined medium for all change and transformation in the cosmology of classical physics. Needham (1976) encourages a rigorous eye for iterations of socially constructed scientific concepts naturalized in anthropological thought, and provides a model for noticing presumptions of causality among intellectuals enamoured with chaos and complexity theories as much as classical physics and calculus. Special thanks go to Dr. Jérôme Rousseau for his guidance in tackling the mathematical problems, and problems of mathematics, in this study.

(see Tuck 1981). This is why it has always been easier to secure negative rights than “rights to” – (inanimate) property is inviolable yet does not have any particular needs. Macpherson (1962) traces back the “possessive individual” of modern rights to the historical conjuncture of the expansion of the capitalist market and its reorganization of social life in seventeenth-century Britain. The relation of ownership, having increasingly become the critically important relation determining one’s freedom of activity, was read back onto the individual who is considered to be free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his own person and capacities. Macpherson (1962) demonstrates how only men who were property owners could be imagined as part of political society, not simply because by way of owning land did they have a material stake in the state, but because only property owners – as opposed to wage-earners, servants, slaves and women – were therefore masters of their own activity, and therefore able to make decisions based on “reason” alone. Women, slaves, servants and workers were thus denied legal personhood on the basis of being “dependent on the wills of others” (1962, 15), that is, unable to transcend their material entanglements (obligations and concerns) and thus unable to make “rational” decisions. They were not self-determining subjects. They were rather posited as “affectable others” (see da Silva 2007; Smith 2013), and, as I suggest below, as “affective others” at one at the same time.

Modern notions of race, class, and gender have always amalgamated within the regime of morality that posits the transcendent self-proprietor vis-à-vis his materially entangled Other.<sup>4</sup>

Stallybrass and White (1986), for example, have studied the symbolic logic of culture in England during the same time period that concerns Macpherson (1962) to find that the bourgeois subject originally and continuously defines himself through the exclusion of the ‘low’, wherein the ‘low’ is the racialized other, the female, and the dirty masses all at once. These are all constructed as polluted by mutual association and by the metonymic association of each and all with filth, the lower stratum of the body, and materiality simply put: “Within the symbolic discourse of the bourgeoisie, illness, disease, poverty, sexuality, blasphemy, the savage, and the lower classes are always inextricably connected”, and “control of the boundaries of the body (in breathing, eating, defecating)” worked to secure an emergent bourgeois identity (Stallybrass and White 1986, 167).

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<sup>4</sup> “[T]he invention of racial fetishism became central to the regime of sexual fetishism became central to the policing of the “dangerous classes.” (McClintock 1995, 182; see also, e.g., Mignolo 2011; Skeggs 2010; Stoler 2002 ; Ehrenreich and English 1973.) It is nothing new to say that modern gender, class and colonial subordination has been legitimated by a posited materiality (sometimes “animality”) attributed to women, colonial subjects and the poor, all compared to the transcendent humanity of the imperial patriarch, yet it is interesting to see how discussions often concentrate on which of the three came first, as if the first axis of domination chronologically-speaking necessarily constitutes the independent term (and/or cause), wherein subsequent ones are merely subsidiary derivatives, less *self-determining* terms, and less relevant for the subversive militant or critical thinker as a consequence.

The “rational” bourgeois public sphere, its salons and tea gardens of “polite, informed and critical opinion”, was never something only in and for itself; it was created through negations, and “produces a new domain by taking into itself as *negative* introjections the very domains which surround and threaten it” (82, 89). These domains included both the popular festive tradition with its noisy carnivals and fairs, the women of the street, “barbaric” colonial populations and the indulgent aristocracy as well. The bourgeoisie’s definitive characteristic has always been “an internalizing imperative which yokes self-control with crowd control, cosmopolitan identity with colonial identity, suppression with repression” (89). The bourgeoisie systematically denies its own carnality – puritanically so, as Weber (1989 [1930]) points out – in contradistinction to both the “decadent” aristocracy and “hedonistic” masses of others, and in the very act of denying their own “lower bodily stratum” of appetites they project the whole mess onto everybody else (see Stallybrass and White 1986, 145).

Graeber (2007), in a parallel study and in conversation with Macpherson (1962), also suggests that the logic of self-containment found throughout bourgeois culture can be linked to the logic of private property. In lieu of Stallybrass and White’s (1986) historical particularist and psychoanalytical method, he engages a more classical anthropological approach that considers similar semantic shifts in cross-cultural meanings and usages of the word “property”. These often bundle three meanings: Property (1) is something that one controls and/or legally represents, but not necessarily exclusively, such as slaves or women whose activity may fall under the power of one or more people. Property (2) connotes exclusion, i.e. the exclusion of others from the property or the exclusion of oneself from it. Excluding others from one’s property is a familiar concept, intrinsic to Western private property rights where something is held “against all the world”.

Excluding *oneself* may not be as intuitive for us, but will be clarified by considering the third sense: Property in the semiotic mode (3) makes something what it is, evident in usages such as “heat is the property of fire”. It is an extension of this usage when we mark distinctions between things identified with someone as opposed to someone else by saying, for example, “my boss” (which I do not “control” or “own exclusively” in the way that I do “my car”). This third meaning is likewise in operation when aristocratic clans on the Lau Islands of Fiji are said to “own” the species of animals, fish and trees that are associated with them (and which they do not control). Exclusion of oneself – property (2) – here interplays with property (3) inasmuch as these species are *tabu* for the clan: They themselves are forbidden to engage in physical contact with the things they are said to “own”. Graeber (2007) points out how this logic of avoidance parallels the way in which it is a sign of disrespect to initiate physical contact with “my” boss, and goes on to explore the relationship between property and avoidance by way of the anthropological literature on “joking” vs. “avoidance” relations that dates back to Radcliffe Brown’s founding text “On Joking Relationships” (1940), mentioned in the last chapter.

Avoidance relations characterize hierarchical relationships, wherein physical contact is discouraged, and wherein the inferior party must steer clear of any display of or reference to bodily functions (eating, excretion, sex, physical aggression). A joking relation, on the other hand, tends to be a partnership among relative status equals characterized by reciprocal teasing, where physical contact is permitted or encouraged and there is no sanction against references to the body and its functions. Power relations of some sort still inflect the jokers' relationship, but they are the kind of power relations that can be laughed at.

It is worth noting here, as Graeber (2007) does himself, that Bakhtin's (1984) discussion of the "grotesque" and carnival laughter in early modern Europe arguably constitutes an autoethnographic parallel to the "joking relations" attributed to exotic colonial subjects.<sup>5</sup> For Bakhtin (1984), popular culture emphasized incompleteness, immanence, and becoming (vs. completeness) via the celebration of the "lower bodily stratum". The lower body itself was symbolic of birth, death, temporality and earthly transience as opposed to the timelessness of transcendental form. Its popular celebration was partially in response to the dynamics of emergent bourgeois identity that attributed the "grotesque" to the masses in the first place (Stallybrass and White 1986), but is nonetheless in line with the logic of the joking relation, in some ways for that very reason.

Bakhtin's "classical body" likewise lines up with the logic of avoidance, wherein the superior party is constructed as self-contained, discrete and shut off rather than continuous with the material world around them (transcendent as opposed to immanent). Graeber (2007) emphasizes this last point to suggest that social hierarchy necessarily involves constructing superiors as abstract (transcendental) property/properties vs. the relative materiality (immanence) of others. He thus makes a more universalist argument that coincides with Stallybrass and White's (1986) particular analysis of the modern bourgeoisie. The broad theoretical idea here is that social hierarchy always involves a combination of linear and taxonomic hierarchy, which is what Levi-Strauss referred to as "universalization and "particularization" (1966, 161), and what Dumont (1970) elaborated as higher categorical ranks "encompassing" those beneath (see also 1986, Ch.9). Graeber's (2007) qualification is that hierarchies always involve exclusion as well as inclusion ("encompassment") wherein the higher rank is set apart from a residual category composed of all the others at the same time as it "includes" them. The logic works like this:

Consider, for example, the segmentary lineage system of the Maori, wherein every household belongs to a lineage, every lineage to a clan, every clan to a tribe, and at each (taxonomic) level the representative of the group is seen to have more *tapu*, at the same time as he is said to "own" everything that belongs to his lineage, clan or tribe. The greater the purview of the representative the more he himself is set apart, considered a

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<sup>5</sup> There is also reason to believe that Bakhtin was self-consciously engaging such a project: his one lonely reference to laughter's victory over "mana" or "taboo" (1984, 91) gives it away.

more “exclusive” sort of person, and is spoken of in a way that makes him more abstract (he is not called by his individual name but rather by a kin term or title of the group he is seen to represent). The same is true regarding the transcendental property of being the “Queen of England”: The lack of respect involved by calling her by her first name, initiating contact with her body, or making reference to bodily functions in her presence are all connected inasmuch as an avoidance relation and her constitution as “property”, in the dual sense of abstract and enclosed, are one and the same. Whether we speak of lineages, clans and tribes or mayors, governors and Presidents, in each case representatives are seen fit to engage in a joking relation with others who share the same property as they, whereas those who they represent or “include”, those who *constitute* their property, must stand in a relation of avoidance to them.

It is worth noting that Graeber (2007) sets up his argument in contradistinction to what Norbert Elias called “The Civilizing Process” (1994 [1969]). In this work, Elias analyzes the increasing repression of reference to, and display of, emotion and bodily functions in early modern Europe with yet another sort of study, one whose departure concerns certain parallel changes in court society and the courtesy manuals of aristocrats: Elias’s argument points to the shift away from people working out their problems immediately (both at once and in unmediated ways) that happened during the formation of modern states. As central authorities came to hold the monopoly on legitimate physical force, securing one’s desires rather came to mean gaining favours from people with ties to this power. In this, self-restraint and denial of the body comes to signify (proximity to) power itself and take on a seemingly independent value: “as the series of actions and number of people on whom the individual and his actions constantly depend are increased, the habit of foresight over long chains grows stronger” which accustoms people to “a greater restraint of affects” (1994 [1969], 447).

Graeber (2007) agrees that behaviours which “medieval courtesy books represent as shameful only if done before superiors (say, blowing one’s nose in the tablecloth), gradually came to be represented as embarrassing even if done before equals, then inferiors, and finally, as behaviour to be avoided on principle, even if no one else is there” (31). He suggests however that this is explained by the normalization of private property relations and the subjectivity of self-proprietorship associated with these – Macpherson’s (1962) “possessive individual”. For Graeber (2007), the most important thing to consider is “the emergence of regimes of private property, commercial exchange, and of a class of people whose lives were so organized around it that they had begun to internalize its logic of exclusion as a way of defining their own social persons.” (34). With the advance of the “exclusion” and “enclosure” of private property, whose logic came to govern the relation between the possessive individual and his very self, “avoidance became generalized” (31).

Elias’s “centralization and differentiation” thesis has certain merits, however, and is perhaps more palatable (and remains coherent) if one does away with his evolutionist overtones (his “civilizing process” spreads from higher to lower classes in Europe and inevitably replicates itself in the colonies). It makes perfect sense that wealthy people



don't display anger because they always have an eye to "staying on good terms" with everyone (conserving as much social capital as possible) and because they can call upon a mediating institution to secure their desires, and come to see all of this as more "proper" than wanting to "have it out" right there. But of course it is no coincidence that in usage the word "proper" and "civilized" overlap, nor, arguably, that regimes of private property tend to be backed up by the military force of centralized states.

Furthermore, whether or not a posited immanence/ materiality vs. transcendence/ abstraction characterizes *all* forms of social hierarchy universally speaking, the phenomenon is clearly not unique to the West, to be found, for example, in the Hindu caste system and the symbolic/practical logic of "pollution" among many pre-colonial peoples. This, as Mary Douglas (1966) points out, has as much to do with sanctions against mixing (abstract) categories as it does with physical contamination. For our purposes, the important point here is that this seductive logic has no fundamental class or racial belonging, yet it currently underpins social hierarchy in the modern West, and constitutes the paradigm that activists in my study are living under and have to deal with.

From Plato's Republic (ca. 380 BC [1955]), which uses the metaphor of the physical body to discuss the social body (some people are thinking heads, some people are just hands and feet), to Augustine's Great Chain of Being (ca. 426 AD [2005]), to the increasing specialization within capitalist divisions of labour that consign people to the role of head or foot like never before, the symbolic and practical confluence of physicality marking that which is "low" vs. that which is "high" is perniciously consistent. Ultimately the theses of Macpherson (1962), Graeber (2007), Elias (1994 [1969]), and Stallybrass and White (1986) are not mutually exclusive, just as no thesis is ever complete, however transcendental its pretensions may be. They are most interesting in dialogue with one another, complementary as they are in demonstrating that manners are never arbitrary or coincidental, that the self-contained manner of the bourgeois is no exception, and that the related properties of self-determination and self-containment have been practically and symbolically linked to political personhood in the modern West.

To return to the self-proprietor as the subject of modern rights, it should be clear that a logic of encompassment/exclusion (whether or not it is universal) is at work in the attribution of "immanence" (vs. "transcendence") to the women, slaves, servants, and workers who cannot be property-holders on account of the material entanglements that prevent their "rationality" (cf. Dumont 1970; 1986).<sup>6</sup> That the patriarchs of the proletariat managed to "lift themselves up" as "individuals" first is no coincidence; whether as consequence or cause, their elevation was one and the same with "owning"

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<sup>6</sup> Dumont (1970; 1986) argues that the hierarchical logic of rank/encompassment does not characterize modern liberal democracy (this being the substance of his argument that "modern egalitarian society" is fundamentally different from "traditional hierarchical society"); Graeber (2007) intervenes to illustrate that the logic of exclusion accompanies the logic of encompassment in traditional society, whereas I intervene to suggest that both exclusion and encompassment characterize liberal democracy.

and representing their women, and servants or slaves if they had any. Furthermore, to the extent that bourgeois women had claim on respectability it was partly inasmuch as they were co-owners of material property. But perhaps due to their legal subsumption by men, their respectability was always contingent on performing the most impeccable self-possession.<sup>7</sup> Indeed it was the bourgeois woman's job to manage her husband's image of self-containment as well as her own, by making everything "grotesque" in their lives – sex, eating, waste and bodily filth – all magically disappear.

And to the extent that the women propertized themselves, it was at the expense of servant, slave and proletariat women who were made to do the dirtiest work. And when the white underclass propertized itself in turn it was in contradistinction to racialized others, hence "whiteness as property" (Harris 1993). None of this should be a surprise. What has not been sufficiently contemplated, however, is that identity-based rights involve the same combination of encompassment and exclusion as the original franchise.

## Identity as Property

We are already in a position to observe certain correlations between the logic of property and the logic of the anti-oppression game. For example, the anti-oppressive activists' focus on the bad behaviour of poor people arguably goes beyond its function of convenience, being yet another reiteration of the bourgeoisie constituting its value via a constructed "lower" person confined to the realm of material labour, bodily pleasure and emotional passion. When activists say, as they do, that working class people have more oppressive views because they are "not educated" or "too caught up in material problems to elevate their thinking" (or "only care about getting fat rims for their SUVs") we may see this particular logic at work. While this is not the only thing going on, it is impossible to understand the disjuncture between activists' attribution of epistemological value (knowledge) to racialized, gendered, (etc.), subject positions and yet not to the "lower class" without understanding that it has always been by othering (classifying, racializing, gendering) both the "decadent" aristocracy and the "hedonistic" masses that the bourgeois distinguish themselves as transcendent and rational subjects. These bourgeois subjects are those of the "classical body" in Bakhtin's (1984) language – or, said another way, subjects who identify with the brain, the soul, the spirit, and the *reflexive self*. These are subjects that are self-determining rather than determined *by* their bodies.

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<sup>7</sup> Thinking back to the discussion of sovereignty in Chapter 3 of this work (see especially Ch 3, fn. 24, *passim*), we may note here that property-holding males were "subsumed by the sovereign", whereas women, children and slaves were subsumed by the property-holding male, this further helping to explain how and why it is that anarchist men approach the "autonomy" (☒ sovereignty) of women differently than their own.

Given all of the above, it should not appear as a coincidence that the boisterous Balkan dancers made the middle class women of Toronto feel “unsafe” while the latter had difficulty explaining why. The women said it was because the Balkan anarchists seemed like cops, then later pointed to their whiteness, but none of this would have been happening if the Balkan men had been behaving in a more self-contained fashion in the first place. The logic of property also helps explain why the nervous middle class foreigners who offend Carmen and Damian close off and shut down their bodies when they want to appear in perfect anti-racist form, and why “safe space” is all about preventing dangerous dialogical engagements in favour of transcendental acts of exclusion. It even helps explain how my ex-co-worker can confuse his own body with a financial document.

Most clearly, perhaps, this should help explain why teaching guidelines of polite conversation as prerequisite education for movement meetings does not work as a sort of “outreach” to ordinary people: Ordinary people already know that such a combination of political and bodily etiquette is predicated on their social exclusion in the first place. As the movement drop out quoted earlier said, “they’re just play-acting at being better than other people with their fancy bullshit lingo.” (Only the bourgeois actually need to read Bakhtin and Bourdieu to discover this.)

In order to fully grasp how self-proprietorship is key to the anti-oppression game, however, why activists are uptight about social identities in particular, and why these identities become ranked in the way that they do, it is important to understand how identity itself becomes recuperated as property. As mentioned earlier, the word identity is currently used to designate many different types of activity – not all of these correspond to propertizing. Identity becomes property specifically when it becomes the subject of legal rights, and/or inasmuch as the logic and subjectivity of legal rights become culturally mobile, such as when we confuse clearly delineated abstract categories for the complex becoming that we actually are, or when we are concerned for identities being “included” or “excluded” from social movement spaces based on the logic of representation (in parallel to the original political space of rights and representation – the state), or when we find that a given identity constitutes power through the exclusion and encompassment of others. Prevalent metaphors of identities as “invisible backpacks” that carry valuable privilege-belongings (or their valuable lack) should also be also suggestive.

The point I make here is that while North American university student anarchists are nominally against legalism and rights, they engage in legalistic thinking without realizing it: The propensity toward calculus is compounded with the modern governmental logic of statistics, and there goes the rhizomatic neighborhood.

First, let’s understand that what happens with the arrival of identity-based rights is that identities grouped around ostensibly shared histories of both material and symbolic violence – or exclusion from property – are then granted specific rights on that very basis. As Patricia Williams explains, “Rights imply a respect that places one in the referential range of self and others, that elevates one’s status from human body

to social being” (1991, 153). Rights have always drawn a circle around the self, whereas identity-based rights draw a circle around the suffering self, and thus inaugurate a new set of property relations (see e.g. Brown 1995; Berlant 2000; Skeggs 2004; Leve 2011).

Wendy Brown (1995) points out how identity-based rights convert social problems into matters of individualized injury and are based on the ownership of pain. Skeggs (2004) highlights how only those with prior entitlements – those who are masters of their own activity and thus relate to the self as does the possessive individual – can convert pain into property. Leve (2011) also locates the neoliberal “identity machine” as a transmutation of “possessive individualism”, noting that in the realm of identity-based rights Locke’s (1813) notion of personal identity as founded in memory is extrapolated to groups who are imagined to “own” a collective identity, when in reality these groups have meaning vis-à-vis one another rather than due to a homogenized history shared by all members of any one group (see also Handler 1984; Ree 1992).

Each in their own way approaches the important point that just as material property is a social relation confused with the relationship between an owner and an object, the mutual constitution of identities is likewise imagined away as a relationship between an individual and his or her history and pain. The point I would like to add is that the identity-based right likewise involves a double movement of exclusion and encompassment, one that manifests a residual category of people that are both excluded from it but constitute it. This fact is generally obscured due to a certain slip that lies in the elision of statistics and reality characteristic of modern state logic, this compounded by the presumption that one’s subjective identification as “most affected” will correspond in a linear fashion with one’s objective circumstances.

Consider first how the degree to which a person enjoys material wealth and power, is master of his or her own activities, and may relate to the self as does the “possessive individual”, determines the degree to which a person may access forums to speak their pain in search of compensation, be recognized as worthy of having that pain, or be willing and able to identify with pain (make it their defining property) in the first place (Skeggs 2004, 57–60). Beyond the question of material resources necessary to mobilize “identity” in one’s favour, people who do not see and experience suffering as *exceptional* do not have the entitled subjectivity necessary to propertize themselves via experience of pain. In fact it has been shown time and again that a propensity to identify unproblematically with pain and victimhood is inversely related to how much one actually experiences it (ibid; Skeggs 1997; hooks 1997; Charlesworth 2000; Rubin 1992).

In other words, poor people are unlikely to identify themselves with their poverty not only because they generally lack the material resources and entitled subjectivity required (for any sort of claim), but because poverty is not an immutable property of the person that can come to stand in for experience-including-suffering (as does being read “female”, or “Black”), it is merely experience-including-suffering itself.

Thinking back now to our discussion of “particularities of class” in the last chapter, Žizek (2012) almost gets this point, but not quite. When he or anyone else says that

“identity” is all about “recognition”, it is because they are focusing on 1) rights movements organized around “identity”, not 2) the movements that largely contain or are spearheaded by people who (are automatically understood to have “identities” because they) are racialized and gendered. The error occurs in that they confuse these two to suggest that any movement organized around, or otherwise defined by, race or gender is automatically just looking for rights (recognition). This is not always the case, but to the extent that it does happen, of course class emerges as particular because class does not refer to marked body parts that are used to discriminate against people and deny them economic and political power (the same body parts that then get attached to corrective rights/recognition). It is simply the situation of having no economic and political power, simply put. Races may not survive racism, but as explained above, people will still have different colour skin and diverse genitals and facial hair after the fall of white supremacy and patriarchy: Feminists and anti-racists do not want skin and fun-parts to cease to exist, they simply want these to stop organizing the way people treat them, that is, they want them to be meaningless, or to take on new positive meanings.

Regarding sexuality, the question is not one of marked body parts but rather marked practices, yet the logic still holds. Queer people do not want their marked practices to stop happening. Post-oppression, the practices will be left over just as skin and fun-parts will be left over, they will simply not have a negative valence, but rather a new, different, perhaps positive one, if indeed the practices are noticed at all.

When it comes to class the equivalent is not true. People do not want to continue working long hours for low pay without being able to afford good food or health care yet have this take on a positive or neutral connotation. People do not want to stay poor but have their poverty be meaningless, or stop organizing the way people treat them (which is what fighting “classism” is all about, and why activists can’t find any working class workshop facilitators to teach them about it). In the case of class, no *immutable* characteristic that can be associated with the past experience of suffering is left over if the suffering itself disappears. If a “most affected” person experiences class mobility, for example, even his suffering teeth might not give this away, as these will likely be upgraded in the process.

It is true that there are features of “working-class-ness” that working class subjects generally consider to have absolute value, and which they imagine “taking with them” when building a post-capitalist society, such as “sincerity”, “solidarity” and “sharing” (see also Skeggs 2011). These cannot be imagined as being properly “taken with them” when experiencing class mobility, however, because these features of working class culture are collective value *practices* rather than values that can be imagined as embodied by *one* individual.<sup>8</sup> They are thus values that cannot remain attached to a person (be “left over”) as their individual property if or when this person becomes a

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<sup>8</sup> We may also think back here to the *apretado* of Chapter 7 who embodies values himself, and thus cannot share them (fn. 16, *passim*).

bourgeois individual him or herself. Said another way, these are *use-values* that have no *exchange-value* in the bourgeois arena, and are indeed values that work against one's exchange value in this arena: Practicing "sincerity" actually gets in the way of success in the "discrete, tactful, professional" world of bourgeois selves we discussed in the last chapter, for example.

There are also specific use-values to be found within indigenous or black cultures, or within networks of reciprocity among neighborhood women, for that matter. These values often likewise include versions of sincerity, solidarity and sharing, as well as diverse other collective values beyond. These collective value practices cannot cross the threshold into exchange value in the bourgeois sphere either. The fact that the immutable properties (that come to stand in for) "woman" or "person of colour" can, however, means that within the bourgeois sphere, these properties can be recuperated to stand in for the practices themselves: the *practice* of sincerity cannot have exchange value, but a *symbol* for it can, which is what we see happening in the anti-oppression game. Said another way, it is true that all of these oppressed groups include subversive collective practices (the "cultures of resistance" of activist lingo), yet the potentially subversive content, or use, of these "cultures" (the sincerity or sharing itself) is necessarily liquidated at one and the same time as group members adopt "sharing" or "sincerity" as a property of their individual persons. This is especially true if they then proceed to valorize themselves vis-à-vis one another by similarly reifying as many other use-values as possible, such as the logic of exchange in the anti-oppression game encourages them to do.

In other words, if class is "particular" it is because most other oppression categories are semantically organized around a body feature or practice that is *not* inherently painful (having Black skin does not sting one's face), yet which translates into painful experience and treatment by others in the current social order, whereas "class" oppression simply refers to living in material want, lack and pain. Even if poor people had the entitled subjectivity and material resources required to propertize themselves with "identity", they are unlikely to propertize themselves with "being poor" because "being poor" is exactly what they want to *stop being*.<sup>9</sup>

To take my earlier comparison to its conclusion then: whereas Zizek suggests that the class equivalent of anti-racism and anti-sexism would be an argument that *the bourgeoisie should be able to fully assert its identity and goals*, the problematic argument we more commonly face, both ethnographically and theoretically, is that *the working*

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note here how many people in North America attribute a very similar complex of values (hospitality, generosity, the mother who always invites everyone to eat, or perhaps strongly encourages second portions) to their ethnic background, be it Italian, Greek, Jewish, or a variety of others. In this we may see the relational practices of working class cultures crossing the threshold to some extent, maintained primarily within family relations, and attributed to a specific ethnic heritage despite being widely shared (as per our discussion, it is only possible to identify with something that one can take with them, and more pleasant than associating oneself with poverty or (having been cast into) the "low" simply put.

*class should be able to fully assert its identity and goals.* Not all movements of women and people of colour are looking to “assert identity and goals” in the sense of grabbing established power for themselves, yet *insomuch as* people or movements *are* looking to increase their power within the system (rights and their iteration), the problem of leveling “race, class, gender” as of the same order is that within such a complex the class equivalent of racism or sexism (“classism”) involves the notion that the working class should be able to fully assert its identity and goals in a way parallel to how “women” or “people of colour” can or should. This is presumed somehow even though it is logically impossible because if they did, they wouldn’t be working class anymore. If class is particular it is not because the “working class” uniquely seeks to annihilate its *other*, but rather that it alone seeks to annihilate *it-self*. And this, we might note, is not particularly conducive to the proper performance of selfhood that “good politics” requires.

Meanwhile, when the property of being “woman”, “black”, “queer”, or whathaveyou, comes to stand in for suffering itself, gradations of material suffering among those included in the identity are obfuscated. This is where the double movement of encompassment and exclusion resides. The poor who do not identify with pain themselves, yet who arguably experience relatively greater quantities of pain, social exclusion, and material suffering are effectively encompassed to constitute *the property*, with all of its attendant entitlements, of identity-claimants.

Let’s consider the specific example of “women”, for example. The fact that “women” experience psychological and physical violence that is specific to women (e.g. misogynist rape), and also on *average* earn less money and are *more likely to* fall below the poverty line than men, are all mobilized in combination to claim specific rights and privileges for “women”. Now, since wealthy women who experience relatively less material violence inevitably benefit more from these rights than poor ones because they have the institutional resources and subjectivity required to ‘activate’ such rights, they are in effect appropriating the suffering, pain and exclusion of all women-on-average, and garnishing compensation for it at the expense of women that experience it the most. The same thing happens with “race” when it comes to stand in not only for the physical and psychological violence that is specifically (one might say ontologically) racial, like being denied access to taxis or being shot in the back by a cop on the specific (however unacknowledged) basis of being black, but also comes to stand in for the experience of poverty that is experienced by people of colour-on-average.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> If my logic is not clear, this is because prevalent “intersectional” thinking invites us to misrecognize the logical difference between saying that “I was randomly arrested because I am black” or “I was attacked and raped because I am a woman” and “I am poor because I am black (or a woman).” Note that logically speaking the equivalent statements could never be true (“I am a woman because I am poor”, “I am black because I am a woman”). Approaching the same category problem a different way, note that poverty is not like rape or racial profiling because unlike these it is not an act that is aimed specifically at people of colour or women. A white guy is sometimes beat up by cops, once in a while a man is raped, but regarding poverty the *exception is the rule*: Most people who are poor in the United States are not

In this way, not only is identity-as-property a social relationship vis-à-vis “all the world” *excluded* from that identity yet confused with a relationship to one’s *individual* history (as property), it is at the same time a social relationship with all those *encompassed* by the identity, confused with a relationship to a *collective* history which is constructed as shared via compounded confusions of reality and statistics.

Wendy Brown (1995) points out how identity claimants avoid class analysis because without recourse to the bourgeois ideal of material comfort and legal protection there can be no claim to injury and exclusion (60–1). The privilege bead games could not illustrate this better. In the same passage Brown also comments in a footnote that politicized identities come to include poverty and class-based violence as well as the suffering specifically attributable to the category of identity (60, fn.11).<sup>11</sup> This is my particular point, and one that has not been sufficiently elaborated so far in either practical or theoretical terms. Mirha Soleil Ross approaches the same point when she highlights that whereas almost all transsexual victims of violence are prostitutes (whose aggressors often don’t even know they are transsexual), transgender activists “use their deaths as fuel” for campaigns that are “all about securing and maintaining their middle- and upper-class privileges through and after transition” (in Namaste 2005, 91).

To be sure, violence that is specifically directed at trans people exists too, but with the help of statistics, trans activists lump all of this violence together. They cannot risk taking prostitution into special consideration because “if they were to do so they would have to give up the majority of their martyrs” (ibid.). Meanwhile, many have pointed out how race- and gender-based affirmative action ultimately serves the elite at the expense of poor whites (e.g. O’Dair 1993), but the fact that wealthy women and people of colour who benefit most from these programs do so at the expense of their impoverished counterparts as well, according to the logic described above, is rarely pointed out. Rather, the promotion of a privileged few is justified (by those who benefit of course) based on the idea that the beneficiaries will necessarily use their class power to work towards the interests of all encompassed by their identity. Here we see the political representation aspect of encompassment, wherein the identity-claimants or propertyholders are presumed to be able to (legally) represent. This is the same

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people of colour, they are white, whereas the equivalent statement cannot be said for people who are raped or shot by police (most people who are raped are indeed women not men; most people killed by police are indeed black not white). Black people or women are not poor because poverty is specifically directed at them; poverty is created by our economic system that creates and needs poor people. Black people or women certainly do find themselves shoved in a low(er) class direction precisely because of racism and sexism, but that lower class does not exist for the *sake* of screwing over black people and women.

<sup>11</sup> “Striated not only in a formal sense by class but divided as well by the extent to which the suffering entailed, for example, in gender and racial subordination can be substantially offset by economic privilege, insistent definitions of Black, Queer, or Woman sustain the same kind of exclusions and policing previously enacted by the tacitly white male heterosexual figure of the ‘working class.’” (Brown 1995, 60, fn.11).



logic that becomes mobile in the idea of “speaking for” or, in activist terms, “giving voice to”, all those encompassed by yet excluded from identities themselves.

This should help explain why in the world of “good politics”, Andrea Smith and Magdalena can stand in for one another whereas Andrea Smith and I cannot. The problem of rich women speaking for poor ones is not considered to be problematic in either the activist or academic milieu to the same extent as men speaking for women or white women speaking for women of colour, precisely because the idea that wealthy persons of oppressed identities may speak for their impoverished counterparts is partly what is giving wealthy oppressed-identity holders their platform in the first place. In short, class is not referenced the way other identities are because it is offering a significant portion of the content that authorizes their power.

This conveniently slips by the materially privileged “representatives”, who authorize themselves to speak for “their” poor on the basis of the fact that the poor are busy being incarcerated or exploited in the workplace (“don’t have time for meetings”), to the extent that they take for granted the idea that wealthy “masters of their own activity”, who suffer the burden of “reason”, may speak for those consigned to purely material existences. In doing so they accept the symbolic structure of social hierarchy in modern capitalist Liberalism that serves to dehumanize people in the first place. When an activist laughs at the idea of “working class knowledge” by saying “Whatever, like what? Knowing how to carry a table?”, it is no coincidence that the worker’s lack of (transcendent) knowledge is articulated with/by referencing (physical) labour as their defining characteristic.

According to the modern capitalist division of labour, the wealthy perform the “higher” functions of imagining, thinking, and giving orders whereas their underlings perform the “lower” functions, that is, they apply their bodies (not just backs, but emotions and will) in the service of bringing *others’* ideas and aspirations to fruition. Academics and activists emerging from the universities, supposedly wielding material-lyunentangled (objective) minds and transcendent perspectives can, indeed *must* speak for the bodies. The fact that the bodies actually have their own heads and mouths and can actually speak for themselves (“They are just play-acting at being better than other people with their fancy bullshit lingo”) creates a certain logical problem here of course. This is why an essay such as Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) which argues that even if the subaltern says words it is not actually speaking are so convenient and widely appreciated, and why Spivak herself must resort to so much “fancy bullshit lingo” to make her point. If academics spent as much time trying to decipher and attribute important meaning to the guy rambling on at the bus stop as they do to Spivak’s essay, they would surely discover something interesting, but it is not in their specific material (career) interest to do so the way reading Gayatri Spivak is, and so they cite her to distract themselves from this very phenomenon.

## Intersectionality: The Academic Literature

Certain ways that the logic of rights, property and representation become mobile and come to characterize the activity and subjectivity of even anarchist activists can only be understood with recourse to the literature on “intersectionality” itself. North American anarchists are not simply messing up “intersectionality” because they are seduced by linear mathematics, mix up real and statistical truths about themselves, and/or don’t understand academic literature. When activists refer to Donna Haraway’s (1990) dense *Cyborg Manifesto* as proving that “the only feminists that aren’t essentialist are trans people” or even “the only feminists that aren’t oppressive are women of colour” then yes, they have misunderstood (and I can’t say I blame them). But as far as “intersectionality” and class goes, the activists haven’t misunderstood much at all. The academic texts on “intersectionality” that activists most often cite in everyday conversation line up rather well with the ones most often assigned in undergraduate courses — the same list of readings I cited earlier (Collins 2004; Crenshaw 1991; Anzaldúa 1987; Mohanty 1997; Hull, Scott and Smith 1982; Haraway 1990; Sandoval 1991). In Chapter 5 we explored the fact that all of these works privilege the particular intersection of gender and race, and how this makes sense because this was the specific intersection pointed to by black feminists who originally drew our attention to the problematic. We also explored the fact that there are clearly other “axes” cross-cutting “women of colour”: in Chapter 5 the specific “axes” elicited by the transnational movements of mobile activists were ones of class and a certain North/South “axis”, but of course there are always more. Finally, we ended with a question: Why is it that no methodology for “intersectionality” has ever been proposed? We are now in a position to at least partially answer this question.

First, it is important to observe that an excavation of the theoretical genealogy of “intersectionality” with an eye to considerations of class reveals a sequence of moves in parallel with the logic of hierarchy (high/transcendent vs. low/immanent) described above. When “intersectionality” was rendered into academic terms following the black feminists’ practical interventions in social movements on which it was based, its *theoretical* justification involved a modification of feminist standpoint theory (see e.g. Haraway 1990; Matsuda 1987; Harding 2004). Now, feminist standpoint theory is itself based on Marx’s notion of “partial perspective” (see Marx 1978 [1932]), specifically “class consciousness” as elaborated by Lukacs (1971), albeit applied to gender. So far, the epistemological logic should still apply to class because the fact of “class consciousness” is the premise on which the entire subsequent theoretical edifice is founded. Shortly thereafter, however, class is factored out of the equation: Epistemic authority is not granted to gendered and racialized subject positions on the basis of “experience”, precisely because “experience” is too analogous to “labour” (see Haraway 1990, 200). Rather, it is granted on account of “bifurcated consciousness” that emerges from cross-sections of oppression (ibid.; Sandoval 1991).

How is knowledge produced from cross-sections of oppression but not their experience? Apparently this happens via the feminist theorist who adopts ‘the crosssection’ itself as a theoretical standpoint (see Harding 1991). Likewise, critical race theorists suggest experience is simply “raw material” but under the right conditions identity-formation *can* generate theoretical advances, that is, if the experience is “legitimate” and the identity is “good”, all of this to be decided by the critical race theorist (see Mohanty 2000). Not even in theory, then, does the “working class” any longer have any perspective of value, only those who experience other forms of oppression, or indeed only the academics that analyze these oppression experiences. In fact, given this last, the idea of epistemic advantage associated with class is subtly preserved but inverted to authorize a dominant class position (that of professional academics), this being inconsistent with how the ideas of standpoint epistemology, bifurcated consciousness, and intersectionality have been applied to gender and race. bell hooks is the most notable exception here, always making sure to highlight that “cutting across racial lines, class is a serious political division among women” (1997, 406). hooks points out that (relative to white women) there are more women of colour who experience an underclass existence, rather than proceeding as if race and class are the same thing: “the bourgeois woman who is suffering psychically is more likely to find help than the woman who is suffering material deprivation as well as emotional pain” (1997, 408). Being discriminated against “may be painful or dehumanizing, but it may not necessarily be as painful, dehumanizing, or threatening as being without food or shelter, as starvation, as being deathly ill but unable to obtain medical care” (ibid.)

Considering that bell hooks is quite possibly the most famous of all black feminist intellectuals, it is significant that her work regarding these complexities (ibid., 2000) is rarely cited compared to the others. This is the case in regard to verbal conversations among activists and written debates among academics as well. Much more influential among “intersectional” analyses are works like Patricia Hill Collins’ landmark discussion of the “outsider within” (2004), where the author says that “black women are not the only outsiders” (121), but elsewhere in the text suggests that all black women are poor, all white women are wealthy, and that there is no possible intersection of oppression to be experienced by white women (e.g. 109, 119, 121).

While “intersectionality” was supposed to draw our attention to the problem of positing any one “axis” as “primary”, critiquing at once the Marxist and feminist traditions of positing race as epiphenomenal to class or gender, in actual practice an increasing amount of scholarship that evokes the concept implicitly or explicitly posits race as “primary”, with class being subsumed by race and with gender articulated as a “qualifier”. Consider the logic of the following exemplary passage:

A tirelessly overdeveloped take on leftist politics argues that the twentieth-century failure of solidarity to endure in the long run should be laid at the door of something the critics call “identity politics”....what they really mean, given all the examples they choose, is that Black people or women

of all races interrupted and messed up class politics in favour of “militant particularism”. That is a pretty silly view for a number of reasons, most of which are well-grounded in the evidence of what happened to whom and why. It is also a stupid view, given that capitalism has regularly found its ‘sternest negation’ (Robinson 1983) from peoples organized according to a number of principles at once, including antiracism... A more useful critique of identity complicates its subjective qualities (noting, for example, that class is also an identity rather than an ontology), shows how the complexity operates (as in Hall’s [1980] exquisite “Race is...the modality through which class is lived”), and reveals the contradictory ways in which identities fracture and reform in the crucibles of state and society, public and private, home and work, violence and consent (see, e.g. Alexander 1994; Omi and Winant 1986; Ransby 2006; Kelley 2002). (Gilmore 2008, 39)

Ruth Gilmore has every reason to be angry with the David Harveys and Slavoj Zizeks of the world, and it sure wouldn’t be my style to chastise her for sounding that way. However, while race certainly is *a* modality through which class is lived (gender being another, etc.), it should be obvious according to the author’s own logic that class is a modality through which race is lived as well.

Instead Gilmore (2008) implies that “race” is objective while “class” is subjective, simply reversing the Harvey-Zizek logic. One’s lived experience of race will surely qualify how one will experience and articulate “class” just as she says, yet one’s class background and position also qualify how one experiences and articulates “race”, this being as true for Ruth Gilmore as much as the former is true for Harvey-Zizek. Note how in this quote we also have an example, parallel to those of the anti-oppression workshops, of “class” being presented as a word that may be legitimately invoked *only* as one of many “identities” (which working class people are hardly entitled to) in the vein of “class-for-itself” vs. “class-in-itself” (another tirelessly developed leftist debate, in fact).

The above is problematic for reasons already explained, to which I add the following: Given the intellectual climate I illustrate here, is it any wonder that the few people in the university setting who could actually walk around understanding and announcing themselves as “lower class” do not consistently do so? Furthermore, does poverty not exist if people do not know the word? Is a black person not affected by “racism” and “white supremacy” if they don’t articulate their experience in these terms? In the same volume in which the above work by Gilmore appears, other chapters insist on applying the words “race” and “racialized” to analyze the experiences of people who do not understand their experiences this way, and indeed in some cases where the people concerned specifically insist that these categories do not apply (e.g. Pierre 2008). Again, the double standard regarding objective-category attribution. The fact that “class” alone be forbidden as a label except if mobilized by a materially impoverished person to authorize him or herself, and the fact that anyone who disagrees may be

called “silly” and “stupid” even in an academic text, appears seriously problematic (yet entirely consistent with the bourgeois logic of social hierarchy).<sup>12</sup>

At one and the same time, and particularly in the United States, an enormous amount of scholarship that discusses “intersections” of oppression begins by citing the “race, class, gender” trio but proceeds to only use the word “class” if and when it appears in the phrase “race and class” which throughout the paper is used interchangeably with “race” alone.<sup>13</sup> This elision of race and class in U.S. scholarship contributes to a variety of bizarre formulations, such as that of poor whites occupying a “racial minority position” (e.g. Wray and Newitz 1997, 5). Confusing poverty and racialization in the process of levelling black and white as both racially marked is obviously problematic because such a move completely occludes white supremacy. It also creates a scholarly climate in which any attempt to bring class difference into view may be read as a claim for “white injury” in competition with “black injury” and/or an attempt to “redeem whiteness” (see e.g. Weigman 1999). In other words, the historic (and growing) occlusion of class in the United States (see also Aranowitz 2003) appears to influence the application of intersectionality to the detriment of critical projects against both white supremacy and the recognition of white poverty, and given this state of affairs it should be no surprise that well-read graduate students in North America sound just like the undergraduate activists in my study – the very day I wrote this paragraph I heard someone say in an anthropology seminar that “homelessness is not a form of oppression, I mean it’s not like racism where you are being mistreated because of some biological trait...homelessness is just, like, a situation.”

Mari Matsuda suggests that intersectionality works by enabling scholars to “ask the other question”: “When I see something that looks racist, I ask ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’” When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where are the class interests in this?’” (1990, 1189). Here, too, class hierarchy does not appear here as a problem in and of itself the way racism, sexism and homophobia do – Matsuda only registers class insofar as “class interests” are involved in creating problems for women, people of colour, and homosexuals. In any case here’s my “other question”: What might

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<sup>12</sup> Problematic, but not surprising: Academic writing is bourgeois writing (see Chapter 8 fn. 4), and to call the theorist of class “stupid” only involves a slight shift from considering the lower class “stupid”, which is how the bourgeoisie imagines itself to have value and justifies its economic wealth in the first place. The fact that Gilmore may call theoretical observance of class “stupid” without academic editors censoring her language, whereas if I were to call Gilmore’s logic in this passage “stupid” I would inevitably be censored by equivalent editors as “rude” (if not “racist” as well), itself illustrates the game-scheme, identityrankings, and rules of play within the game of “good politics” I outline in Chapter 8, as well as how academics are playing the same game. Note that beyond Pierre (2008) writing in the same volume, Goldstein (2003) also makes a compelling argument as to the anthropologist’s responsibility to cast her research subjects as racialized and facing racism even if they do not articulate their lives in this way (“identify” as racialized) themselves.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Haraway (1990); Koyama (2006); Maecklebergh (2009), as well as the majority of scholarly articles published in the past ten years in which the phrase “race and class” appears.

be the class interests in the academic development of intersectionality? Perhaps class is not allowed to operate at the same conceptual level as other oppression categories because, as per our discussion above, it offers a significant portion of the content that authorizes their power.

To expand on this idea, in a context where people produce “knowledge” for a living, it is particularly and directly against the material (career) interests of identity representatives to acknowledge the intersection of class. Obviously it would be important to those who accumulate power, influence, and build careers by referencing identity-related epistemic authority *that there be no collective apprehension that the nonidentified poor suffer simply by virtue of being poor*, and furthermore, that the poor who suffer compounded oppressions suffer more than their wealthy counterparts, because if they admitted this they would also have to admit that the poor have epistemic authority as great – indeed greater – than any of their spokespersons with class power, and as a consequence the authority of these academic spokespersons would diminish considerably.

In other words, while the black feminists who originally inspired cross-sectional analyses were *not* elite intellectuals, it should be no surprise that the concept is mobilized to authorize knowledge emergent from “intersectional” positionalities specifically within the dominant class at the same time as the theoretical concept is adopted by the university – the place of transcendent knowledge *par excellence*. The fact that it has become acceptable, even required, to invoke “intersectionality” in academic circles arguably suggests the extent to which the subversive challenge it originally posed has been safely foreclosed.

## Dialogism

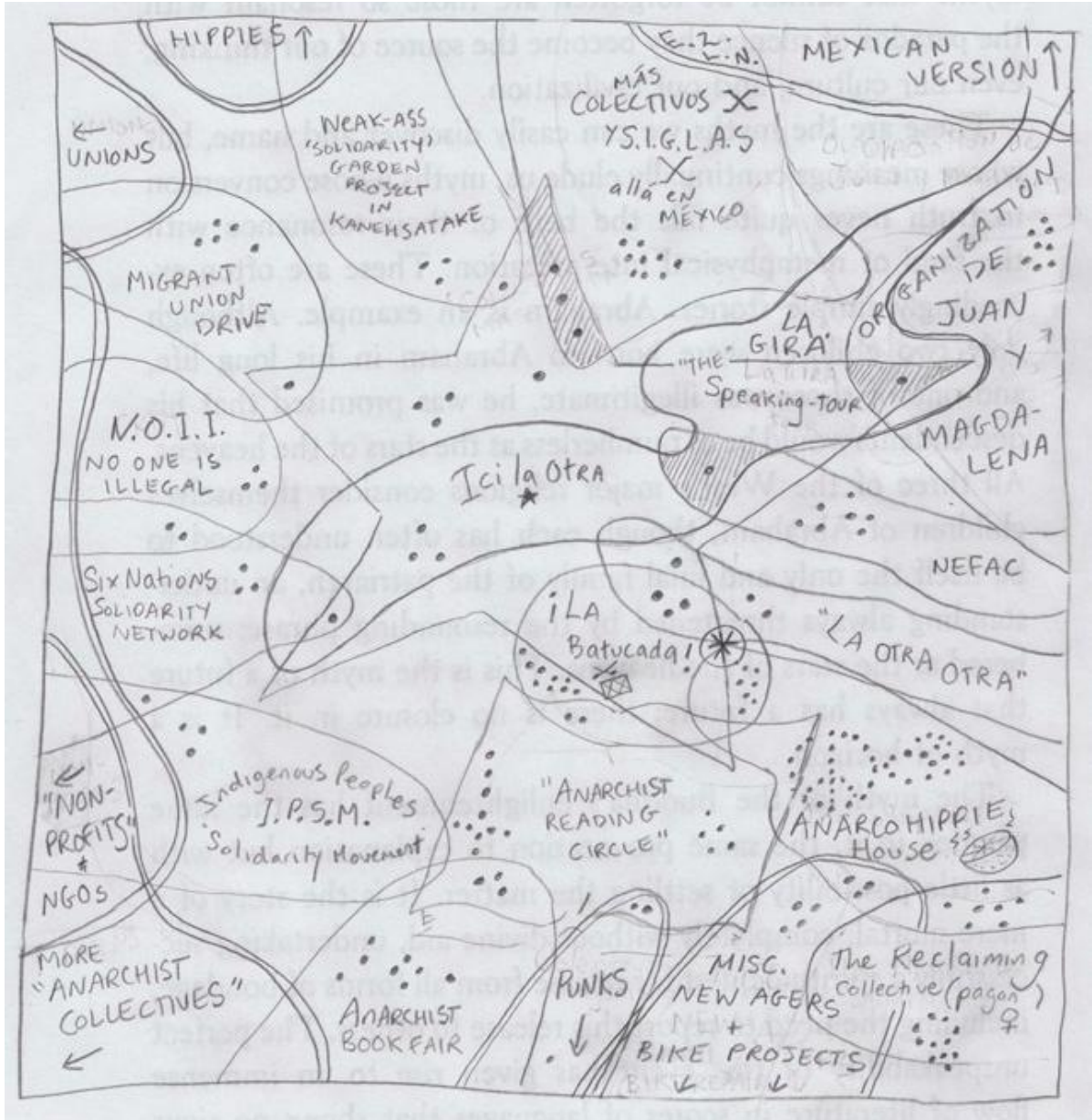
The idea here is not to elevate class by making its defining property exclusion from identity-as-property (whose defining property was exclusion from property in the first place). This would be to take the potentially subversive and discomfiting insight just suggested and re-territorialize it squarely within the logic of property, safely recuperated by the state. And for precisely this reason, neither would it actually work, either to attribute value to the perspective of the poor or to stop the game of appearances that is “good politics”. The relatively less-poor who develop the resources and subjectivity required to make the identity “work” for them, (perhaps an upwardly mobile person such as myself), would then have a platform based on the encompassment and exclusion of all people who are still actually poor. The idea is not simply to add new cards to the activists’ deck or new terms to the academic equation. The idea is to bring our attention to the seduction of the linear formula itself, how state logic interacts with the activist notion of “safety”, and how the logic of property structures the game at the expense of a diversity of others, including but by no means limited to the “working class”.

Unlike the academic “intersectionalists”, who specifically get career points for writing texts that ordinary people can’t understand, the anarchists who play the antioppression game are ostensibly anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, against the logic of individual rights, and are often not formally imbricated in institutions that structurally enforce this logic. In their case, the logic of property/ rights does not directly structure the field but rears its head on the level of culture and affect, being subtly embedded in all the game’s unwritten rules, all misrecognized by the players. If activists set store “in the seemingly most insignificant details of *dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners*, the reason is that, treating the body as a memory, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture”; the principles “em-bodied this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation” (Bourdieu 1977, 94–5).

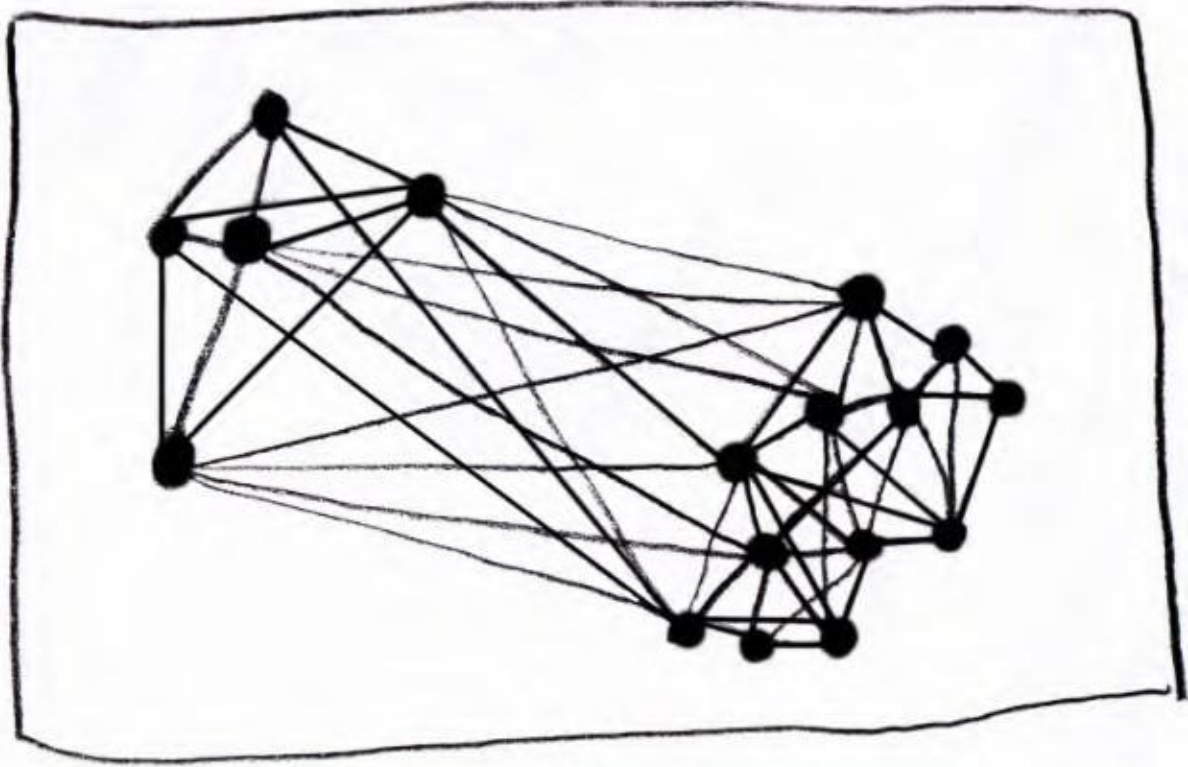
Just as rights draw a circle around the self (as property), anarchists draw circles around both their bodies and their identities, all of which are imagined as exclusive and transcendent. The triangular relationship of manners and identity, via property as the hidden third term, explains by connecting, and connects by explaining, two homologous governing logics of the game that serve to naturalize one another: First, the act of propertizing the self by abstracting oneself (the individual is untouchable), and second, the act of propertizing the self with identities (the “voices” of which are inviolable). In both cases, as in the case of formal political rights, social relations become reified as enclosed “things”. The anarchists thus practice a sovereignty of self, or the one kind of autonomy that class power allows and encourages.

It is no coincidence that middle class anarchists (and their scholars) are drawn to the “network” as opposed to the “patch”. Deleuze and Guattari and their (abstract representations) of exactly one kind of plant are well-liked for more than one reason. Inasmuch as autonomy is recuperated to mean the sovereign transcendence of the individual, neither collective autonomy nor the sovereignty imagined by some indigenous women (“an active, living process within this knot of human, material, and spiritual relationships bound together by mutual responsibilities and obligations”), are very appealing or even conceptually accessible. The “patch” involves overlapping, compromised boundaries, the mutualities of dialogic being, and further impurities of all kinds; the “network” links together independent nodes. Indeed the “network” is probably the best way to acknowledge relationality without compromising either the practice or imagination of bourgeois autonomy, wherein people are units that may network with other units, yet ultimately remain autonomous, and a comfortable distance from others as well.

Going back further to Chapter 1, we may remember that activists tend to define direct action similarly yet differently, even in the very same scene. My point at the time was that they usually do manage to smooth out a working understanding in any given scenario, yet at this juncture it is worth considering Thompson’s (2010) argument that its fuzzy definition is intrinsic to the fact that among these (white) middle class activists, “direct action” continually falls back into the realm of representation. This, he







**Figure 9-1.** Contaminated patches vs. hygienic rhizome.

explains, happens insofar as the action is defined by what it *means* as opposed to what it *does* (2010, Chapter 2). This does appear to be the case (and with respect to “solidarity” as much as “direct action”), yet not purely among white activist subjects. Otherwise university student activists of all colours would recognize the trades-worker’s “gravel maneuver” and other everyday autonomous cooperation among the poor of all colours as “direct action”, with most of their own everyday activity described as something else entirely. It is impossible to understand “good politics” as having any affinity with “direct action” unless the poor are problematized in *some* way, because in practice “good politics” tends to involve the complete opposite of direct action: a whole lot of transcendental abstraction and representation.

It is no coincidence that the construction of the perfect anarchist self (whose political formation is always complete from birth) in practice intersects with a self-contained manner, and that the politics of identity in the anti-oppression game intersects with this particular politics of the body.<sup>14</sup> It is not mere coincidence, for example, that Damian is a “person of colour” as well as a refugee, but does not have the skills or self-orientation (desire) necessary to propertize himself with pain and skin colour, whereas Carlo mobilizes both identity and the value of self-containment against him in one and the same gesture. Likewise, the reasons why the violence and poverty suffered by the Balkan refugees or my white working class friends (those who do not have any visible oppressed identity to show for it), are not acknowledged, and the reasons why middle class women of colour may successfully mobilize both oppression-properties-visible-from-a-distance and the virtues of bodily-containment in their favour to forbid them from either dancing happily or yelling angrily, are one and the same. The *form* of one’s utterance being valued over its content, and the abstraction of material oppression itself to neatly visible signifiers of the same constitutes a perfect homology: The bourgeoisie always prefers the clinical gaze to the contaminating touch.

Of course it makes sense that neoliberal institutions would want to organize people into reductive categories legible from a distance, and therefore amenable to topdown management techniques. Part of the reason class is hard to integrate into affirmative action programs is because it is “so very hard to tease out”, and cannot be ascertained with “a glance” (O’Dair 1993, 239).<sup>15</sup> Understanding the logic of property, however, is

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<sup>14</sup> Following the discussion in Chapter 8, fn. 15 regarding trauma as medicalization of entitlement via discourses of trauma, we may also note further at this juncture that the bourgeois cultural logic of self-containment is replicated in therapeutic discourses and common sense middle class notions of “setting boundaries”, “setting limits”, and “drawing lines” with others; this, always for the purposes of “self-care” and “personal healing”, which are always imagined as absolute goods accessible to all (i.e. whose acquisition is contingent only on personal intention), this last serving to justify “mobilizing resources” and/or maintaining resources already mobilized, as well as subjective feelings of entitlement towards said resources, even though these concentrations of wealth necessarily involve traumatizing others (i.e. all those who work for minimum wage thus making it possible for the bourgeois sufferer to afford his or her therapist in the first place). See also Lagalisse (2016).

<sup>15</sup> While activists do not recognize “cultural appropriation” in relation to class due to their understanding of culture as racial as well as their desire to deny and appropriate the (projected) authenticity

necessary to understand why and how oppressions-visible-from-a-distance are similarly privileged in autonomist activist praxis. Legibility from a distance is as important to activist facilitators (as much as “top-down” institutions) because the facilitator wants to be able to stack the speakers’ list to privilege the voices of “oppressed people” without knowing what any of their histories, fears, traumas, and special insights actually are, this requiring the equivalent of an application form with boxes (properties) to tick.

An over-arching modern urge to overlay a legible-because-linear grid onto nonlinear social complexity blends easily with the specific bourgeois aspiration to selfenclosure, property and authority. This in turn blends easily with the more basic human desire to protect oneself emotionally and physically and is easily brought to rationalize both: It is obviously “safer” to calculate in the abstract what people are living, feeling, and thinking without talking to them, or asking them, or feeling their joy, sadness or anger, because that way one can avoid such feelings in one’s own body and indeed continue to forget the body altogether. In the same gesture one avoids the risk that some uncalculable combination of experience, feeling and thought presents itself, threatening the transcendental pretension that the individual alone, armed with an abstract geometry of pain, can stand above and know the world.

For this reason, the deep insight of intersectionality — that any given perspective will be incomplete, that the *map will never be the territory* — has been rendered into something much more comfortable: a calculus to facilitate guesswork from a distance. “Intersectionality” is thus brought to articulate with the logic of the state, of law, of hierarchy and of enclosure all at once by making it amenable to the predictability that legal thinking requires (see Scott 2005; Chapter 4 of this work).<sup>16</sup> What people will have experienced, and how they will think and act as a consequence, is desired to be known, indeed *must* be approached as knowable without any interaction with them whatsoever.

In fact, the principal insight of intersectionality described earlier, that is, identities cannot be reduced to mutually exclusive categories, and that even if we multiplied evergreater numbers of categories to arrive at an even greater number of cross-sections we would never be able to predict what one’s experience has been or what their insight will be, actually implies the opposite. We will actually *have to* interact with others to find out. The loss of certainty that results from losing one’s birds-eye-view map means we must “walk asking” as the Zapatistas suggest. As John Holloway points out, this is “not only because we do not know the way (we do not) but because asking is part of the revolutionary process itself” (2005, 215). No doubt if we started asking and listening instead of assuming what someone must think based on a reference chart, we would discover entire realms of “unlikely alliances”, which are only “unlikely” in the

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(they lack) on the poor (Chapter 4, fn. 10, *passim*), the easier legibility of race/culture disjuncture in the sense described here is also arguably a contributing factor.

<sup>16</sup> While Scott (2005) is useful further reading here, I owe this particular insight regarding the articulation of intersectionality with the predictability that legal thinking requires to the Critical Race Theory seminar of Joao Costa Vargas.

TOP POST  
2,854,822 VIEWS

quiz  
video  
fall


# How Privileged Are You?

Check(list) your privilege.

Rega Jha  
BuzzFeed India Contributor

Tommy Wesely  
BuzzFeed Staff

f ✉ p t



Check off all the statements that apply to you.

I am white.

I have never been discriminated against because of my skin color.

I have never been the only person of my race in a room.

I have never been mocked for my accent.

**Figure 9–2.** One of many “privilege quizzes” in existence. This top post graced Facebook walls all over North America in 2013.

# GAWKER



Figure 9–3. This one is satire (tree-shapes are supposed to be embarrassing).

first place because the logic of oppressed-identities as bounded, mutually exclusive and accumulated properties is hegemonic across the neoliberal-anarchist spectrum.

Walking asking questions means being prepared for argument, according to Bernice Reagon Johnson's challenge, not to mention the challenge of the anthropological record, of which John Zerzan (2005) and other popular "anarchoprimitivist" intellectuals do not have a very good grasp: Direct, unmediated confrontation is characteristic of any "egalitarian" situation; if people are *not* expressing their feelings it is usually because some hierarchy is in play. This is true across the board, whether of "hunter gatherers with systems of immediate return" (see e.g. Woodburn 1982) or of present-day academics that write about anarchists: Many write about their lack of researcher-power with reference to the competing power of their "informants", but do not similarly mention delicate negotiations with ethics boards, review committees, and grant agencies precisely because the latter actually *do* have power over the researcher whereas the "informant" does not (see e.g. Juris and Khasnabish 2013).

When people do not say what they think it is because they are afraid of power, and the repressing of emotion is always an aspiration to transcendence of some kind. Reagon Johnson (1983) emphasizes that in real coalition work we're bound to "feel threatened to the core" and if not we're "not really doing no coalescing" (1983, 356). Audre Lorde has also cautioned against the world of "flattened affect", sounding much like Damian as she explains how "the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility" (2007 [1984], 56). bell hooks, following her comment on culture and classroom dynamics that I cited earlier, emphasizes that the sharing of anger, including "hostile verbal confrontations" that "feel uncomfortable, negative and unproductive because there are angry voices, tears and so on" lead to much-needed "clarity and growth" (1997, 410).

The novelty of my point is simply that it shouldn't only be bell hooks and Audre Lorde who are allowed to say so, and I dare say they would agree with me. In fact I am quite sure Bernice Reagon Johnson would effectively lose her temper if she saw how today's activists (and not just white ones) invoke the authority of black feminist matriarchs such as herself only to justify building ever-more "barred rooms" in the name of "safety" for a proliferating hierarchy of identities: A little colour is okay (good form), but culturally-speaking (content-wise) activists are really looking to hang out with others exactly like themselves, whether in terms of their political priorities, their manner of dancing or vocabulary which should not include "pissing contests" and "friends" but rather "solidarity" and "allies". In the process, "intersectionality" has been turned into a pile of safe distances and class distinctions all the way down.

Jacqui Alexander's point that the "will to divide and separate" resides in the "archeologies of dominance" (2005, 6) whereas in fact "*everything in the universe is interconnected!*" thus falls flat, as does John Holloway's parallel point in his critique of Marx's own fetish (the "working class") and any other fetishization that necessarily occurs in the attempt to reify *any* particular identity as *the* revolutionary subject: "We overflow the bounds of any concept" (151). "Everything is becoming" (25). Rather than

confusing “doing” with “being” we must “live against and beyond identity”. Definition “adds the locks to a world that is assumed to be closed” (141), he explains. Neither cite Bakhtin (1984 [1941]), but the homology between the transcendent identity-proprietor and the static, closed, classical body (both atemporal vis-à-vis the *process* of learning, growth, and dynamic imperfection) should be clear by now, as should the logic behind the black man, the indigenous woman and the white woman all deciding to joke around with the activists concerned with form: “True open seriousness fears neither parody, nor irony, nor any other form of reduced laughter, for it is aware of being part of an uncompleted whole”, writes Bakhtin (1984 [1941], 123). “Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level...Laughter does not permit seriousness to atrophy and to be torn away from the one being, forever incomplete.” (ibid.)

Foucault was of a different sensibility, but even he, in a rare passage that suggests a way out of all the traps he wrote about, suggested that “the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are”; and the political problem we face is not merely to “liberate the individual from the state and the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization that is linked to the state.” (1983, 216). With such “refusal” in mind, Audra Simpson’s (2014) ethnography of Mohawk sovereignty and its complex memberships is entirely different than my own, yet each in our way we seek to historicize, explain, and critically engage the fact that there is simply “no place in the formal political discussion for qualities” (170), even though these might matter the most in the project of dismantling settler colonialism. Anna Tsing’s (2015) critique of the modern biological assumption that species are self-contained and self-replicating entities likewise intersects with my point. As I have suggested, her call to behold “patches” of interdependent multi-species life vs. taxonomies of mutually exclusive “abstract kinds” (“mutualism” vs. a falsely imagined “autonomy”) is logically parallel to beholding social relations as opposed to reified properties.

In other words, a lot of what I have been saying is not entirely new, yet the common failure to perceive the role of property in the composite of “good politics” is partially responsible for the failure of each theoretical camp represented above to enter into dialogue with one another and recognize where *they* connect. Only by sacrificing the property that is mobilized by each theorist to speak for and above the others according to the logic of academic knowledge production (e.g. “sociology”, “anthropology”, “class”, “race”, “intersectionality” itself) will anyone actually get past the “class vs. identity” impasse.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the problem is not “identity” — a word that is currently

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<sup>17</sup> Anthropology has its own reasons for not wanting to touch “class” — “class is what *sociologists* do”. Anthropology’s own double-movement of exclusion and encompassment (its pretensions to transcend all other disciplines and subsume them as lesser beings at once) encourages us to look down on “class” (and sociologists). After all, culture is higher up the taxonomic hierarchy than class: we anthropologists have a more transcendent view, and are interested in more overarching questions. Culture is *our* property,

used to refer to an enormous multiplicity of phenomena — but *property*. And we know that identity is being mobilized as property whenever it comes alongside admonitions against “material interest”, embodiment or emotional display. Such a method may also be promising in that this regulation of expression does not target a particular group. The rowdy students of bell hook’s classroom as well as the angry white working class male, the “white” Balkan refugees and Mexican ones alike, are all shut down in a similar way — the “affectable other” is always seen to be a little too “affective” as well. As discussed in Chapter 1 however, the revolution must be “affective” in order to be “effective”...<sup>18</sup>

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in all three senses of the word: Culture is what makes us what we are, what authorizes us to speak and represent truth just as it subsumes other categories, and our trading in these representations is what makes us a living. Culture, however, is also a thinly veiled re-iteration of “race”, which became “ethnicity”, which became “identity” – a performance of (and in contradistinction to) “class” all the way down. Touching this is, of course, taboo.

<sup>18</sup> I might explain here why I do not make use of “affect theory” in this work and how my work may help to explain “affect theory”. While diverse and important work has been done using its vocabulary of “affect”, the value of this work should arguably be attributed to its author rather than this theoretical language itself. Note that one reader (Gregg and Seigworth 2010) elaborates the following list of affect theory’s objects, or rather “main orientations that undulate and sometimes overlap in their approaches to affect”: “phenomenologies and post-phenomenologies of embodiment as well as investigations into a body’s incorporative capacities for scaffolding and extension”, “assemblages of the human/ machine/ inorganic”, “nonhumanist, oftentimes subterranean, and generally non-Cartesian traditions in philosophy, usually linking the movements of matter with a processual incorporeality”, “psychoanalytic inquiry where a relatively unabashed biologism remains co-creatively open to ongoing impingements and pressures from intersubjective and interobjective systems of social desiring”, the “politically engaged work – perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists, and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of a normativizing power – that attends to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workaday, of everyday and every-night life, and of “experience” (...), where persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm.” (6–7). The subject/object of “affect theory” is therefore not clear, and yet the lack of clarity is itself significant: What, in the end, do the broad diversity of things listed above have in common? These are all things that are *not discourse*. Academics of the poststructuralist era have realized that the universe is not, in fact, an assemblage of texts; they have rediscovered the material world, yet wish to avoid returning to any sort of “materialism” that might suggest the importance of class analysis if not Marxism *per se* (alongside the feminist, queer, and disability studies which they do mention, this being in line with the game scheme). Such study would suggest that the theorists in question are non-transcendent subjects with particular social positions and material interests, yet inasmuch as affect theory and Marxism are brought together, it is often with respect to an emergent category of “immaterial labour”. The social positions and material interests of theorists may be somewhat betrayed by the form and content of affect theory as described in the reader above: The affect theorists in this work search everywhere for the body, yet approach it from a safe angle and in as distanced a manner as possible. They are concerned by body-boundaries and their lack of clarity, preoccupied by an unsettling discovery that the body extends, mixes and overlaps with other bodies, and may even be part of a “collective” body. The very fact that such objects of study are grotesque “immanences”, whose repression constitute the bourgeois subject and against which bourgeois self-identity is defined, may help explain why affect theorists often explain their object in a vague, dissociated and abstract manner.



## CODA: From Black Women to “Women of Colour” to Indigenous Women...

*No One is Illegal Radio:* It comes back to land, it comes back to land an awful lot when you respond to what sovereignty, autonomy, dignity, self-determination means in a meaningful way. But what we all mean by land can be very different. What a capitalist obviously means by land is very different than what an anti-capitalist or non-capitalist means, but even what an anarchist sitting here in Montreal means by land is very different than what you might be meaning by land. What do you mean by land when you speak about it as a Dene?

*Glen Coulthard:* I think of land not only as a kind of a material substance that is required for our sustenance over time, like to sustain ourselves as a people, but as a reciprocal relationship between human and non-human entities in a given place or geographical area, so it's that system of social relationships that transcends what it means to be human, and includes other elements of creation other than human entities that we relate with and rely on in order to sustain ourselves both spiritually but materially over time. So land is a relational concept, it's not just a material that can be exploited, and once you have that relational aspect there's an ethics involved in relating to it, and exploitation and domination over it is rendered a problematic that is unacceptable, and I think we need to start living our lives as indigenous peoples taking that relationship seriously.

-Interview with Glen Coulthard, author of “*Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*” (2014), on No One Is Illegal Radio, CKUT News, March 5, 2015. (Retrieved March 5, 2015. <http://archives.ckut.ca/64/20150305.17.45-18.00.mp3>.) A full transcription of this interview is attached as Appendix B.

Beholding the dual logic of exclusion and encompassment, as it relates to property in general and identity-as-property in particular, allows us to look for dynamics of subsumption and exclusion as they may apply to a variety of political identity categories. Approaching the “white working class male” as constitutive limit to “good politics” as an analytical starting point makes sense because he is suggestively found at the very bottom of the game-schematic. But now that we understand how and why this is happening, we should be curious to find if the same process of exclusion and encompassment is not happening all the way up the ladder. Along these lines, it should be significant, for example, that while “intersectionality” is bequeathed to us by black feminists, in movement practice those who have inherited the epistemological authority associated with it are not “black women” but rather “women of colour” in general, and “indigenous women” specifically.

The label “people of colour” excludes and encompasses at once like any other, and not just along the lines of excluding and subsuming the poor (people of colour). It also performs the operation at a *logic once-removed* within its own particular categorical logic. Beyond subsuming categories of non-white people that are economically poorer with the effect of garnering epistemic authority for non-white people that are economically powerful, it also subsumes categories of non-white people that experience qualitatively different forms of *racism*: The encompassing category “people of colour” invites us to see both the economic and racial violence faced by Mexican refugees and wealthy *chicanos* as the same, just as it invites us to see the violence faced by African Americans living in the inner city and violence faced by Asian graduate students as the same, which is probably part of the reason why some of the Mexican and Black people I know do not actually appreciate being called “people of colour”. In my first few antioppression workshops it was impressed upon me that I should never say Latina or Black as an adjective to describe someone but rather “person of colour” so I adopted the usage, yet apparently the facilitators only spoke for a certain fraction of non-white people because almost every Mexican and Black person I subsequently got into a conversation with stopped me right away: “What the *fuck* does *that* mean?”, “Aren’t you whities not supposed to refer to ‘coloured people’ any more?”, “I’m Latina dammit and proud of it too, why should my defining feature be the fact that I am not white instead? They told you that’s anti-racist? That’s just fucked.”

Maybe another factor here is that my friends (or perhaps preferably: “the racialized subjects with whom I try to position myself in political solidarity”) are not sufficiently bourgeois to make being on the losing end of white supremacy their selfdefining property.<sup>19</sup> It’s also true that most of them have not studied in the university, where they

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<sup>19</sup> I might also suggest here that if the white middle class activists in my study denigrate “friendship” (vs. “allyship”), it may not be simply because (too many) people reference diverse “friends” as proof that they are not oppressive, but also because their own friends throughout life have not been diverse, particularly in terms of race: They do not want the racial diversity of one’s friends be any measure of their openness to racial diversity, because then they would lose anti-racism points. That white working class people often grow up sharing schoolyards, alleys, parks and sidewalks with more non-white people (than rich whites do) certainly does not mean that white working class people are less likely to be racist, but it does mean that poor whites do have some experience interacting with people of colour in non-institutional and mundane settings. This involves at least the possibility of interracial friendships during early childhood years, these sometimes characterized by shared criticism of elite whites (see also Moss 2003), which result in the white person coming to recognize “people of colour” as human beings at least somewhat similar to oneself rather than as “specimens of difference around whom we must seem really, really nice”. It is also significant to consider how the juxtaposition “friend” vs. “ally” betrays certain unspoken presumptions about friendship: “A friend isn’t necessarily an ally” activists will say, and yet: Who stays friends with a person who insults and oppresses them in subtle ways? I myself “stayed friends” with activists who exploited me because of benefits I could glean from the situation; meanwhile they presented themselves as “open”, “cool”, “understanding”, “not classist”, for having me as a “friend” — this is the sort of “friendship” that “allies” improve upon. And yet for it to be taken for granted that one’s “friends” might throw us under the bus (requiring “allies” to protect us from them) is in itself telling: For the bourgeois subject especially, the friend is an instrumental

would find out soon enough that “people of colour” is what they “really” are (in much the same way that Mexican lesbians are “really” transgender). Even people I meet in the universities, however – specifically the few black academics that manage to squeeze in — have complaints about “people of colour”: it is all too obvious to them that their blackness has social significance and material repercussions qualitatively different and beyond those faced by many other “people of colour”.

Of course it is true that the phrase “people of colour” has been chosen by many people to describe themselves, has been “forged in struggle” as some might say, so perhaps it should not be my place, especially as a subject of the dominant white race, to take issue with it. And yet the same can be said for “working class”, which bourgeois academics and activists of the professional class never tire of deconstructing, and they seem to feel it is very much their place to do so. The same can be said in regard to “women”. If Saba Mahmood (2011) or Lila Abu-Lughod (1993) are allowed to speak for Muslim women halfway around the globe to problematize the fundamental categories of Western feminism, and yet I am not allowed to speak for my non-university educated Mexican friends to problematize the category “people of colour”, then it is only because we have already decided that being “of colour” is a valid encompassing category whereas being “non-elite” is not, this of course being in line with the logic of property and the politics of academic production described above. Perhaps specifically for this reason it must be emphasized, beyond the brief mention in Chapter 5, that the category “people of colour” homogenizes as much as the revolutionary subject groups that came before.

Whereas the “working class” supposedly represents all proletarians, but is in fact practically and symbolically organized around the interests of the white male worker, and “feminism” supposedly represents all women, but is in fact practically and symbolically organized around the interests of the white woman of the First World, “people of colour” supposedly represents all non-white people in the world, but is practically and symbolically organized around the interests of middle-class English-speaking North Americans (who are interested in certain colours more than others), all of which the category “people of colour” effectively displaces.

One last look at “anarchoindigenism” is in order. This time not in terms of anarchists’ incomplete project of decolonization in relations with indigenous activists, but in terms of *both* white anarchists’ and indigenous activists’ tendency to posit “indigenous” as the most subversive racialized category of all. After all, anarchists may botch some jobs, but they are in some way “taking lead” from indigenous thinkers such as Ward Churchill (2003), Deloria (1973), Alfred (2005), and Smith (2005) when they approach the indigenous person as quintessential revolutionary subject. On this point

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object (social capital), wherein attention to possible self-interested maneuvers for future personal and professional advancement outweighs concerns of moral quality (e.g. “I know she is being an asshole, but everybody knows she controls the Board of Directors, and she’s my friend.”). A full discussion of the shifting meaning of “friend” in bourgeois social life is beyond the scope of this work, and yet I suggest taking cue from Elias: “as the series of actions and number of people on whom the individual and his actions constantly depend are increased, the habit of foresight over long chains grows stronger”.

Black scholar Frank Wilderson (2010) challenges Ward Churchill, for example, who argues that “the proletariat’s struggle to obliterate the wage relation and democratize ownership of the means of production (of which land is a primary component) is at best inadequate, and at worst unethical, in comparison to a struggle to re-indigenize the land” (178). Wilderson (2010) is concerned to show how the “settler” and the “savage” find resonance in each other’s notion of personhood, sovereignty, suffering and struggle, visà-vis those of the “slave” who cannot represent an inspiring model of good and traditional “relationships with the land” (or “culture of life”). Indigenous people and settler anarchists, however different they may be, arguably share “a capacity for time and space coherence” (Wilderson 2010, 181). “At every scale – the soul, the body, the group, the land, and the universe – they can both practice cartography, and although at every scale their maps are radically incompatible, their respective “mapness” is never in question” (ibid.).<sup>20</sup>

Wilderson’s argument is more complex than my summary can sustain, but one of his main points should be simple to grasp: The “settler” and the “savage” can and do recognize themselves in the other in a way that the “settler” and the “slave” (and the “savage” and the “slave”) do not. This mutual identification hinges on partially reconciled notions of sovereignty, as well as on the partial homologies of “(indigenous) culture = relationships with others *and* land” and “(Western) culture = relations with others *in* a given territory”. If culture can’t exist without a land base (“motherland”), and if “cultures of life” are cultures that interact with that land base in a respectful and harmonious fashion, then Black Americans have no culture by definition (and are alwaysalready socially “dead”, this indeed being Wilderson’s broader point).

If the anarchists in my study are specifically focused on the revolutionary potential of indigenous subjects and their social forms, and bring “intersectionality” to buttress this imaginary instead of focusing on the revolutionary potential of Black women who brought us “intersectionality” in the first place (and the many other “remainders” they point towards), Wilderson’s analysis goes some way to explaining why. As the radio interview heading this section continues we learn, for example, that “true sovereignty” involves a “relational understanding of land” by “refamiliarizing oneself with it”, “defend-

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<sup>20</sup> Wilderson (2010) is concerned with the “ontological death” of the black, or the particularity of black non-personhood: there are “particularities of blackness” as well. Note (in passing) the play of property: “From Father Vicente Valverde’s late sixteenth century invocation of papal bulls before Atahualpa...and Atahualpa’s rejoinder that ‘he could not conceive how a foreign priest should pretend to dispose of territories which did not belong to him’; to the School of Salamanca’s meditations on “Savage” dominium [*property*]; to the late eighteenth-century tracing of the U.S. constitution along the contours of Iroquois governance; to the emergence of new formations of engendered white masculinity by way of nineteenth-century marriages to Choctaw and Cherokee “princesses”; all the way up to Deloria’s meditations on the myriad articulations between Indigenous cosmology and the tenets of Jung, modernity is laced with this network of connections, transfers, and displacements between the ontological capacity of the “Savage” and the ontological capacity of the Settler” (51). Of course neither can it be said that indigenous property or “dominium” (thus political personhood) was always, or is, a foregone conclusion, following, for e.g., Simpson (2014) in relation to Locke ([1797] 2003).

ing it from exploitation and harm”, and “embodying this place-based ethics associated with a reciprocal understanding of land”<sup>21</sup>. Wilderson’s (2010) analysis should work to challenge both anarchist and indigenous notions of de-colonization that focus specifically on the question of land and the subjects who still have some land, effectively factoring all descendents of slaves out of the equation, thus performing a racist operation themselves. The fact that “consensus” is attributed to indigenous peoples while the same activists imagine that poor whites and non-indigenous people of colour “can’t do it” is no coincidence. The activists look for consensus where they see the collective management of land, and poor black and white people don’t have much of that.

Andrea Smith (2013) is the only other academic so far to have approached what I call “the anti-oppression game” as an object of study (much to my delight), yet specifically identifies it as a white/settler phenomenon. For Smith, the self-determining subject is positioned as white whereas non-whites are “affectable others”. I hesitate to say she is wrong (and not just out of courtesy), because, as in regard to the consensus conundrum, while not all white people act like English gentlemen, most people who act like English gentlemen are indeed white. No doubt most everyone she meets that is playing the game is white.

It makes perfect sense that Andrea Smith and Damian’s first thought is that the game is white or Canadian, whereas my first thought was that it is elitist – we are each confronted with the game via our own oppressed subject positions, a subjectivation imposed on us by the game itself, one that fixes us in place as the “other” that we are within its logic, which in turn reproduces the hegemonic logic of the dominant society. And if I have continually worked to triangulate race and class to find the specific intersection in which activist behaviour resides, this should not be to my “good politics” credit, much less attributed to some sort of transcendent white-knowledge-capacity. Rather, it is partially due to the fact that I hear what these activists say when indigenous people are not around, and also because as my other-ness (class background) becomes less obvious, I move ever more invisibly among them to notice things that only people with once-othered, now-less-so features can. But it is mostly due to the fact that the academic game of “good politics” (the game of “radical scholarship”) exactly parallels the activist version. For this reason, during my studies I have been ever-encouraged to listen for the subaltern knowledge of black men and indigenous women (which in itself can only be a good thing), whereas scholars of colour are not likewise encouraged to listen for the subaltern knowledge of poor white people in a similar way (which is not so much of a good thing).

And yet all of this being said, I am pretty sure that Andrea Smith herself knows that not all people who engage in “privilege politics” or the “anti-oppression game” are white. A brief caveat betrays the contradiction: “Individuals may find themselves variously in the position of being the confessor or judge of the confession depending on the context since these positions are not ontologically fixed.” (Smith 2013, 269). To those of us who

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<sup>21</sup> Note that this radio interview can be found in its entirety in Appendix C.

know this game well (and aren't thrown off by the "ontologies" of academic feminists), it is clear that she is pointing to how confessions and judges line up along all "axes of oppression", *not* just that of race. Indeed by locating the game as "fundamentally" white and suggesting that attending to specifically "queer and indigenous futurities" provides a way out of it, she is actually playing the game.

Meanwhile, as I worked to finalize this manuscript during the summer of 2015, a magnificent melodrama broke out around Andrea Smith's claim to indigenous status. The president of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in the United States, Rachel Dolezal, had recently been "out-ed" as a white person in disguise, this followed by many members of the "intersectionality" faction freaking about (having to deal with) "trans-racial-identified" people. In the middle of this mess various interested parties dug up an apparently long-standing argument around Andrea Smith's identity claims: Basically, for a variety of compelling reasons, we should not consider Andrea Smith Cherokee, and "it's bullshit that she has built so much of a career on it".<sup>22</sup>

In this vein, a variety of indigenous women suggested I remove her from the text as my primary example of an "indigenous woman scholar" – she gets too much play already. A different variety of indigenous women directed me to her work in the first place, and think I should keep her in. From which indigenous women shall I say I am "taking lead"? How about I don't hide behind any indigenous woman, and simply explain that there is no way I can sit here and proclaim on whether Andrea Smith "is" or "isn't" Cherokee, and especially not at the end of this particular book. I am, however, well-positioned to point out that all of this arises due to the game of "good politics" that attributes subversive value to the oppressed, yet requires an ante of substantial capital to play. It should not be surprising that a common complaint made about Smith is that she gets to "speak for" all others in the category, and that she gets "all the recognition" when this is "just because she has had the means" to advance herself. It is entirely understandable that indigenous women with less means resent those who cash in on their behalf, and it is also entirely understandable that any oppressed person with the means to do so identifies with as much "difference" as they possibly can when they are moving in the bourgeois world, because the only platform the oppressed are currently offered in this arena is their "difference" itself.

Smith realizes that her "essay does not escape the logic of self-reflexivity either"; "Rhetorically it simply sets me up as yet another judge of the inadequacies of the academic/activist confessions of others" (272, 269). The same could be said of me; of course

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<sup>22</sup> For a sense of this argument and its flourish see, e.g., <http://andreasmithisnotcherokee.tumblr.com>, <https://tequilasovereign.wordpress.com/2015/06/30/rachel-dolezal-and-andrea-smith/>, <https://tequilasovereign.wordpress.com/2015/07/02/on-the-politics-of-distraction/>, <https://tequilasovereign.wordpress.com/2015/07/10/questions-and-questioning/>, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/06/30/meet-the-native-american-rachel-dolezal.html>, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/07/07/open-letter-indigenous-women-scholarsregarding-discussions-andrea-smith>, <https://againstpoliticsofdisposability.wordpress.com>

it is no coincidence that I defend the knowledge of poor white people just as Smith defends the knowledge of indigenous women. Yet nowhere in this text do I suggest that certain subject positions are “fundamentally” subversive, or that white working class people should be unique leaders of the revolution. I think that the consensus practices and values of sharing, reciprocity and sincerity among the poor have a *lot* to teach professional middle class activists interested in anarchism, but obviously the “poor” here includes poor people of colour, poor women, poor indigenous people, poor queer people, what-have-you. I am also happy to acknowledge that I can learn something from otherwise oppressed people who are *not* terribly poor, such as Andrea Smith or Frank Wilderson. Our perspectives are always incomplete, and no one category of oppressed person can engulf the knowledge and potential contribution of others. As long as we continue to invent and rank categories of greater innocence and transcendence we are not going to get anywhere. No one can stand above and know the world, so Smith and Wilderson need me as much as I need them. I do hope that everyone I have engaged in dialogue throughout this work appreciates it, even if it sometimes means getting into an argument ;-)

# Epilogue

Has anyone else seen Banksy's "Exit Through the Gift Shop" (2010)? Hopefully I too have my audience walking out wondering who the joke was really on. Elite leftists simply don't want to read critically about themselves as classed subjects, so in order to impress a point one must pander to their self-understandings long enough to lead them into beholding themselves. Then make silly faces at them later.

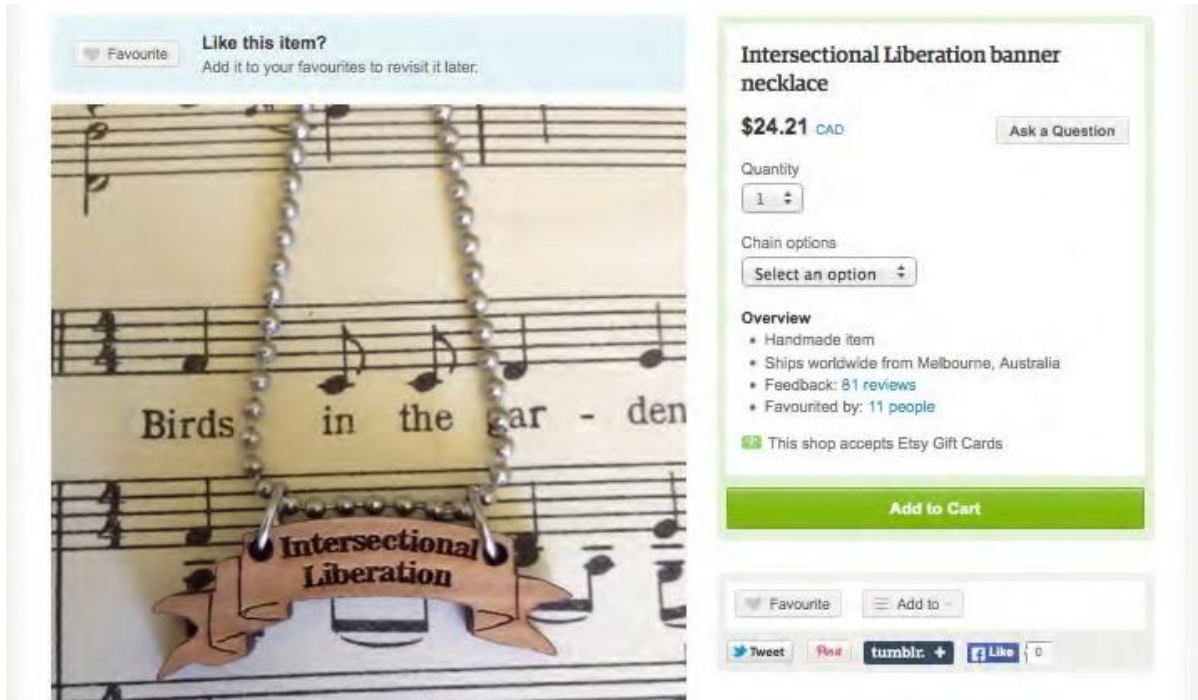
Of course I poke fun at the game knowing that I operate within its parameters. Just enough sarcasm to symbolize a working class self-identity – never in excess. Sarcasm canapés among so much self-reflection. All the while knowing that many readers impressed by my identity-as-property critique are only paying attention in the first place because they grant me the identity-entitlements required to voice such a thing. Make no mistake — this work (and appreciating it) is No Exit. You only exit the game when you put this many hours into listening to the guy at the bus stop, instead of sucking up to Gayatri Spivak, me or any other person who writes books.

Presented primarily as an ethnography of anarchism, this work becomes an ethnography of "intersectionality" and its professionalization, wherein anarchists constitute a limit case. As explained in my introduction, the problem is not that anarchists *in particular* implement "intersectionality" or "anti-racism" in disingenuous ways, but that *even* among anarchists and critical anti-racist feminists, neoliberal structures of value and self-making hold sway. Even theoretical work that should have radical practical implications – everything from Deleuze to bell hooks – is therefore brought to support bids for property instead. The anarchists are behaving too much like academics. The logic of proprietorship is not only replicated within overarching government institutions ("rights"), but is diffuse in cultural forms, affective arrangements, and critical theory as well, from which many anarchists learn.

And yet, while this ethnography has broad import beyond the particular ethnographic case, I should not want to discuss slaughtered Mexicans and poor white people only for the sake of building theory (or displaying my "good politics"). Any ethnographer with *consciencia* should want to avoid using subaltern subjects merely as foils to reflect one's reflexivity. This is of course part of my greater point. And so let us return to Mexico once more.

In early 2014 the state of Michoacan, which had been suffering various constellations of paramilitary violence for years, exploded into a full state of war. Alongside the federal military, state troops, federal police, and miscellaneous other "cartels", a new set of groups emerged on scene, the *autodefensas*. Citizens of towns governed by the narcostate had finally lost their patience when paramilitaries started raping their





**Fig 10 -1:** On the way out everyone is invited to purchase this DIY “intersectional liberation” necklace for the amazing price of only 25 dollars, because it is always better to look like you have “good politics” than it is to actually have them. (A piano in the background is much pricier).

daughters, and armed themselves to form a civilian “self-defense” army (or, perhaps, a rhizomatic network of autonomous “self-defense” armies). But maybe they were just rival cartels dressed up as autonomous resistance movements. Or maybe they were mercenaries working for the government. Or maybe, due to the glorious surrealism of Mexican politics, all three things were true at once. Of course it was hard to tell. But in any case machine gun fire was ripping apart *la tierra caliente* and no one north of the borders was paying much attention, anarchists included.

Rather, the one event related to Mexico organized by activists in Montreal during this period was a fundraiser to cover legal fees incurred by three Canadian anarchists arrested in Mexico. They had supposedly thrown a Molotov cocktail at a car dealership while in Mexico City, and were being held without bail on terrorism charges. Certainly those three anarchists did not deserve to rot in jail, whether or not they actually threw the Molotov, and hey, on another day it could have been me. It’s nice to see that one’s comrades organize to rescue their peers from political imprisonment. But it was disturbing to observe the silence around Michoacan in comparison. Here we have a clearly terrible situation. And an incipient yet powerful resistance movement (maybe) that’s surely “on the front lines of struggle” against imperialist colonialism – the shifting legality of plants vs. “drugs” has always been about managing racialized empire and imperial monopoly, and we must understand the “cartels” in question as making their money from smuggling migrants over the border, selling women and children into sex slavery, and “taxing” Canadian mining companies as much as from moving coke and weed around.<sup>1</sup> Call it “protection money”, call it “tax”, call it “extortion”, either way these “cartels” must be seen as mercenary armies facilitating resource extraction for multinational corporations: The mining companies pay their dues, and in return men armed with heavy artillery scatter people wherever necessary. The resulting situation is a terrible war. More lives have been lost in Mexico in the past decade than in Iraq or Afghanistan or Palestine.

And yet a resounding silence from the anarchist solidarity quarters. The rural *mestizos* of Michoacan really do have it worse than ex-fishermen in Newfoundland, who have considerably fewer machine guns to deal with. Indeed these *mestizos* must be understood some of the biggest losers of the anti-oppression game. After all, it is arguable that the main reason North American lefties are not exalting them as heroes is simply because they are not “indigenous” enough. As one similarly concerned blogger (“Angry White Kid”, U.S.A.) wrote at the time, “What is of concern is the predominant response from the left, where the self-defense groups have received a lukewarm reception at best...For not being indigenous, for not having a comprehensive platform, or for cooperating with the government”. Basically, for not sufficiently resembling Za-

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<sup>1</sup> See Paley (2014) and Scott (2010) regarding the link between narcotics trading, resource extraction, and state power, globally speaking and with regard to Mexico in particular. One of the best sources for up-to-date and fairly reliable information regarding the “narco-war” in Mexico is *Proceso* magazine (Spanish language only).

patistas. And so, from “behind computer screens, those who are dodging the bullets of the Knights

Templar (and occasionally of the state) are patronizingly told what they should be doing.”

Angry White Kid is familiar with what I call the Anti-Oppression Game: The critiques of the *autodefensas* within the U.S. American left are “based on the fact that the self-defense groups are not wholly indigenous and not wholly rural. Instead of embracing the emergence of urban, *mestizo* self-organization, somehow this is held up as a point of criticism.” No wonder other (*mestizo*) bloggers in the United States call upon peers to “Drop the ‘Latino’ and re-Adopt the Indigenous Label for Mixed-Indigenous People”.<sup>2</sup> Yet presumably the same should not apply to (whiter) Quebecois with indigenous greatgrandmothers, or successful academics like Andrea Smith. In order to do well in the Anti-Oppression Game one must make sure to craft revolutionary identities that encompass one’s own while excluding as many other claimants as possible. To effectively challenge neoliberal frontier capitalism the opposite is true.

Of course if solidarity activists were not flocking to Michoacan that year, it wasn’t only because there wasn’t enough traditional dress involved. It was also because they could have been slaughtered, and cred-seeking activists do not desire to risk death for the sake of building their revolutionary CV. And, in the end, it is probably a good thing that naïve *gringo* twenty-somethings did not flock to Michoacan. They would have been a dangerous burden incapable of distinguishing between MULT and MULTI, so to speak. A year later it did come to light that some of the first self-defense groups in Michoacan were, indeed, financed by President Calderón, with the experienced guidance of Colombia’s General Naranjo, who had helped arm the infamous paramilitary *autodefensas* to fight guerilla movements in Colombia.<sup>3</sup> The fact that some, but not all, *autodefensas* leaders in Michoacan were swiftly arrested was the first hint: The government-sponsored ones were left alone, but the autonomous ones that had followed their example were simply not to be permitted.

In any case it is not necessarily clear what “solidarity activists” north of the borders should be doing in regard to the current situation in Mexico. Maybe solidarity, in this case, should mean finding a way to trash the Canadian mining companies operating in Mexico, even if it is considerably more dangerous to chain oneself to their jobsites compared to those of Keystone XL north of the border (see Appendix E for a list of these companies). Or maybe it means helping people escape – putting some action behind that “No One Is Illegal” talk and actually lending someone *your* Social Insurance Number. Maybe it means talking to white fishermen up in Newfoundland, or rather listening to them. Maybe it means building (un)safe-houses for *mestizos* and fishermen alike in rural Quebec, where even poor white people with their “culture of death”

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<sup>2</sup> <https://squinde.wordpress.com/2014/02/25/drop-the-latino-and-re-adopt-the-indigenous-label-this-is-ouridle-no-more-movement/>, accessed March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> See “El fatídico experimento de Peña Nieto” by José Gil Olmos in *Proceso*, March 2015, edición 2000.

succeed in propagating more rhizomatic raspberry bushes than the best of all university students carrying books on “permaculture”.

In the meantime, one of my first readers (featured in Chapter 8 as the Latina who gets away with the “pussy” joke), tells me she has mobilized Chapters 7 and 8 as an “instruction manual” to ply her co-workers into finally letting her into the staff collective of the non-profit where she has worked for years: The whitey co-staff had always been concerned she wouldn’t understand “collective process” (read: consensus process). I am happy to help her know her enemy. As long as this game is going to be in effect, let the rules be known by all!

In the meantime, Wikileaks chooses to target “safe space” in typical bro-dude fashion by liberally citing “free speech”, while subsequent comment threads read: “When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the (rainbow) flag and carrying a gender studies degree”.<sup>4</sup> The boys will always blame feminism, but of course neither feminism nor “intersectionality” are the problem, rather bourgeois property relations are, including those which inspire professional feminists, elite queers, and privileged hacker boyz. In the meantime, the status of “anarchism” is not clear. Is anarchism a movement? A perpetual form of critique? A moral universe? Is this moral universe one that anthropologists and other social scientists should use to structure their studies of power and society? In this ethnography, anarchism is a process, not an object. And it is a process that anthropologists, as well as activists, participate in. As you can see from my own tick-tacking ethnography, I feel ambivalent about anarchism coming to enjoy any overarching theoretical status within the discipline. On the one hand, I wish James Scott (2005; 2013) would properly cite the hundred years of anarchist thinking he has clearly read, so that everyone would know that “anarchist intellectuals” have produced a sophisticated and robust set of theories and practices. Yet on the other I am concerned about yet another Eurocentric, androcentric philosophy coming to structure anthropological theory. It is a tricky question, and a weighty one, because the outcomes are in no way fixed. If I have conveyed uncertainty about what anarchism *is* by the form and content of my ethnography then I am happy, because I think the answer is in no way simple and not to be taken for granted by any activist or anthropologist. I hope that readers understand that *they* are the answer, that what they do will *create* the answer...

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.vocativ.com/news/248373/wikileaks-targets-trigger-warnings-and-safe-spaces/> (accessed March 14, 2016).

# Appendix A

*Ley Revolucionaria de las mujeres/ Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Law*, as published by the EZLN in *El Despertador Mexicano, Organo Informativo del EZLN*, México, No.1, December 1993. The translation below is mine; the original in Spanish can be found at: <https://mujeresylasextaorg.wordpress.com/ley-revolucionaria-demujeres-zapatistas/>. (Accessed March 12, 2016)

**First.** Women, regardless of their race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine.

**Second.** Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.

**Third.** Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.

**Fourth.** Women have the right to participate in matters of the community and hold positions in municipal government [*cargos*] if they are free and democratically elected.

**Fifth.** Women and their children have the right to first attention in their health and nutrition.

**Sixth.** Women have the right to education.

**Seventh.** Women have the right to choose their partners and will not be obligated to enter into marriage.

**Eighth.** Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.

**Ninth.** Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.

**Tenth.** Women will have all the rights and obligations that the [other] revolutionary laws and regulations give.

*La Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona/ The Sixth Declaration from the Lacondon Jungle*, Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), 2005. This English translation can be found at: <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2005/06/30/sixthdeclaration-of-the-selva-lacandona/>. The original can be found at <http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/sdsl-es/> (Accessed March 12, 2016)

*Zapatista Army of National Liberation.*

*Mexico.*

*Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona*

This is our simple word which seeks to touch the hearts of humble and simple people like ourselves, but people who are also, like ourselves, dignified and rebel. This is our simple word for recounting what our path has been and where we are now, in order to

explain how we see the world and our country, in order to say what we are thinking of doing and how we are thinking of doing it, and in order to invite other persons to walk with us in something very great which is called Mexico and something greater which is called the world. This is our simple word in order to inform all honest and noble hearts what it is we want in Mexico and the world. This is our simple word, because it is our idea to call on those who are like us and to join together with them, everywhere they are living and struggling.

## I – What We Are

We are the zapatistas of the EZLN, although we are also called “neo-zapatistas.” Now, we, the zapatistas of the EZLN, rose up in arms in January of 1994 because we saw how widespread had become the evil wrought by the powerful who only humiliated us, stole from us, imprisoned us and killed us, and no one was saying anything or doing anything. That is why we said “Ya Basta!,” that no longer were we going to allow them to make us inferior or to treat us worse than animals. And then we also said we wanted democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexicans although we were concentrated on the Indian peoples. Because it so happened that we, the EZLN, were almost all only indigenous from here in Chiapas, but we did not want to struggle just for own good, or just for the good of the indigenous of Chiapas, or just for the good of the Indian peoples of Mexico. We wanted to fight along with everyone who was humble and simple like ourselves and who was in great need and who suffered from exploitation and thievery by the rich and their bad governments here, in our Mexico, and in other countries in the world.

And then our small history was that we grew tired of exploitation by the powerful, and then we organized in order to defend ourselves and to fight for justice. In the beginning there were not many of us, just a few, going this way and that, talking with and listening to other people like us. We did that for many years, and we did it in secret, without making a stir. In other words, we joined forces in silence. We remained like that for about 10 years, and then we had grown, and then we were many thousands. We trained ourselves quite well in politics and weapons, and, suddenly, when the rich were throwing their New Year’s Eve parties, we fell upon their cities and just took them over. And we left a message to everyone that here we are, that they have to take notice of us. And then the rich took off and sent their great armies to do away with us, just like they always do when the exploited rebel – they order them all to be done away with. But we were not done away with at all, because we had prepared ourselves quite well prior to the war, and we made ourselves strong in our mountains. And there were the armies, looking for us and throwing their bombs and bullets at us, and then they were making plans to kill off all the indigenous at one time, because they did not know who was a zapatista and who was not. And we were running and fighting,

fighting and running, just like our ancestors had done. Without giving up, without surrendering, without being defeated.

And then the people from the cities went out into the streets and began shouting for an end to the war. And then we stopped our war, and we listened to those brothers and sisters from the city who were telling us to try to reach an arrangement or an accord with the bad governments, so that the problem could be resolved without a massacre. And so we paid attention to them, because they were what we call “the people,” or the Mexican people. And so we set aside the fire and took up the word.

And it so happened that the governments said they would indeed be well-behaved, and they would engage in dialogue, and they would make accords, and they would fulfill them. And we said that was good, but we also thought it was good that we knew those people who went out into the streets in order to stop the war. Then, while we were engaging in dialogue with the bad governments, we were also talking with those persons, and we saw that most of them were humble and simple people like us, and both, they and we, understood quite well why we were fighting. And we called those people “civil society” because most of them did not belong to political parties, rather they were common, everyday people, like us, simple and humble people.

But it so happened that the bad governments did not want a good agreement, rather it was just their underhanded way of saying they were going to talk and to reach accords, while they were preparing their attacks in order to eliminate us once and for all. And so then they attacked us several times, but they did not defeat us, because we resisted quite well, and many people throughout the world mobilized. And then the bad governments thought that the problem was that many people saw what was happening with the EZLN, and they started their plan of acting as if nothing were going on. Meanwhile they were quick to surround us, they laid siege to us in hopes that, since our mountains are indeed remote, the people would then forget, since zapatista lands were so far away. And every so often the bad governments tested us and tried to deceive us or to attack us, like in February of 1995 when they threw a huge number of armies at us, but they did not defeat us. Because, as they said then, we were not alone, and many people helped us, and we resisted well.

And then the bad governments had to make accords with the EZLN, and those accords were called the “San Andrés Accords” because the municipality where those accords were signed was called “San Andrés.” And we were not all alone in those dialogues, speaking with people from the bad governments. We invited many people and organizations who were, or are, engaged in the struggle for the Indian peoples of Mexico, and everyone spoke their word, and everyone reached agreement as to how we were going to speak with the bad governments. And that is how that dialogue was, not just the zapatistas on one side and the governments on the other. Instead, the Indian peoples of Mexico, and those who supported them, were with the zapatistas. And then the bad governments said in those accords that they were indeed going to recognize the rights of the Indian peoples of Mexico, and they were going to respect their culture, and they were going to make everything law in the Constitution. But

then, once they had signed, the bad governments acted as if they had forgotten about them, and many years passed, and the accords were not fulfilled at all. Quite the opposite, the government attacked the indigenous, in order to make them back out of the struggle, as they did on December 22, 1997, the date on which Zedillo ordered the killing of 45 men, women, old ones and children in the town in Chiapas called ACTEAL. This immense crime was not so easily forgotten, and it was a demonstration of how the bad governments color their hearts in order to attack and assassinate those who rebel against injustices. And, while all of that was going on, we zapatistas were putting our all into the fulfillment of the accords and resisting in the mountains of the Mexican southeast.

And then we began speaking with other Indian peoples of Mexico and their organizations, and we made an agreement with them that we were going to struggle together for the same thing, for the recognition of indigenous rights and culture. Now we were also being helped by many people from all over the world and by persons who were well respected and whose word was quite great because they were great intellectuals, artists and scientists from Mexico and from all over the world. And we also held international encuentros. In other words, we joined together to talk with persons from America and from Asia and from Europe and from Africa and from Oceania, and we learned of their struggles and their ways, and we said they were “intergalactic” encuentros, just to be silly and because we had also invited those from other planets, but it appeared as if they had not come, or perhaps they did come, but they did not make it clear.

But the bad governments did not keep their word anyway, and then we made a plan to talk with many Mexicans so they would help us. And then, first in 1997, we held a march to Mexico City which was called “of the 1,111” because a compañero or compañera was going to go from each zapatista town, but the bad government did not pay any attention.

And then, in 1999, we held a consulta throughout the country, and there it was seen that the majority were indeed in agreement with the demands of the Indian peoples, but again the bad governments did not pay any attention. And then, lastly, in 2001, we held what was called the “march for indigenous dignity” which had much support from millions of Mexicans and people from other countries, and it went to where the deputies and senators were, the Congress of the Union, in order to demand the recognition of the Mexican indigenous.

But it happened that no, the politicians from the PRI, the PAN and the PRD reached an agreement among themselves, and they simply did not recognize indigenous rights and culture. That was in April of 2001, and the politicians demonstrated quite clearly there that they had no decency whatsoever, and they were swine who thought only about making their good money as the bad politicians they were. This must be remembered, because you will now be seeing that they are going to say they will indeed recognize indigenous rights, but it is a lie they are telling so we will vote for them. But they already had their chance, and they did not keep their word.



And then we saw quite clearly that there was no point to dialogue and negotiation with the bad governments of Mexico. That it was a waste of time for us to be talking with the politicians, because neither their hearts nor their words were honest. They were crooked, and they told lies that they would keep their word, but they did not. In other words, on that day, when the politicians from the PRI, PAN and PRD approved a law that was no good, they killed dialogue once and for all, and they clearly stated that it did not matter what they had agreed to and signed, because they did not keep their word. And then we did not make any contacts with the federal branches. Because we understood that dialogue and negotiation had failed as a result of those political parties. We saw that blood did not matter to them, nor did death, suffering, mobilizations, consultas, efforts, national and international statements, encuentros, accords, signatures, commitments. And so the political class not only closed, one more time, the door to the Indian peoples, they also delivered a mortal blow to the peaceful resolution – through dialogue and negotiation – of the war. It can also no longer be believed that the accords will be fulfilled by someone who comes along with something or other. They should see that there so that they can learn from experience what happened to us.

And then we saw all of that, and we wondered in our hearts what we were going to do. And the first thing we saw was that our heart was not the same as before, when we began our struggle. It was larger, because now we had touched the hearts of many good people. And we also saw that our heart was more hurt, it was more wounded. And it was not wounded by the deceits of the bad governments, but because, when we touched the hearts of others, we also touched their sorrows. It was as if we were seeing ourselves in a mirror.

## II. – Where We Are Now

Then, like the zapatistas we are, we thought that it was not enough to stop engaging in dialogue with the government, but it was necessary to continue on ahead in the struggle, in spite of those lazy parasites of politicians. The EZLN then decided to carry out, alone and on their side (“unilateral”, in other words, because just one side), the San Andrés Accords regarding indigenous rights and culture. For 4 years, since the middle of 2001 until the middle of 2005, we have devoted ourselves to this and to other things which we are going to tell you about.

Fine, we then began encouraging the autonomous rebel zapatista municipalities – which is how the peoples are organized in order to govern and to govern themselves – in order to make themselves stronger. This method of autonomous government was not simply invented by the EZLN, but rather it comes from several centuries of indigenous resistance and from the zapatistas’ own experience. It is the self-governance of the communities. In other words, no one from outside comes to govern, but the peoples themselves decide, among themselves, who governs and how, and, if they do not obey,

they are removed. If the one who governs does not obey the people, they pursue them, they are removed from authority, and another comes in.

But then we saw that the Autonomous Municipalities were not level. There were some that were more advanced and which had more support from civil society, and others were more neglected. The organization was lacking to make them more on a par with each other. And we also saw that the EZLN, with its political-military component, was involving itself in decisions which belonged to the democratic authorities, “civilians” as they say. And here the problem is that the political-military component of the EZLN is not democratic, because it is an army. And we saw that the military being above, and the democratic below, was not good, because what is democratic should not be decided militarily, it should be the reverse: the democratic-political governing above, and the military obeying below. Or, perhaps, it would be better with nothing below, just completely level, without any military, and that is why the zapatistas are soldiers so that there will not be any soldiers. Fine, what we then did about this problem was to begin separating the political-military from the autonomous and democratic aspects of organization in the zapatista communities. And so, actions and decisions which had previously been made and taken by the EZLN were being passed, little by little, to the democratically elected authorities in the villages. It is easy to say, of course, but it was very difficult in practice, because many years have passed – first in the preparation for the war and then the war itself – and the political-military aspects have become customary. But, regardless, we did so because it is our way to do what we say, because, if not, why should we go around saying things if we do not then do them.

That was how the Good Government Juntas were born, in August of 2003, and, through them, self-learning and the exercise of “govern obeying” has continued.

From that time and until the middle of 2005, the EZLN leadership has no longer involved itself in giving orders in civil matters, but it has accompanied and helped the authorities who are democratically elected by the peoples. It has also kept watch that the peoples and national and international civil society are kept well informed concerning the aid that is received and how it is used. And now we are passing the work of safeguarding good government to the zapatista support bases, with temporary positions which are rotated, so that everyone learns and carries out this work. Because we believe that a people which does not watch over its leaders is condemned to be enslaved, and we fought to be free, not to change masters every six years.

The EZLN, during these 4 years, also handed over to the Good Government Juntas and the Autonomous Municipalities the aid and contacts which they had attained throughout Mexico and the world during these years of war and resistance. The EZLN had also, during that time, been building economic and political support which allowed the zapatista communities to make progress with fewer difficulties in the building of their autonomy and in improving their living conditions. It is not much, but it is far better than what they had prior to the beginning of the uprising in January of 1994. If you look at one of those studies the governments make, you will see that the only indigenous communities which have improved their living conditions – whether

in health, education, food or housing – were those which are in zapatista territory, which is what we call where our villages are. And all of that has been possible because of the progress made by the zapatista villages and because of the very large support which has been received from good and noble persons, whom we call “civil societies,” and from their organizations throughout the world. As if all of these people have made “another world is possible” a reality, but through actions, not just words.

And the villages have made good progress. Now there are more *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are learning to govern. And – even though little by little – there are more women going into this work, but there is still a lack of respect for the *compañeras*, and they need to participate more in the work of the struggle. And, also through the Good Government Juntas, coordination has been improved between the Autonomous Municipalities and the resolution of problems with other organizations and with the official authorities. There has also been much improvement in the projects in the communities, and the distribution of projects and aid given by civil society from all over the world has become more level. Health and education have improved, although there is still a good deal lacking for it to be what it should be. The same is true for housing and food, and in some areas there has been much improvement with the problem of land, because the lands recovered from the *finqueros* are being distributed. But there are areas which continue to suffer from a lack of lands to cultivate. And there has been great improvement in the support from national and international civil society, because previously everyone went wherever they wanted, and now the Good Government Juntas are directing them to where the greatest need exists. And, similarly, everywhere there are more *compañeros* and *compañeras* who are learning to relate to persons from other parts of Mexico and of the world. They are learning to respect and to demand respect. They are learning that there are many worlds, and that everyone has their place, their time and their way, and therefore there must be mutual respect between everyone.

We, the zapatistas of the EZLN, have devoted this time to our primary force, to the peoples who support us. And the situation has indeed improved some. No one can say that the zapatista organization and struggle has been without point, but rather, even if they were to do away with us completely, our struggle has indeed been of some use. But it is not just the zapatista villages which have grown – the EZLN has also grown. Because what has happened during this time is that new generations have renewed our entire organization. They have added new strength. The *comandantes* and *comandantas* who were in their maturity at the beginning of the uprising in 1994 now have the wisdom they gained in the war and in the 12 years of dialogue with thousands of men and women from throughout the world. The members of the CCRI, the zapatista politicalorganizational leadership, is now counseling and directing the new ones who are entering our struggle, as well as those who are holding leadership positions. For some time now the “committees” (which is what we call them) have been preparing an entire new generation of *comandantes* and *comandantas* who, following a period of instruction and testing, are beginning to learn the work of organizational

leadership and to discharge their duties. And it also so happens that our insurgents, insurgentas, militants, local and regional responsables, as well as support bases, who were youngsters at the beginning of the uprising, are now mature men and women, combat veterans and natural leaders in their units and communities. And those who were children in that January of '94 are now young people who have grown up in the resistance, and they have been trained in the rebel dignity lifted up by their elders throughout these 12 years of war. These young people have a political, technical and cultural training that we who began the zapatista movement did not have. This youth is now, more and more, sustaining our troops as well as leadership positions in the organization. And, indeed, all of us have seen the deceits by the Mexican political class and the destruction which their actions have caused in our patria. And we have seen the great injustices and massacres that neoliberal globalization causes throughout the world. But we will speak to you of that later.

And so the EZLN has resisted 12 years of war, of military, political, ideological and economic attacks, of siege, of harassment, of persecution, and they have not vanquished us. We have not sold out nor surrendered, and we have made progress. More compañeros from many places have entered into the struggle so that, instead of making us weaker after so many years, we have become stronger. Of course there are problems which can be resolved by more separation of the political-military from the civil-democratic. But there are things, the most important ones, such as our demands for which we struggle, which have not been fully achieved.

To our way of thinking, and what we see in our heart, we have reached a point where we cannot go any further, and, in addition, it is possible that we could lose everything we have if we remain as we are and do nothing more in order to move forward. The hour has come to take a risk once again and to take a step which is dangerous but which is worthwhile. Because, perhaps united with other social sectors who suffer from the same wants as we do, it will be possible to achieve what we need and what we deserve. A new step forward in the indigenous struggle is only possible if the indigenous join together with workers, campesinos, students, teachers, employees...the workers of the city and the countryside.

### **III – How We See the World**

Now we are going to explain to you how we, the zapatistas, see what is going on in the world. We see that capitalism is the strongest right now. Capitalism is a social system, a way in which a society goes about organizing things and people, and who has and who has not, and who gives orders and who obeys. In capitalism, there are some people who have money, or capital, and factories and stores and fields and many things, and there are others who have nothing but their strength and knowledge in order to work. In capitalism, those who have money and things give the orders, and those who only have their ability to work obey.

Then capitalism means that there a few who have great wealth, but they did not win a prize, or find a treasure, or inherited from a parent. They obtained that wealth, rather, by exploiting the work of the many. So capitalism is based on the exploitation of the workers, which means they exploit the workers and take out all the profits they can. This is done unjustly, because they do not pay the worker what his work is worth. Instead they give him a salary that barely allows him to eat a little and to rest for a bit, and the next day he goes back to work in exploitation, whether in the countryside or in the city. And capitalism also makes its wealth from plunder, or theft, because they take what they want from others, land, for example, and natural resources. So capitalism is a system where the robbers are free and they are admired and used as examples.

And, in addition to exploiting and plundering, capitalism represses because it imprisons and kills those who rebel against injustice.

Capitalism is most interested in merchandise, because when it is bought or sold, profits are made. And then capitalism turns everything into merchandise, it makes merchandise of people, of nature, of culture, of history, of conscience. According to capitalism, everything must be able to be bought and sold. And it hides everything behind the merchandise, so we don't see the exploitation that exists. And then the merchandise is bought and sold in a market. And the market, in addition to being used for buying and selling, is also used to hide the exploitation of the workers. In the market, for example, we see coffee in its little package or its pretty little jar, but we do not see the campesino who suffered in order to harvest the coffee, and we do not see the coyote who paid him so cheaply for his work, and we do not see the workers in the large company working their hearts out to package the coffee. Or we see an appliance for listening to music like cumbias, rancheras or corridos, or whatever, and we see that it is very good because it has a good sound, but we do not see the worker in the maquiladora who struggled for many hours, putting the cables and the parts of the appliance together, and they barely paid her a pittance of money, and she lives far away from work and spends a lot on the trip, and, in addition, she runs the risk of being kidnapped, raped and killed as happens in Ciudad Juárez in Mexico.

So we see merchandise in the market, but we do not see the exploitation with which it was made. And then capitalism needs many markets...or a very large market, a world market.

And so the capitalism of today is not the same as before, when the rich were content with exploiting the workers in their own countries, but now they are on a path which is called Neoliberal Globalization. This globalization means that they no longer control the workers in one or several countries, but the capitalists are trying to dominate everything all over the world. And the world, or Planet Earth, is also called the "globe", and that is why they say "globalization," or the entire world.

And neoliberalism is the idea that capitalism is free to dominate the entire world, and so tough, you have to resign yourself and conform and not make a fuss, in other words, not rebel. So neoliberalism is like the theory, the plan, of capitalist globalization.

And neoliberalism has its economic, political, military and cultural plans. All of those plans have to do with dominating everyone, and they repress or separate anyone who doesn't obey so that his rebellious ideas aren't passed on to others.

Then, in neoliberal globalization, the great capitalists who live in the countries which are powerful, like the United States, want the entire world to be made into a big business where merchandise is produced like a great market. A world market for buying and selling the entire world and for hiding all the exploitation from the world. Then the global capitalists insert themselves everywhere, in all the countries, in order to do their big business, their great exploitation. Then they respect nothing, and they meddle wherever they wish. As if they were conquering other countries. That is why we zapatistas say that neoliberal globalization is a war of conquest of the entire world, a world war, a war being waged by capitalism for global domination. Sometimes that conquest is by armies who invade a country and conquer it by force. But sometimes it is with the economy, in other words, the big capitalists put their money into another country or they lend it money, but on the condition that they obey what they tell them to do. And they also insert their ideas, with the capitalist culture which is the culture of merchandise, of profits, of the market.

Then the one which wages the conquest, capitalism, does as it wants, it destroys and changes what it does not like and eliminates what gets in its way. For example, those who do not produce nor buy nor sell modern merchandise get in their way, or those who rebel against that order. And they despise those who are of no use to them. That is why the indigenous get in the way of neoliberal capitalism, and that is why they despise them and want to eliminate them. And neoliberal capitalism also gets rid of the laws which do not allow them to exploit and to have a lot of profit. They demand that everything can be bought and sold, and, since capitalism has all the money, it buys everything. Capitalism destroys the countries it conquers with neoliberal globalization, but it also wants to adapt everything, to make it over again, but in its own way, a way which benefits capitalism and which doesn't allow anything to get in its way. Then neoliberal globalization, capitalism, destroys what exists in these countries, it destroys their culture, their language, their economic system, their political system, and it also destroys the ways in which those who live in that country relate to each other. So everything that makes a country a country is left destroyed.

Then neoliberal globalization wants to destroy the nations of the world so that only one Nation or country remains, the country of money, of capital. And capitalism wants everything to be as it wants, in its own way, and it doesn't like what is different, and it persecutes it and attacks it, or puts it off in a corner and acts as if it doesn't exist. Then, in short, the capitalism of global neoliberalism is based on exploitation, plunder, contempt and repression of those who refuse. The same as before, but now globalized, worldwide.

But it is not so easy for neoliberal globalization, because the exploited of each country become discontented, and they will not say well, too bad, instead they rebel. And those who remain and who are in the way resist, and they don't allow themselves

to be eliminated. And that is why we see, all over the world, those who are being screwed over making resistances, not putting up with it, in other words, they rebel, and not just in one country but wherever they abound. And so, as there is a neoliberal globalization, there is a globalization of rebellion.

And it is not just the workers of the countryside and of the city who appear in this globalization of rebellion, but others also appear who are much persecuted and despised for the same reason, for not letting themselves be dominated, like women, young people, the indigenous, homosexuals, lesbians, transsexual persons, migrants and many other groups who exist all over the world but who we do not see until they shout *ya basta* of being despised, and they raise up, and then we see them, we hear them, and we learn from them.

And then we see that all those groups of people are fighting against neoliberalism, against the capitalist globalization plan, and they are struggling for humanity.

And we are astonished when we see the stupidity of the neoliberals who want to destroy all humanity with their wars and exploitations, but it also makes us quite happy to see resistances and rebellions appearing everywhere, such as ours, which is a bit small, but here we are. And we see this all over the world, and now our heart learns that we are not alone.

## **IV – How We See Our Country Which is Mexico**

Now we will talk to you about how we see what is going on in our Mexico. What we see is our country being governed by neoliberals. So, as we already explained, our leaders are destroying our nation, our Mexican Patria. And the work of these bad leaders is not to look after the well-being of the people, instead they are only concerned with the wellbeing of the capitalists. For example, they make laws like the Free Trade Agreement, which end up leaving many Mexicans destitute, like campesinos and small producers, because they are “gobbled up” by the big agro-industrial companies. As well as workers and small businesspeople, because they cannot compete with the large transnationals who come in without anybody saying anything to them and even thanking them, and they set their low salaries and their high prices. So some of the economic foundations of our Mexico, which were the countryside and industry and national commerce, are being quite destroyed, and just a bit of rubble – which they are certainly going to sell off – remains. And these are great disgraces for our Patria. Because food is no longer being produced in our countryside, just what the big capitalists sell, and the good lands are being stolen through trickery and with the help of the politicians. What is happening in the countryside is the same as Porfirismo, but, instead of hacendados, now there are a few foreign businesses which have well and truly screwed the campesino. And, where before there were credits and price protections, now there is just charity...and sometimes not even that.

As for the worker in the city, the factories close, and they are left without work, or they open what are called maquiladoras, which are foreign and which pay a pittance for many hours of work. And then the price of the goods the people need doesn't matter, whether they are expensive or cheap, since there is no money. And if someone was working in a small or midsize business, now they are not, because it was closed, and it was bought by a big transnational. And if someone had a small business, it disappeared as well, or they went to work clandestinely for big businesses which exploit them terribly, and which even put boys and girls to work. And if the worker belonged to his union in order to demand his legal rights, then no, now the same union tells him he will have to put up with his salary being lowered or his hours or his benefits being taken away, because, if not, the business will close and move to another country. And then there is the "microchangarro," which is the government's economic program for putting all the city's workers on street corners selling gum or telephone cards. In other words, absolute economic destruction in the cities as well.

And then what happens is that, with the people's economy being totally screwed in the countryside as well as in the city, then many Mexican men and women have to leave their Patria, Mexican lands, and go to seek work in another country, the United States. And they do not treat them well there, instead they exploit them, persecute them and treat them with contempt and even kill them. Under neoliberalism which is being imposed by the bad governments, the economy has not improved. Quite the opposite, the countryside is in great need, and there is no work in the cities. What is happening is that Mexico is being turned into a place where people are working for the wealth of foreigners, mostly rich gringos, a place you are just born into for a little while, and in another little while you die. That is why we say that Mexico is dominated by the United States.

Now, it is not just that. Neoliberalism has also changed the Mexican political class, the politicians, because they made them into something like employees in a store, who have to do everything possible to sell everything and to sell it very cheap. You have already seen that they changed the laws in order to remove Article 27 from the Constitution so that ejidal and communal lands could be sold. That was Salinas de Gortari, and he and his gangs said that it was for the good of the countryside and the campesino, and that was how they would prosper and live better. Has it been like that? The Mexican countryside is worse than ever and the campesinos more screwed than under Porfirio Diaz. And they also say they are going to privatize – sell to foreigners – the companies held by the State to help the well-being of the people. Because the companies don't work well and they need to be modernized, and it would be better to sell them. But, instead of improving, the social rights which were won in the revolution of 1910 now make one sad...and courageous. And they also said that the borders must be opened so all the foreign capital can enter, that way all the Mexican businesses will be fixed, and things will be made better. But now we see that there are not any national businesses, the foreigners gobbled them all up, and the things that are sold are worse than the those that were made in Mexico.



And now the Mexican politicians also want to sell PEMEX, the oil which belongs to all Mexicans, and the only difference is that some say everything should be sold and others that only a part of it should be sold. And they also want to privatize social security, and electricity and water and the forests and everything, until nothing of Mexico is left, and our country will be a wasteland or a place of entertainment for rich people from all over the world, and we Mexican men and women will be their servants, dependent on what they offer, bad housing, without roots, without culture, without even a Patria.

So the neoliberals want to kill Mexico, our Mexican Patria. And the political parties not only do not defend it, they are the first to put themselves at the service of foreigners, especially those from the United States, and they are the ones who are in charge of deceiving us, making us look the other way while everything is sold, and they are left with the money. All the political parties that exist right now, not just some of them. Think about whether anything has been done well, and you will see that no, nothing but theft and scams. And look how all the politicians always have their nice houses and their nice cars and luxuries. And they still want us to thank them and to vote for them again. And it is obvious, as they say, that they are without shame. And they are without it because they do not, in fact, have a Patria, they only have bank accounts.

And we also see that drug trafficking and crime has been increasing a lot. And sometimes we think that criminals are like they show them in the songs or movies, and maybe some are like that, but not the real chiefs. The real chiefs go around very well dressed, they study outside the country, they are elegant, they do not go around in hiding, they eat in good restaurants and they appear in the papers, very pretty and well dressed at their parties. They are, as they say, “good people”, and some are even officials, deputies, senators, secretaries of state, prosperous businessmen, police chiefs, generals.

Are we saying that politics serves no purpose? No, what we mean is that THAT politics serves no purpose. And it is useless because it does not take the people into account. It does not listen to them, it does not pay any attention to them, it just approaches them when there are elections. And they do not even want votes anymore, the polls are enough to say who wins. And then just promises about what this one is going to do and what the other one is going to do, then it's bye, I'll see you, but you don't see them again, except when they appear in the news when they've just stolen a lot of money and nothing is going to be done to them because the law – which those same politicians made – protects them.

Because that's another problem, the Constitution is all warped and changed now. It's no longer the one that had the rights and liberties of working people. Now there are the rights and liberties of the neoliberals so they can have their huge profits. And the judges exist to serve those neoliberals, because they always rule in favor of them, and those who are not rich get injustice, jails and cemeteries.

Well, even with all this mess the neoliberals are making, there are Mexican men and women who are organizing and making a resistance struggle.

And so we found out that there are indigenous, that their lands are far away from us here in Chiapas, and they are making their autonomy and defending their culture and caring for their land, forests and water.

And there are workers in the countryside, campesinos, who are organizing and holding their marches and mobilizations in order to demand credits and aid for the countryside.

And there are workers in the city who do not let their rights be taken away or their jobs privatized. They protest and demonstrate so the little they have isn't taken away from them and so they don't take away from the country what is, in fact, its own, like electricity, oil, social security, education.

And there are students who don't let education be privatized and who are fighting for it to be free and popular and scientific, so they don't charge, so everyone can learn, and so they don't teach stupid things in schools.

And there are women who do not let themselves be treated as an ornament or be humiliated and despised just for being women, but who are organizing and fighting for the respect they deserve as the women they are.

And there are young people who don't accept their stultifying them with drugs or persecuting them for their way of being, but who make themselves aware with their music and their culture, their rebellion.

And there are homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals and many ways who do not put up with being ridiculed, despised, mistreated and even killed for having another way which is different, with being treated like they are abnormal or criminals, but who make their own organizations in order to defend their right to be different.

And there are priests and nuns and those they call laypeople who are not with the rich and who are not resigned, but who are organizing to accompany the struggles of the people.

And there are those who are called social activists, who are men and women who have been fighting all their lives for exploited people, and they are the same ones who participated in the great strikes and workers' actions, in the great citizens' mobilizations, in the great campesino movements, and who suffer great repression, and who, even though some are old now, continue on without surrendering, and they go everywhere, looking for the struggle, seeking justice, and making leftist organizations, nongovernmental organizations, human rights organizations, organizations in defense of political prisoners and for the disappeared, leftist publications, organizations of teachers or students, social struggle, and even political-military organizations, and they are just not quiet and they know a lot because they have seen a lot and lived and struggled. And so we see in general that in our country, which is called Mexico, there are many people who do not put up with things, who do not surrender, who do not sell out. Who are dignified. And that makes us very pleased and happy, because with all those people it's not going to be so easy for the neoliberals to win, and perhaps it will be possible to save our Patria from the great thefts and destruction they are doing. And we think that perhaps our "we" will include all those rebellions...

## V – What We Want To Do

We are now going to tell you what we want to do in the world and in Mexico, because we cannot watch everything that is happening on our planet and just remain quiet, as if it were only we were where we are.

What we want in the world is to tell all of those who are resisting and fighting in their own ways and in their own countries, that you are not alone, that we, the zapatistas, even though we are very small, are supporting you, and we are going to look at how to help you in your struggles and to speak to you in order to learn, because what we have, in fact, learned is to learn.

And we want to tell the Latin American peoples that we are proud to be a part of you, even if it is a small part. We remember quite well how the continent was also illuminated some years ago, and a light was called Che Guevara, as it had previously been called Bolivar, because sometimes the people take up a name in order to say they are taking up a flag.

And we want to tell the people of Cuba, who have now been on their path of resistance for many years, that you are not alone, and we do not agree with the blockade they are imposing, and we are going to see how to send you something, even if it is maize, for your resistance. And we want to tell the North American people that we know that the bad governments which you have and which spread harm throughout the world is one thing – and those North Americans who struggle in their country, and who are in solidarity with the struggles of other countries, are a very different thing. And we want to tell the Mapuche brothers and sisters in Chile that we are watching and learning from your struggles. And to the Venezuelans, we see how well you are defending your sovereignty, your nation's right to decide where it is going. And to the indigenous brothers and sisters of Ecuador and Bolivia, we say you are giving a good lesson in history to all of Latin America, because now you are indeed putting a halt to neoliberal globalization. And to the piqueteros and to the young people of Argentina, we want to tell you that, that we love you. And to those in Uruguay who want a better country, we admire you. And to those who are sin tierra in Brazil, that we respect you. And to all the young people of Latin America, that what you are doing is good, and you give us great hope.

And we want to tell the brothers and sisters of Social Europe, that which is dignified and rebel, that you are not alone. That your great movements against the neoliberal wars bring us joy. That we are attentively watching your forms of organization and your methods of struggle so that we can perhaps learn something. That we are considering how we can help you in your struggles, and we are not going to send euro because then they will be devalued because of the European Union mess. But perhaps we will send you crafts and coffee so you can market them and help you some in the tasks of your struggle. And perhaps we might also send you some pozol, which gives much strength in the resistance, but who knows if we will send it to you, because pozol is

more our way, and what if it were to hurt your bellies and weaken your struggles and the neoliberals defeat you.

And we want to tell the brothers and sisters of Africa, Asia and Oceania that we know that you are fighting also, and we want to learn more of your ideas and practices.

And we want to tell the world that we want to make you large, so large that all those worlds will fit, those worlds which are resisting because they want to destroy the neoliberals and because they simply cannot stop fighting for humanity.

Now then, what we want to do in Mexico is to make an agreement with persons and organizations just of the left, because we believe that it is in the political left where the idea of resisting neoliberal globalization is, and of making a country where there will be justice, democracy and liberty for everyone. Not as it is right now, where there is justice only for the rich, there is liberty only for their big businesses, and there is democracy only for painting walls with election propaganda. And because we believe that it is only from the left that a plan of struggle can emerge, so that our Patria, which is Mexico, does not die.

And, then, what we think is that, with these persons and organizations of the left, we will make a plan for going to all those parts of Mexico where there are humble and simple people like ourselves.

And we are not going to tell them what they should do or give them orders.

Nor are we going to ask them to vote for a candidate, since we already know that the ones who exist are neoliberals.

Nor are we going to tell them to be like us, nor to rise up in arms.

What we are going to do is to ask them what their lives are like, their struggle, their thoughts about our country and what we should do so they do not defeat us.

What we are going to do is to take heed of the thoughts of the simple and humble people, and perhaps we will find there the same love which we feel for our Patria.

And perhaps we will find agreement between those of us who are simple and humble and, together, we will organize all over the country and reach agreement in our struggles, which are alone right now, separated from each other, and we will find something like a program that has what we all want, and a plan for how we are going to achieve the realization of that program, which is called the “national program of struggle.”

And, with the agreement of the majority of those people whom we are going to listen to, we will then engage in a struggle with everyone, with indigenous, workers, campesinos, students, teachers, employees, women, children, old ones, men, and with all of those of good heart and who want to struggle so that our Patria called Mexico does not end up being destroyed and sold, and which still exists between the Rio Grande and the Rio Suchiate and which has the Pacific Ocean on one side and the Atlantic on the other.

## VI – How We Are Going To Do It

And so this is our simple word that goes out to the humble and simple people of Mexico and of the world, and we are calling our word of today: Sixth Declaration of the Selva

Lacandona

And we are here to say, with our simple word, that...

The EZLN maintains its commitment to an offensive ceasefire, and it will not make any attack against government forces or any offensive military movements.

The EZLN still maintains its commitment to insisting on the path of political struggle through this peaceful initiative which we are now undertaking. The EZLN continues, therefore, in its resolve to not establish any kind of secret relations with either national political-military organizations or those from other countries.

The EZLN reaffirms its commitment to defend, support and obey the zapatista indigenous communities of which it is composed, and which are its supreme command, and – without interfering in their internal democratic processes – will, to the best of its abilities, contribute to the strengthening of their autonomy, good government and improvement in their living conditions. In other words, what we are going to do in Mexico and in the world, we are going to do without arms, with a civil and peaceful movement, and without neglecting nor ceasing to support our communities.

Therefore...

In the World...

1. – We will forge new relationships of mutual respect and support with persons and organizations who are resisting and struggling against neoliberalism and for humanity.
2. – As far as we are able, we will send material aid such as food and handicrafts for those brothers and sisters who are struggling all over the world.

In order to begin, we are going to ask the Good Government Junta of La Realidad to loan their truck, which is called “Chompiras,” and which appears to hold 8 tons, and we are going to fill it with maize and perhaps two 200 liter cans with oil or petrol, as they prefer, and we are going to deliver it to the Cuban Embassy in Mexico for them to send to the Cuban people as aid from the zapatistas for their resistance against the North American blockade. Or perhaps there might be a place closer to here where it could be delivered, because it’s always such a long distance to Mexico City, and what if “Chompiras” were to break down and we’d end up in bad shape. And that will happen when the harvest comes in, which is turning green right now in the fields, and if they don’t attack us, because if we were to send it during these next few months, it would be nothing but corncobs, and they don’t turn out well even in tamales, better in November or December, it depends.

And we are also going to make an agreement with the women's crafts cooperatives in order to send a good number of bordados, embroidered pieces, to the Europes which are perhaps not yet Union, and perhaps we'll also send some organic coffee from the zapatista cooperatives, so that they can sell it and get a little money for their struggle. And, if it isn't sold, then they can always have a little cup of coffee and talk about the anti-neoliberal struggle, and if it's a bit cold then they can cover themselves up with the zapatista bordados, which do indeed resist quite well being laundered by hand and by rocks, and, besides, they don't run in the wash.

And we are also going to send the indigenous brothers and sisters of Bolivia and Ecuador some non-transgenic maize, and we just don't know where to send them so they arrive complete, but we are indeed willing to give this little bit of aid.

1. – And to all of those who are resisting throughout the world, we say there must be other intercontinental encuentros held, even if just one other. Perhaps December of this year or next January, we'll have to think about it. We don't want to say just when, because this is about our agreeing equally on everything, on where, on when, on how, on who. But not with a stage where just a few speak and all the rest listen, but without a stage, just level and everyone speaking, but orderly, otherwise it will just be a hubbub and the words won't be understood, and with good organization everyone will hear and jot down in their notebooks the words of resistance from others, so then everyone can go and talk with their compañeros and compañeras in their worlds. And we think it might be in a place that has a very large jail, because what if they were to repress us and incarcerate us, and so that way we wouldn't be all piled up, prisoners, yes, but well organized, and there in the jail we could continue the intercontinental encuentros for humanity and against neoliberalism. Later on we'll tell you what we shall do in order to reach agreement as to how we're going to come to agreement. Now that is how we're thinking of doing what we want to do in the world. Now follows...

In Mexico...

1. – We are going to continue fighting for the Indian peoples of Mexico, but now not just for them and not with only them, but for all the exploited and dispossessed of Mexico, with all of them and all over the country. And when we say all the exploited of Mexico, we are also talking about the brothers and sisters who have had to go to the United States in search of work in order to survive.
2. – We are going to go to listen to, and talk directly with, without intermediaries or mediation, the simple and humble of the Mexican people, and, according to what we hear and learn, we are going to go about building, along with those people who, like us, are humble and simple, a national program of struggle, but a program which will be clearly of the left, or anti-capitalist, or anti-neoliberal, or for justice, democracy and liberty for the Mexican people.

3. – We are going to try to build, or rebuild, another way of doing politics, one which once again has the spirit of serving others, without material interests, with sacrifice, with dedication, with honesty, which keeps its word, whose only payment is the satisfaction of duty performed, or like the militants of the left did before, when they were not stopped by blows, jail or death, let alone by dollar bills.
4. – We are also going to go about raising a struggle in order to demand that we make a new Constitution, new laws which take into account the demands of the Mexican people, which are: housing, land, work, food, health, education, information, culture, independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace. A new Constitution which recognizes the rights and liberties of the people, and which defends the weak in the face of the powerful.

#### TO THESE ENDS...

The EZLN will send a delegation of its leadership in order to do this work throughout the national territory and for an indefinite period of time. This zapatista delegation, along with those organizations and persons of the left who join in this Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona, will go to those places where they are expressly invited.

We are also letting you know that the EZLN will establish a policy of alliances with nonelectoral organizations and movements which define themselves, in theory and practice, as being of the left, in accordance with the following conditions:

Not to make agreements from above to be imposed below, but to make accords to go together to listen and to organize outrage. Not to raise movements which are later negotiated behind the backs of those who made them, but to always take into account the opinions of those participating. Not to seek gifts, positions, advantages, public positions, from the Power or those who aspire to it, but to go beyond the election calendar. Not to try to resolve from above the problems of our Nation, but to build FROM BELOW AND FOR BELOW an alternative to neoliberal destruction, an alternative of the left for Mexico.

Yes to reciprocal respect for the autonomy and independence of organizations, for their methods of struggle, for their ways of organizing, for their internal decision making processes, for their legitimate representations. And yes to a clear commitment for joint and coordinated defense of national sovereignty, with intransigent opposition to privatization attempts of electricity, oil, water and natural resources.

In other words, we are inviting the unregistered political and social organizations of the left, and those persons who lay claim to the left and who do not belong to registered political parties, to meet with us, at the time, place and manner in which we shall propose at the proper time, to organize a national campaign, visiting all possible corners of our Patria, in order to listen to and organize the word of our people. It is like a campaign, then, but very otherly, because it is not electoral.

Brothers and sisters:

This is our word which we declare:

In the world, we are going to join together more with the resistance struggles against neoliberalism and for humanity.

And we are going to support, even if it's but little, those struggles.

And we are going to exchange, with mutual respect, experiences, histories, ideas, dreams.

In Mexico, we are going to travel all over the country, through the ruins left by the neoliberal wars and through those resistances which, entrenched, are flourishing in those ruins.

We are going to seek, and to find, those who love these lands and these skies even as much as we do.

We are going to seek, from La Realidad to Tijuana, those who want to organize, struggle and build what may perhaps be the last hope this Nation – which has been going on at least since the time when an eagle alighted on a nopal in order to devour a snake – has of not dying.

We are going for democracy, liberty and justice for those of us who have been denied it.

We are going with another politics, for a program of the left and for a new Constitution.

We are inviting all indigenous, workers, campesinos, teachers, students, housewives, neighbors, small businesspersons, small shop owners, micro-businesspersons, pensioners, handicapped persons, religious men and women, scientists, artists, intellectuals, young persons, women, old persons, homosexuals and lesbians, boys and girls – to participate, whether individually or collectively, directly with the zapatistas in this NATIONAL CAMPAIGN for building another way of doing politics, for a program of national struggle of the left, and for a new Constitution.

And so this is our word as to what we are going to do and how we are going to do it. You will see whether you want to join.

And we are telling those men and women who are of good heart and intent, who are in agreement with this word we are bringing out, and who are not afraid, or who are afraid but who control it, to then state publicly whether they are in agreement with this idea we are presenting, and in that way we will see once and for all who and how and where and when this new step in the struggle is to be made.

While you are thinking about it, we say to you that today, in the sixth month of the year 2005, the men, women, children and old ones of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation have now decided, and we have now subscribed to, this Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona, and those who know how to sign, signed, and those who did not left their mark, but there are fewer now who do not know how, because education has advanced here in this territory in rebellion for humanity and against neoliberalism, that is in zapatista skies and land.

And this was our simple word sent out to the noble hearts of those simple and humble people who resist and rebel against injustices all over the world.



Democracy!

Liberty!

Justice!

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast.

Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee – General Command of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation.

Mexico, in the sixth month, or June, of the year 2005.

# Appendix B

No One Is Illegal Radio interview with Glen Coulthard, author of “*Red Skin, White*

*Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*” (2014), on CKUT News, March 5, 2015. (Accessed March 5, 2015 at: <http://archives.ckut.ca/64/20150305.17.45-18.00.mp3>.)

**NOII Radio:** I’m on the line from Vancouver with Glen Coulthard. Glen is a Weledeh

Dene, the author of *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* and he is part of the Indigenous Nationhood Movement. Glen is going to be in Montreal next week as part of various talks including a panel that’s part of Israeli Apartheid Week called Indigenous Resistance, Colonialism and Racism that will be at the Native Friendship Center on March 12<sup>th</sup> in the evening...Glen, welcome to No One Is Illegal Radio.

**Glen Coulthard:** Thank you, it’s a pleasure to be here.

**NOII Radio:** Glen, let’s start with your book. Your book has been getting a lot of attention, a lot of positive attention. It’s an important book—*Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. It’s a question you’ve been asked many times, I’m sure, but in capsule form what do you mean when you talk about rejecting the colonial politics of recognition and why is it necessary to put that argument out there today in 2015?

**Glen Coulthard:** I think because as indigenous peoples we’ve spent far too much time over the last 40 years asking that settler states and powerful institutions of capital recognize our rights as indigenous peoples, and in doing so they only recognize it with their own interests in mind, and that this has kind of really come to sap the critical or radical nature of our struggles for land and freedom in ways that are prematurely conciliatory and really only prop up these powerful institutions, both state and capital.

**NOII Radio:** One way you’ve expressed that in one of your articles at the Indigenous Nationhood Movement website is “for our nations to live, capitalism must die.” That’s a uncompromising expression of some of your politics, so talk a bit more about that.

**Glen Coulthard:** Well, colonialism, as I kind of formulate it and have come to understand it, is a structure of dispossession that’s ultimately kind of violently aimed at acquiring in a ongoing basis our land and resources. And as indigenous peoples, if we take seriously this understanding of land as being constitutive of who we are as people, that that relationship with territory is one premised on reciprocity and respect,

then any sort of economy that is premised on exploitation of land and resources for the benefit of a few over the many, including the land itself, is inherently anti-indigenous and inherently undermines our capacities to self-determination as nations. So, in that sense I think that we cannot have a reconciliation between indigenous nationhood and freedom, with that understanding of land in mind, and capitalism.

**NOII Radio:** It comes back to land, it comes back to land an awful lot when you respond to what sovereignty, autonomy, dignity, self-determination means in a meaningful way. But what we all mean by land can be very different. What a capitalist obviously means by land is very different than what a anti-capitalist or non-capitalist means, but even what an anarchist sitting here in Montreal means by land is very different than what you might be meaning by land. What do you mean by land when you speak about it as a Dene?

**Glen Coulthard:** I think of land not only as a kind of a material substance that is required for our sustenance over time, like to sustain ourselves as a people, but as a reciprocal relationship between human and non-human entities in a given place or geographical area, so it's that system of social relationships that transcends what it means to be human, and includes other elements of creation other than human entities that we relate with and rely on in order to sustain ourselves both spiritually but materially over time. So land is a relational concept, it's not just a material that can be exploited, and once you have that relational aspect there's an ethics involved in relating to it, and exploitation and domination over it is rendered a problematic that is unacceptable, and I think we need to start living our lives as indigenous peoples taking that relationship seriously.

**NOII Radio:** How does that relational aspect of relating to land assert itself in 2015 for those who want to reclaim that idea of what is meant by land, of what is meant by true sovereignty?

**Glen Coulthard:** Well I think we see it popping up all over the place and we always have and it's through communities, not solely through communities, but through those people who are willing to put their bodies on the land in order to defend it for future generations. So the resistances that are happening to pipeline constructions, to liquefied natural gas exploration and fracking, these, that is, embodying that relational understanding of land by refamiliarizing oneself with it by being on it but also in defending it from exploitation and harm. So those direct action measures are really kind of embodying this place-based ethics associated with a reciprocal understanding of land.

**NOII Radio:** Glen, obviously we're living in a particular political context that shows itself in different ways whether it's the policies of the current government but it's also the resistance or the opposition to those, that those policies take and you've talked about land defense just now. You're part of something called Indigenous Nationhood Movement and one can't help but notice the initials INM resembling Idle No More as well and the Indigenous Nationhood Movement sort of emerges out of, I guess, reflections on Idle No

More, so I'm wondering if you could speak a bit about the Indigenous Nationhood Movement that you're part of, and how that relates to many of these ideas that you're talking about.

**Glen Coulthard:** Yeah, it emerged among a bunch of community members and activists during Idle No More but it was kind of another reflection of similar concerns, perhaps just punctuated more assertively, I think, and that's the importance of rebuilding our nations which are constituted by our relationships with territory and their defense. But what we have to understand also, and this is core to a lot of perspectives within the Indigenous Nationhood Movement, that it's not just economics that are destroying our communities and our land bases, it's the convergence of economics with state power. So this is where we would have allies with our anarchist comrades. It's through racist policies of elimination. So this also allows for a conversation with other marginalized people of colour who have been exploited in their own colonial context and have ended up here on indigenous territory. And then, of course, sexism and gender discrimination is a core foundation of how indigenous peoples have been dispossessed through the Indian Act. So, it's really kind of robust and intersectional understanding of the problem and the demands for self-determination and decolonization have to take those dead seriously in our efforts to decolonize. So, it has to be pro-feminist, anti-racist, very critical of the state as an inherently dominating force, and anti-capitalist, in my opinion, anyway.

**NOII Radio:** Glen, the subtitle of your book is "Rejecting the Politics of Recognition." There's also the term 'reconciliation', even 'partnership', as ways in which some people, both indigenous and non-indigenous, propose to proceed. In what I consider to be one of the best first tweets ever from your twitter account (your twitter account is @denerevenge), when Canadians for a New Partnership expressed itself publicly through a press conference back in September, Canadians for a New Partnership being indigenous and non-indigenous folks talking about, to put it diplomatically, an new partnership between indigenous and non-indigenous folks based on respect. You have Joe Clark and Paul Martin joining up with other folks as well. You're first tweet, at least the PG13 version of your first tweet, was "Who the hell are you calling Canadian, partner?" So, speak a bit about that and why you came out of cyberspace to express that in relation to this idea of a New Partnership by Canadians with indigenous peoples.

**Glen Coulthard:** Well, not to speak of that organization or network in particular but just the whole discourse of reconciliation, it's kind of telling that we often refer to it in this language of partnership in a very business-like sense. So, reconciliation from the state's perspective is an attempt to reconcile indigenous claims to nationhood and sovereignty with the presumed authority of Canada over its lands in order to gain access to it in an ongoing manner for the purposes of settlement and capitalist development. So, that's the partnership that they're trying to facilitate, and we're obviously a junior partner in that, and we don't have much say over it when we negotiate on those terms. So, the vision of decolonization that me and others are trying to advocate, in

a more sort of grounded sort of way, is one where we're not asking for that type of reconciliation, we're attempting to reconcile our own relationships with our territories in a way that respect land and others in a more reciprocal manner, and that requires that we stop demanding our rights so much and really kind of focus on restoring them through direct action, through assertions, through our practices and those practices include reconnecting ourselves to our territories.

**NOII Radio:** Glen, you've spoken about intersectionality, the ways in which that gets expressed or that we can't really talk about decolonization and anti-colonialism if we don't have gender justice, otherwise, it's a bit of a sham. We can't really hope for true justice within a capitalist model, and we can go on and on about intersectionality and one form of intersectionality that's taking place with your visit to Montreal is a talk as part of Israeli Apartheid Week where the issues around land, colonization, decolonization. You reference, of course, you're rooted in Franz Fanon and that has a particular meaning within the Palestinian struggle, as well. So, I'm wondering if you can share some of your reflections speaking as part of Israeli Apartheid Week, speaking alongside a speaker who will be joining us via Skype from occupied Jerusalem?

**Glen Coulthard:** Yeah, I am by no means qualified as an expert on the Palestine occupation, so, what my participation in this is to live the types of reciprocal solidarity that I demand of others and my book based on that conception of land that I just articulated. These social relationships are ones of reciprocity and respect, so, what I want to do there is to be part of this larger movement, this global movement, that wants to seek justice and land restoration for people who have experienced colonialism and its violences in other areas because it is truly a global phenomenon which has to be tackled as such and that requires making these linkages with other people in like-minded struggles. So, mine is kind of a gesture of solidarity and to be there and support that important work in community building on the ground.

**NOII Radio:** Glen, a final question. Often the term 'indigenous anarchism' or 'indigenoanarchism' gets referenced in reference to your writings and your talks, and others as well, and that can mean indigenous folks who are anarchists, that can mean indigenous folks who use the word 'anarchism' but that can mean something completely different as well and I'm just wondering if you could elaborate a bit more this relationship with anarchist practice and anarchist ideas beyond the idea of sharing an opposition to the state?

**Glen Coulthard:** Yeah. (chuckles) I take the anarcha-indigenous perspective has been influential. I've worked with people like Taiaiake Alfred who like to think through that type of politics and what it might look like on the ground and I map it out a little bit in the end of the book. It's just kind of certain ethical commitments based on an attempt to eliminate all forms of oppression, domination and exploitation simultaneously. The thing that I would really want to stress, though, is that that's an engagement with other radical traditions like anarchism, marxism, feminism or what have you, but it's always done through an indigenous lens or cultural basis. So, it's like, what does it mean to engage these other critical traditions and activist practices but

still remain Weledeh Dene at the same time. That's how I approach, not only engaging other radical traditions, but also engaging solidarity with groups who are engaged in those practices. So, that's how I understand something like "anarchoindigenism". In what ways can me as a Dene individual who has certain ethical commitments based on that cultural basis engage with and effectively relate to others in struggle around state power or against capital, against heterosexism and normativity and these other forms and axes of domination.

***NOII Radio:*** Glen Coulthard, author of *Red Skin, White Masks*, thank you for joining us on *No One Is Illegal Radio*...

# Appendix C

**The Anti-Oppression Game of “Good Politics” in Play (E-Version): “POLY MEANS POLYNESIAN, NOT POLYAMOROUS”.** A Facebook argument of some proportion in which U.S. American activist understandings and praxes of “diversity”, “anti-oppression”, “identity”, “intersectionality”, and related movement mathematics are illustrated. (Handed to me in 2015 by a Guerilla Feminism page member upon hearing my description of the anti-oppression game.)


 **Guerrilla Feminism**  
November 16 at 6:35pm

**POLY MEANS POLYNESIAN, NOT POLYAMOROUS – LILY STONE**

"I type Poly into the search bar, seeking refuge. Numerous search results come up. I am elated when I find a Facebook group called "Poly People" only to find that Poly – a term that we Polynesians have been using as an identifier for our community since the time of genocidal and despicable Captain Cook – has been co-opted, white-washed, and repackaged to mean "polyamorous". I return to the search bar and scroll anxiously through the pages and groups listed and find a few, many of which seem to have gone defunct."

<http://www.guerrillafeminism.org/poly-means-polynesian-not.../>

[Lily Stone, a disjointed self portrait. [Image description: An artistic rendering of a Lily Stone, fat brown woman with long hair sitting on the floor wearing a plumeria in her ear and a shoulderless short flower dress, a yellow weaved threaded pattern is all over the image.]



404

GUERRILLAFEMINISM.ORG

 I didnt know that. Thanks for the info!  
👍 10 · November 16 at 7:16pm

 There's a great Tumblr post about this. I'm not sure if it's written by the same person or not. The Tumblr blog is really image-heavy with lots of different colours and pictures, so I'll paste it here:

TITLE: 'The Abbreviation 'Poly' is Already in Use... See More

**Aa** the abbreviation "poly" is already in use.  
clatterbane: "nerdymouse: "hardestcopy: "actuallypoly: "Hey, can any polyamory blogs with a follower count please inform the palagi portion of the community that "poly" is a Polynesian community...  
ACTUALLYPOLY.TUMBLR.COM

👍 23 · November 16 at 7:49pm · Edited

 Guerrilla Feminism Nope, not the same person. Thanks for posting this here! 😊 [smile]   
👍 2 · November 17 at 1:46am

 I mean yeah of COURSE the world poly is also Greek. But it's not great to be part of a community dealing with the fallout of colonialism only to lose the name you call yourself to a bunch of smug white swingers.

I know a lot of folks who prefer the term non-monogamous for a lot of reasons. This just kind of seals the deal for me on not wanting to use the term polyamorous.

👍 26 · November 16 at 6:01pm

👁 Hide 17 Replies



Smug white swingers?  
I'll give you the smug and white part. I've definitely seen my share of smug white polyam people. But we're not swingers. That's a different thing entirely, thanks.  
28 November 16 at 5:41pm

Not sure if the diction "smug white swingers" is very productive. Not everyone who identifies as polyamorous is smug or white or ignorant. This comment isn't helping anyone.  
16 November 17 at 12:16am

Are we really getting "not all polyamorous people" responses here? I mean, of course we are, but.  
"Smug white swingers" in this context is a useful rhetorical flourish that is meant to help y'all understand the impact and disorientation for a Polynesian person seeking community and finding polyamorous stuff coming up first.  
Also I am so not here for conflating polyamory with being LGBTQ+ which I am concerned is happening when it is described as a sexuality.  
10 November 17 at 5:27am Edited

Guerrilla Feminism - it's typically the white polyamorous folk who are upset by not getting to use the term "poly". -  
4 November 17 at 6:42am

Guerrilla Feminism Polyamory is not a sexuality. Tyvm. -  
4 November 17 at 6:43am

Guerrilla Feminism Polyamorous folk are not an oppressed group for being interested in polyamory. It's just a just folk can make about the type of relationship they want to be in. It's not anything they're born with and face a lack of privilege due to it. People can disapprove of it or whatever. Maybe some feelings will get hurt, but it's not like they need safe spaces/protection, in my opinion. I don't think folk are worried about getting beaten up/murdered/employment/housing for being polyamorous. -  
7 November 17 at 7:21am

Guerrilla Feminism As much as anyone in the LGBTQIA+? Y'all get attacked/and murdered pretty often do you? -  
November 17 at 9:05am Edited

Guerrilla Feminism Have people pass legislation and such to make it illegal for you to use the washroom? I'm not going to have this conversation actually. -  
1 November 17 at 9:07am

Look, all I wanted to point out was it's not ok to call someone something they're not. Being referred to as a 'swinger' instead of polyamorous is not ok to me. Not because swingers are bad, but because that's not who I am. Also, for some polyamory is ... See More  
5 November 17 at 9:11am

How is saying that polyamory is a white people thing not erasure of POC who are involved in that lifestyle?  
14 November 17 at 10:42am

Polyamory in its organized form (I.e. the kind that involves fb groups and the like) is "overwhelmingly" white and overwhelmingly privileged. POC regularly express a feeling of alienation from these groups for various reasons and it is extremely important to call out the whiteness of polyamory in order to not erase those POC's experiences and existence.  
9 November 17 at 11:15am

Calling it a white people thing calls attention to the fact (as I said) that POC are regularly marginalized within the polyam community. It's an observation that needs to be made and brought into the conversation of making polyamory more inclusive. However, having POC outside the community call it a 'white people thing' can, I would imagine, make POC who are also polyam feel uncomfortable. IDK, though. I'm a white person so I can't speak to that.  
5 November 17 at 12:12pm

For those interested in the experience of polyam POC: <http://polyweekly.libsyn.com/pw-447-poly-people-of-color>



Polyamory Weekly : PW 447: Poly people of color  
EDIT\_HERE

POLYWEEKLY.LIBSYN.COM | BY EDIT\_HERE

I'm trying, very hard, to listen to this with an open mind and an open heart. It is no skin off my nose to teach myself to say "polyam" instead of poly. At 46, I've had to unlearn lots of things that aren't ok any more. And I don't care to tone police, that's not what cool people do. But it would be super cool if people could be as willing to be educated on polyam, cuz y'all are being very judge about my lifestyle, my sexuality, and my lived experience as a polyam person.  
3 November 17 at 1:45pm

you may find it helpful to reframe what you are experiencing as personal criticisms into what they were intended to be, which is much more of a criticism of polyam "communities" and the ways they are organized and the ways they operate. This discussion is not so much about polyamorous individuals.

I mean, I'm polyamorous. fwiw (though I tend to identify as non-monogamous instead for reasons relating to this discussion in general).  
November 17 at 4:26pm

People get fired for being out as polyamorous. People are deemed to be unfit parents for being polyamorous. Polyamorous people struggle to adopt. Polyamorous people are forbidden from marrying all of their partners. Children born to polyamorous families only have two legal parents which creates a whole host of problems. Polyamorous people cannot be openly affectionate to more than one partner at a time in public without being gawked at and accused of being inappropriate in front of children.

Please do not tell me that it's a choice. I'm not just "interested in polyamory". I can tell you as a bi, trans, polyamorous person I'm just as capable of choosing to love only one gender or choosing to be cis as I am of choosing to love only one person at a time. So many polyamorous people, many of us facing multiple forms of oppression, are saying that we are oppressed because we are polyamorous. When are you going to start listening to us and not dismissing it because you personally don't feel oppressed in that way.

Yes, there is a lot of prejudice in polyamorous communities, including but not limited to racism and transphobia. That doesn't mean that polyamory is a white issue.

Honestly, a lot of the rhetoric surrounding the idea that polyamorous people aren't marginalised sounds very similar to what people say about bisexual people and how we're not really oppressed because we can just choose to 'act straight'. Polyamorous people probably can act monogamous in the same way that bi people could spend their whole lives pretending to be straight but why should we have to?

9 November 19 at 3:12am

Fuckin' thank you.

1 November 19 at 1:38pm

November 16 at 8:50pm  
 Yeah, I saw this when it was making the rounds on Tumblr. I disagree that "poly" has been "co-opted and whitewashed." I mostly disagree that it's been co-opted. There is an issue with much of the discussion about polyamory being dominated by white voic... See More  
 November 16 at 10:08pm

I honestly didn't know. I have known several Polynesian people, and I am ashamed that I still didn't know. Thank you.  
 November 16 at 9:35pm

Polyamorous people: use polyam if you want a shortened term. It's not that hard lol  
 November 16 at 9:39pm

Guerrilla Feminism That's what I'm saying!  
 November 17 at 1:17am

And if polyam is still "too long," then "polya" works too.  
 November 18 at 9:34am

IDK, I like how polyam sounds better haha  
 November 18 at 9:35am

sounds better out loud too.  
 November 19 at 4:31am

I'm glad that this is being said 😊 there's many polyamorous people that take offense to this... hopefully if more people speak out, they will begin to see the errors in their ways  
 November 16 at 19:00pm

I never even put that together. Thank you, Guerrilla Feminism, for bringing this to my/our attention. BIAH will definitely be using "polyam" from now on; and apologies for using "poly" inappropriately for so long.  
 November 16 at 10:15pm Edited

Guerrilla Feminism Thank you!

words have always had multiple meanings...we can't impose one meaning on them; i think that is dangerous...im pretty sure polyamorous practitioners are not trying to wipe out Polynesians through the shortening of the word...its a really normal thing for people to do to language that defines them...shorten it, to personalise.  
 November 16 at 10:17pm

Guerrilla Feminism impact > intent  
 November 17 at 1:18am

Guerrilla Feminism respectfully disagree...we read some of the comments that the above article links to where people on reddit are being deliberately disrespectful and snide about it, which doesn't help. But I genuinely have a commitment to not telling other people how to define themselves whether Polynesian or polyamorous. maybe as me i choose not to use certain words, but i can't bring myself to tell other people what words to use...im almost on the Lenny Bruce end of the spectrum regarding this, and i know that i would get booted from this page for using the language he does, so i respect the rules of this house, sotospeak (I'm well behaved/respectful etc)...but the Lenny Bruce argument is that words gain their power by being forbidden. for me its not the word but the meaning that is being imposed on it. i agree with everything in the article re: the position of marginalisation that the Polynesian community has experienced through imperialism. but i think the target here: language of a separate group that has a right to identify themselves is missing the real enemies.  
 November 17 at 1:24am

Guerrilla Feminism additionally, a point someone else has made to me re: these identity politics debates: someone who is not well versed in a quite privileged and academic/middle class debate to begin with on intersectionality, etc. etc. can slip up and use the wrong word (a word that used to be 'acceptable' - language changes over time...people have differing speeds of adoption) and immediately be shouted down as a bigot / booted out of a meeting whereas a clever privileged liberal full of bigotry can learn the acceptable lexicon and pass as empathic/sympathetic/one of the group. there is a problem with this identity politics debate and use of language...my ultimate worry is that academic waffle will take over direct action. but hey, just like language and it's evolution, so these debates are evolving/revolving/uppinganddowning just by this process 😊  
 November 17 at 1:32am

Guerrilla Feminism how is using the term "polyam" instead of "poly" at all academic? anyone who has access to the internet can look this up.  
 November 17 at 6:45am

Guerrilla Feminism the second point re academic language is a broader one about identity politics, which is why I specifically give 'intersectionality' as the example, this very page says something along the lines of 'we're not here to educate you'. But doesn't academic also mean (irony not totally lost on me here) pedantic tinkering around with dry theory rather than actual real life action. I'd also ask you, in all sincerity, what about people who don't have the internet?  
 November 17 at 8:29am

Guerrilla Feminism now you're just derailing. please stop.  
 November 17 at 2:37pm

Guerrilla Feminism I'm trying to talk openly, I don't believe i am derailing. But if you don't want to talk any further, no problem.  
 November 17 at 2:38pm

#PASIFIKAEXCELLENCE!!!!!!!  
 November 16 at 10:25pm

As a Polynesian person at least here in NZ, I've only ever heard the term "Poly" used in a very derogatory way. I appreciate this may be different in the states or elsewhere but I wonder if this is also somewhat location specific? In any case I don't really agree with this argument. I 100% agree on the horrible history our people have endured and I think we definitely need to have our struggles recognised, but I don't think forcing others to not use a term that obviously they identify with is the way to go about it. Don't we have other terms? Pasifika? Nesian? etc. especially when you look at the (Latin) root of the word- poly being many... There are plenty of words with the poly prefix. If Polynesian people identify with it that's great but I think it's a bit nonsensical to argue that no one else can use "Poly", Pasifika- sure. The full term "Polynesian" -of course. But something that is so ambiguous? I don't know. Also if we're talking about a name for ourselves wouldn't you be more comfortable with a name not given by those raping, pillaging, genocidal pākehā "explorers"?  
 November 17 at 6:16am

Guerrilla Feminism I think it's likely that it depends on where you grew up and fine if you don't agree. I stand by what I wrote.  
 November 17 at 7:52am

you're articulating a lot of what I feel after reading this article. (Im a Nzborn Maori Samoan) As an aside I really love the term 'Moana nui' as a more inclusive term for Pasifika peoples (poly/mela/micro) -I happened to see someone use it on social media and I've wanted to make it 'happen' ever since 😊  
 November 18 at 2:26am

Moana nui is a great term!  
 November 18 at 5:34am

Wow so much white-splaining around this issue! To me it seems like such a cut and dry case and a great example of how an innocent or ignorant mistake actually has huge consequences. Am I jumping to conclusions to expect polyam people to be a little more radical inclusive and social justice oriented? Damn selfish crybabies  
 6 November 17 at 11:43am

Should probably write that one off, no going back now.  
 November 17 at 1:00pm

...did u caption this fat brown woman?  
 1 November 17 at 2:50pm  
 View 2 more replies

Guerrilla Feminism nope, we only identify folk as "Fat" if they self-identify that way.  
 7 November 17 at 6:42pm

I'd have to agree with what [redacted] was saying. "Poly" means many, it is an abbreviation that can mean a lot of different things. Like she said, using unabbreviated terms is of course not okay and their peoples struggle should be acknowledged but the shortened terms shouldn't be inclusive. Also the fact she mentioned on calling them poly is the first place is white washing. If you take "poly" away from polyamorous people, what do we have? "Amorous?" That makes no sense. Polyamorous people are already discriminated against and erased enough in society and now you want to take away the only term we use to establish our existence and identify ourselves? Nah.  
 5 November 18 at 12:07am

Guerrilla Feminism did you read the article? polya or polyam should be just as good, no?  
 1 November 18 at 4:15am

Why should they have to change their name? They could just as easily ask us to change ours? Though I'm not polyamorous or involved in that community as far as I can tell from reading online we have a lot more options for self identifying names than they do "if" the argument is made that there can only be one group using that term- which I disagree with. A couple have been suggested like nesian, pasifika, moana nui, Pl etc. I really like moana nui. I am normally 100% with [redacted] on issues especially relating to POC but I feel like this is barking up the wrong tree a bit and I can understand why polyamorous people are upset about this. I don't think labelling them as whitesplainers is fair. Further marginalising an already marginalised group isn't cool even if it's coming from another marginalised group. I fail to see the logic in arguing that we can't both use and embrace the term and use it in our safe spaces- especially if, as acknowledged in response to my post, the usage of the term "poly" for Polynesians doesn't carry the same meaning across all of Polynesia for all Polynesians. If that was the case, and we all identified as Poly and had done for yonks then I could understand it, but that's not the case. I'm not of course saying your opinion is wrong/illegitimate but can you please refrain from the negative comments to polyamorous people? That just makes us look petty which isn't so great when we need all the allies we can get to help advance Pacific issues.  
 6 November 18 at 5:23am

Hi. White/NDN polyam cispan, here. Yes, I read the article.  
 I am unsure how to word this, so bare with me. How does the Polyamory community using Poly-/whitewash/ the term when #notallpolyams are white? Either I'm not getting something or Autism isn't letting me get it.  
 Please and thank you.  
 1 November 18 at 10:27pm Edited

Thank you. And [redacted], honestly no, taking "poly" away from the polyamorous community is disastrous to lose the only label we have for communication. It's important to keep an equal balance of intersectionality within race and sexuality, because no intersection trumps the validity of another.  
 November 19 at 3:06am

Except intersectional feminism was created by black women to observe the intersection of race and gender...?  
 So... You're wrong.  
 2 November 19 at 12:31pm

I guess my point is that inclusive feminist theory is not complete without queer theory and standpoint. So prioritizing one aspect over another isn't right  
 1 November 19 at 12:46pm Edited

But it's NOT the only label for communication-that's incredibly dis-ingenuous. If it's so important to "keep an equal balance of intersectionality within race and sexuality" (whatever that means), then why are you so comfortable telling people that a label they have used for themselves suddenly "belongs" to another group?  
 2 November 19 at 1:25pm

I'm meaning gender/sexuality plays apart in feminist theory, that's all I'm saying! Isn't that exactly what you're doing to polyamorous people? Telling them a label they have used for themselves is invalid because another group uses it (which it seems they don't even prefer that term)? And yes, poly is the only common abbreviation used among polyamorous people that I have ever heard of. I honestly don't think anyone whose not in either community should police this, because obviously on this thread there's a lot of lack of understanding of the polyamory  
 1 November 19 at 1:41pm

I am in one of these communities, and frankly it strikes me that you are the one policing this term. You're telling Polynesian folks that they don't have a right to feel protective of their identity, while demanding they place at the forefront concern for polyamorous folk.  
 2 Yesterday at 9:02am

I get it, it's a matter of respect and non erasure. Just wasn't too happy at the fact that some people on this thread don't think the polyamorous community isn't discriminated against...  
 22 hrs

wow, why is that so hard? Lots of us didn't know, we got educated and "called out" and we got even conveniently offered another option. why do we need to do anything other than saying: "wow, I am sorry, I didn't know. Polya or polyam are great Ideas. Thanx. Again, peeps, sorry." then changes our various profiles and move on? why is this so effin hard? why all the "but WHY can't I...? of course ya'll CAN ignore this information and keep doing it, only a few people will judge you for it and that is HARDLY something that we seem to care much about to begin with when I look around. BUT WHY WOULD you WANT to?????????  
 6 November 18 at 3:21am

So one word evolved two different connotations completely separate from one another.  
 And btw not all polyamorous people are white, so that's kind of bullshit.  
 But also, using the word poly to mean "many" which is its actual definition....  
 Sorry. This wasn't done to disrespect another culture or take something away from another culture. It happened naturally and independently in both cases.  
 6 November 18 at 1:09pm

Wasn't Polynesia given its name by a French man?  
 1 November 18 at 7:31pm  
 9 Replies

Had no idea about this. My knee-jerk reaction to reading the excerpt was "well, wait, 'poly' is just a Greek prefix applied to literally dozens of English words." But that reaction was wrong as I found out by reading the article. Thank you for sharing!  
 3 November 18 at 8:05pm

Hey everyone, why dont you check your goddamn kneejerk defensive reactions.  
 3 November 18 at 10:03pm  
 3 Replies

When is the campaign to discontinue the use of "poly bags" in packaging terminology? That seems more problematic tbh.  
 I'm admittedly trolling, just a tiny bit. I'll "also" try to change my vocabulary.  
 1 November 18 at 10:19pm

wow this is fascinating thanks!  
 1 November 19 at 11:49am

yes continue whitesplaining everything that really helps a lot. she needs to check her activist privilege? I think you need to check how disrespectful you are being. Did you even read the piece?  
 1 November 19 at 12:26pm

you don't have to be sorry you read the piece and no it's not a joke, I'm trying to understand where you are coming from. and yes you are whitesplaining and being disrespectful in your first post. do you feel like you learned from the piece, I found it really informative. I'm just wondering if you did.  
 1 November 19 at 12:30pm

retract my statements, because I don't have the background to effectively comment on this.  
 1 November 19 at 12:40pm

The more I read through these comments the more I feel like I'm reading comments on a post about how it's A-OK if white people wear dreads and it's not fair to take that away. And the whole "greek prefix blahblah" bit just rings familiar re-arguments that it doesn't make sense for "they/their/them" to be a pronoun.  
 2 November 19 at 12:51pm

I respectfully disagree. I totally agree that white people wearing dreads is cultural appropriation and not okay. I am a staunch intersectional feminist and a huge advocate for my culture and other indigenous/minority peoples, so please don't paint thi... See More  
 Yesterday at 12:49am

I agree that everything you said about polyam people and families experiencing oppression; I also have friends in the polyam community and I don't think for a second that they experience the same privileges of monogamous people/couples. (Someone here c... See More  
 21 hrs

Well, with the LGBT movement and Queer Theory, as well as Postmodernism, questioning concepts and labels is good. But labels cant necessarily be "owned" in the sense of capital, like only one group or person. They can be owned, claimed and reclaimed as... See More  
 22 hrs

We have to be VERY cautious not to white wash or erase identities, but also still be critical. Just because one Polynesian said it does... Chat (42)

Well, with the LGBT movement and Queer Theory, as well as Postmodernism, questioning concepts and labels is good. But labels cant necessarily be "owned" in the sense of capital, like only one group or person. They can be owned, claimed and reclaimed as... See More  
 22 hrs

We have to be VERY cautious not to white wash or erase identities, but also still be critical. Just because one Polynesian said it doesnt mean the community as a whole agrees. Thats up to the Polynesia community, as well as individual Polynesians, to decide what they want to identify as. Not to decide what others can identify as.  
 And we have already seen some discussion from self identifies Polynesian people.  
 1 22 hrs

I respectfully disagree. I totally agree that white people wearing dreads is cultural appropriation and not okay. I am a staunch intersectional feminist and a huge advocate for my culture and other indigenous/minority peoples, so please don't paint this as being only non-intersectional white people disagreeing with the author. All I'm saying is that I don't think it's fair to force another oppressed group to change the language they use to self-identify. As a polynesian person I have personally only heard the term "Poly" used in a derogatory way and certainly in NZ this term is almost exclusively used with negative undertones. If this is different elsewhere, then that's cool, I'm not saying Polynesians can't use it, I'm just saying that it seems really nonsensical to argue that another group should ditch their term when it's not used widely by all Polynesians, and when we also have many other terms that are arguably more fitting and more authentic. While I don't really identify as polyamorous myself, I have a number of friends who are and have read quite widely on the subject- so I'm definitely not proclaiming to be an expert or trying to shout louder than any polyamorous voices, but I think [redacted]'s comments about polyamorous people not being oppressed is not very fair. Polyamorous families are constantly struggling to get recognition of their equal parenthood, and as far as I know, they are not recognised in any Western country. If their kid gets sick they may not be able to take the day off work because their relationship isn't recognised. If the biological/birth certificate listed parents pass away then another parent may not have any rights and consequently may not be able to have a relationship with their child. They experience discrimination in the workplace, media, institutions like marriage, other government policy... I would say that's pretty oppressed. Now we don't need to get into a "who is more oppressed" argument, but I just think it's pretty exclusionary to write off another group because they're "perceived" to be wealthy white people who just like to sleep around- that's discrimination and stereotyping in and of itself. If we want people to take our feminism seriously we need to stop alienating people. Does that mean change everything we stand for? Of course not. But it's not that difficult to share a term."  
 Pretty much my perspective  
 7 hrs

Having said that, I have long LONG since stopped identifying to any monos, besides the ones that have twisted perverted minds on what they think it means. way too many of the "liberal open-minded and accepting" ones use jealousy and manipulation with you against their partners. I am keen to it now, so can spot it much easier, but it also makes things much easier just to keep my mouth shut.  
 7 hrs

# Appendix D

**Social Class Privilege Checklist** and **How to be a Class Ally: Anti-oppression training materials** prepared by NASCO (North American Students of Cooperation), circa 2007.



## Social Class Privilege Checklist

1. I don't need to worry about learning the social customs of others.
2. It is likely that my career and financial success will be attributed to my hard work.
3. People appear to pay attention to my social class.
4. When I am shopping, people usually call me "sir" or "ma'am."
5. When I purchase things with a check or credit card, my appearance doesn't create problems.
6. When I am taught about history, people from my social class are represented.
7. I can easily speak with my attorney or physician.
8. Experts appearing on mass media are from my social class.
9. There are stores that market especially to people from my social class.

10. Law enforcement officials will likely assume I am a non-threatening person once they see me and hear me.
11. Disclosure of my work and education may actually help law enforcement officials perceive me as being “in the right” or “unbiased.”
12. My citizenship and immigration status will likely not be questioned, and my background will likely not be investigated, because of my social class.
13. I can afford to seek medical help when I need it.
14. I can afford to provide childcare for my children when I cannot be home with them.
15. If I wish to send my children to private schools, I can.
16. I can find colleges that have many people from my social class as students and that will welcome my child or me.
17. If asked to go out to lunch with a friend, I don’t have to turn them down because I can’t afford the restaurant.
18. I can go to social events and concerts that I would like to attend.
19. If I apply to a prestigious job competing with people of a lower class, my social class will be to my advantage.
20. I can apply to jobs that require you own a car, because I can afford to have one.
21. I do not have to rely on public transportation; I can afford to own a car.
22. The decision to hire me will be related to my background and where I went to school.
23. When I watch TV or read newspapers and magazines I can see people of my class represented well.
24. My elected representatives share a similar background as mine.
25. It is likely that the person in charge in any organization is likely to be sympathetic to my status.
26. My child is not ignored at school, and if there are problems, I am called by the teacher or principle.
27. People are usually careful with their language and grammar around me.
28. I can afford to go out drinking with my friends.

29. My neighborhood is well taken care of and has a grocery store nearby.
30. If I am charged with a crime, I will be able to afford a competent attorney and will not have to rely on a court-appointed lawyer.
31. In a court of law, it is likely that a jury will find in my favor.
32. If I am convicted of a crime that requires I either pay a large fine or spend a period of time in jail (such as drunk driving, in most states), I can avoid going to jail.
33. I am able to save enough money to ensure that my family and I will not go hungry if I unexpectedly lose my job.
34. When I die, I will be able to leave my family an inheritance, instead of debt.
35. I have the ability to “choose” to be poor or working class as a lifestyle choice, while my privileged background continues to affect my present status (what’s in my head, how safe or comfortable I feel at any given time/situation, skills and behaviors privileged folks hold, etc.).

## **Being a Class Ally**

1. I don’t assume that it is a working class/working poor/poor person’s job to educate me about class issues. I read up on class struggles.
2. I understand that knowledge from books is never as valid as knowledge based on personal life experiences.
3. I understand that a middle class/upper-middle class/rich position is privileged and not normative or average.
4. I don’t assume that it is a working class/working poor/poor person’s responsibility to tell me their life story. I don’t force discourse.
5. I make an effort to use inclusive language, because I understand that education and overly academic language are often inaccessible to working class/working poor/poor people.
6. I realize that class is not a defining marker of intelligence and don’t “talk down” to a working class/working poor/poor person.
7. I understand anger and allow space for discourse about my specific privilege and/or moneyed privilege in general.

8. I recognize how classism interacts with and is complicated by other systems of oppression-racism, sexism, ableism, oppression of parents, etc.
9. I engage in anti-classist struggles and seek to build cross-class alliances.
10. I share money when I can.
11. I investigate my own life and how I am classist. I challenge these beliefs and behaviors in myself and my life.
12. I work to make meetings and events accessible by considering where they are held, when they are held, whether or not child care is available, etc.
13. I understand that the right to have/adopt and parent/care for children should not be dependent upon class position or income.
14. I recognize that class does not equal income, but also includes education, geography, job, and many other factors.
15. I respectfully interrupt classist jokes, slurs, comments, or assumptions when I come across them.
16. I offer alternatives and/or accurate information when I hear classist stereotypes or myths.
17. I build and maintain friendships and relationships across class and race lines.
18. I use the words “class” and “classism” in my conversations with people.
19. I acknowledge the class implications of all the decisions that I make.
20. I try not to assume that others have the same level of resources as I do.
21. I support the leadership of poor and working class people.
22. I don’t make assumptions about people’s intelligence based on their appearance.
23. I am open to talking about my class situation and class of origin.
24. I take care to notice and critically analyze judgments I make about people and look for class elements in those judgments.
25. I take to notice what clothing I wear and why.
26. I go to activities and events that are outside of my class comfort zone.
27. I support boycotts and strikes.



# Appendix E

**List of Companies with Mining Projects in Mexico**, (source: Mexican government). <http://portalweb.sgm.gob.mx/economia/en/mexico-mining/mining-companies.html>. (Accessed March 13, 2016).

Companies with mining projects in Mexico

Source: General Direction of Mining Development

<b>No.</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Country</b>
1	<i>Abot Mining Co.</i>	USA
2	<i>Agave Silver Corp.</i>	Canada
3	<i>Agnico-Eagle Mines Ltd.</i>	Canada
4	<i>Alamos Gold Inc.</i>	Canada
5	<i>Almaden Minerals Ltd.</i>	Canada
6	<i>Alphamin Resources Corp.</i>	Canada
7	<i>Alta Vista Venture Ltd.</i>	Canada
8	<i>Alto Group Holding Inc.</i>	USA
9	<i>Amarium Mineral Inc.</i>	USA
10	<i>Amato Exploration Ltd.</i>	Canada
11	<i>American Consolidated Minerals Corp.</i>	Canada
12	<i>Amex Exploration Inc.</i>	Canada
13	<i>Animas Resources Ltd.</i>	Canada
14	<i>Arcelormittal Steel Company N. V.</i>	India
15	<i>Arco Resources Corp.</i>	Canada
16	<i>Arcus Development Group</i>	Canada
17	<i>Argentum Silver Corp.</i>	Canada
18	<i>Argonaut Gold Inc.</i>	Canada
19	<i>Arian Silver Corp. Plc.</i>	UK
20	<i>Aura Minerals Inc.</i>	Canada
21	<i>Aura Silver Resources Inc.</i>	Canada
22	<i>Auramex Resource Corp.</i>	Canada
23	<i>Aurcana Corp.</i>	Canada
24	<i>Aurico Gold Inc.</i>	Canada
25	<i>Aurion Resources Ltd.</i>	Canada
26	<i>Avino Silver &amp; Gold Mines Ltd.</i>	Canada
27	<i>Azure Minerals Ltd.</i>	Australia
28	<i>Bacanora Minerals Ltd.</i>	Canada
29	<i>Baja Mining Corp.</i>	Canada
30	<i>Bandera Gold Ltd.</i>	Canada
31	<i>Bearing Resources Ltd.</i>	Canada
32	<i>Bell Copper Corp.</i>	Canada
33	<i>Black Panther Mining Corp.</i>	Canada
34	<i>Blackcomb Minerals Inc.</i>	Canada
35	<i>Bold Ventures Inc.</i>	Canada
36	<i>Bowmore Exploration Ltd.</i>	Canada
37	<i>California Gold Corp.</i>	USA
38	<i>Camino Minerals Corp.</i>	Canada
39	<i>Canadian Mining Company Inc.</i>	Canada
40	<i>Canarc Resource Corp. (Salió Del País)</i>	Canada
41	<i>Canasil Resources Inc.</i>	Canada
42	<i>Candente Gold Corp.</i>	Canada
43	<i>Cangold Ltd.</i>	Canada

<b>No.</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Country</b>
242	AA Mine Holding	China
243	Ammex Gold Mining Corp.	Canada
244	Andromeda Resources Inc.	Canada
245	Antofagasta Plc.	Chile
246	Arcelia Gold Corp.	Canada
247	Aura Mining Inc.	Canada
248	Auricup Resources Ltd.	Australia
249	Australian Minerals Group (Salió Del País)	Australia
250	Axiom Gold and Silver Corp.	USA
251	Aztec Copper Inc.	USA
252	Aztec Metals Corp.	Canada
253	Azteca Gold Corp.	USA
254	Chemical Products Corp.	USA
255	Continuum Resources Ltd.	Canada
256	Cotton & Western Mining Inc.	USA
257	Ecometals Ltd.	UK
258	Exeter Resource Corp.	Canada
259	First Narrows Resources Corp.	Canada
260	First Potash Corp.	USA
261	Focus Gold Corp.	Canada
262	Fury Explorations Ltd.	Canada
263	Gold American Mining Corp.	USA
264	HuntMountain Resources Ltd.	USA
265	International Gold Corp.	Canada
266	IRK Iternational (Minerals & Metals)	India
267	Jaguar Mining Enterprises Inc.	USA
268	JDC Minerals	China
269	Kimberly Gold Mines Inc.	USA
270	Lone Star Gold Inc.	USA
271	Macmillan Gold Corp.	Canada
272	Mo-Jiaki Minerals	Corea
273	Nayarit Gold	Canada
274	Ningbo Yinyi Group Co. Ltd.	China
275	NWT Uranium Corp.	Canada
276	Oremex Resources Inc.	Canada
277	Pan American Goldfields Ltd.	Canada
278	Paradise Resources Ltd.	Canada

Source: General Direction of Mining Development

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