ANARCHISM'S VALUE: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF AUTONOMY AND ALIENATION IN

NEW ORLEANS' ANARCHIST MILIEU

by

PATRICK W. HUFF

(Under the Direction of Theodore Gragson and Nik Heynen)

ABSTRACT

This ethnography explores the ways in which contemporary political anarchism articulates a value system distinct from the hegemonic value systems associated with the state and capitalism. This ethnography is based on seven months of intensive fieldwork within New Orleans' anarchist milieu, an ensemble of persons and reoccurring social situations taking place across the space of the city. I employ an innovative and reflexive methodology that synthesizes the ethnographic extended case approach with the philosophy of science known as critical realism. The extended case methodology achieves generalization through the reconstruction of existing theory based on the empirical data obtained during ethnographic case research. Critical realism completes this methodological approach by provided a fully developed ontological and epistemological justification authorizing the methodological procedures entailed in the extended case method. I focus on four primary ethnographic field sites within the city of New Orleans and its anarchist milieu: the efforts of a local and national network of anarchists to organize an Anarchist People of Color (APOC) convergence in New Orleans during the summer of 2012; the decision-making process adopted by the Iron Rail Collective, which manages a radical lending library and bookshop; the efforts of food justice activists as they struggle against the

commodification of food, and the culture of creativity associated with the Nowe Miasto housing collective. From this empirical data I develop a theoretical reconstruction of categories of value associated with anarchist activism: autonomy, solidarity, gift, and alienation. I demonstrate the ways in which anarchism can be understood as an alternative value system. I develop a conception of anarchism as the internal "Other" of Western modernity and suggest that it offers a pathway toward the greater fulfillment of the political project of realizing human freedom and emancipation.


INDEX WORDS:   Value, Autonomy, Alienation, the Gift, Solidarity, Anarchism, New
               Orleans

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the Spirit of Revolt.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

viii

LIST OF FIGURES

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

## AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF VALUE AND VALUES WITHIN AN ANARCHIST MILIEU

**Introduction: punk rock under the Big Top**

"Break your face! Break your face, break your face," screamed the lead singer as his band mates violently wrung music from their instruments a couple of yards in front of me. In the space between us a small but energetic group of punks thrashed to the music, a few of their number occasionally slamming their bodies together, attempting to bring on a general mosh. It seemed that there was not the critical mass of bodies needed to really get the mosh going so most participants just stood in place, swaying to the music and occasionally jumping up and down as the music picked up tempo.

I spotted a few folks coming in with boxes of books and start to arrange them on a table near the venue's entrance. I approached them.

"Hey, y'all are from the Iron Rail, right? I'm Pat, that anthropologist guy that you've probably heard about," I said.

"Oh, yeah, right," replied the woman on the other side of the table. "Yeah, someone said that you'd probably drop by," she continued. "Hi, I'm Mary Mayflower," she said smiling. Tall and thin, she wore thick-framed glasses that seemed even larger set on her thin face. Her loose black tank top left exposed several tattoos on her arms and chest.

1

As we chatted a small guy with thick dark hair, wearing tight, fraying jeans and a dirty white t-shirt, came over and greeted Mary with a big hug. I recognized the guy as Bert. I had met him previously during a brief visit to the Iron Rail, an anarchist book collective, several months earlier. We had also interacted during my brief stay at the Occupy Wall Street encampment in New Orleans' Duncan Plaza in October 2011. Since then, I had been in contact with the membership of the Iron Rail via email and a few phone calls. A liaison, named Mark, had volunteered to assist me as I prepared to enter the field in New Orleans.

I had only arrived in New Orleans two days earlier on the first of June 2012. I came to New Orleans to conduct seven months of ethnographic field research within the city's anarchist milieu. A day earlier, on Saturday, I had coffee with Mark and he told me that the collective planned to staff an information table at a benefit show at the Big Top, an art space on Clio street in the Uptown area that held an event called Punk Rock Takeover every Sunday. Punk rock bands played to raise money for local organizations. This Sunday the Iron Rail Collective was the beneficiary and they had decided to set up a book and information table at the event.

Mary and Bert were anarchists and members of the Iron Rail Book Collective. I sat behind the book table with Mary, trying to make small talk whenever the bands paused between sets. I was soon introduced to Lu, who joined us at the table. Lu's attire was classic anarcho-punk: black high-top lace-up boots, tight black pants covered in patches, held up by suspenders, and a black t-shirt with pink lettering that read "smash Israeli apartheid." Lu was friendly and we discussed one of the books displayed on the table.

"I've wanted to pick that up for awhile," I said, pointing to a copy of Silvia Federici's (2004) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*.

"Oh, I love Silvia. I once spent an afternoon with her at a talk in New York at Bluestockings," Lu said. Bluestockings is a well-known collectively run radical bookstore on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

"That's awesome," I replied.

"Yes, she was really sweet. Her analysis of how capitalism appropriates the value of women's labor is really enlightening. You really ought to read it," Lu said excitedly.

"You know, I think I'll pick this copy up here. I've been wanting to read it anyway and here it is," I said.

We chatted a bit more and eventually Lu went outside to the street to have a smoke. I stayed at the table for a while and then, as the show started to wind down, I made my exit. By the time I left, we had all agreed that I would come by the regularly scheduled Wednesday night meeting at the Iron Rail Lending Library and Bookshop.

Scenes like the one depicted above are probably not what most people think of when they think of New Orleans, famed land of streetcars, crawfish étoufé, and Bourbon Street, but this was the city that I encountered in course of fieldwork. This opening vignette contains a number of elements that were commonplace to my experience in New Orleans, and will reoccur through this ethnography. Punk aesthetics, radical politics, concerns with questions of value, and interpersonal relations tied to alternative spaces are all important to this ethnography.

**Ethnographic Goals and Objectives**

New Orleans' anarchist milieu and its value system are the primary focus of this dissertation. I consider how this system entangles thought and action and value and values within the everyday life of the anarchist milieu. Specifically, I ask the following research questions:

Q1: How do activists operating in the urban setting of New Orleans *produce and articulate alternative systems of value and governance* within the broader contexts of New Orleans and US society?

Q2: How are physical spaces, social networks/affinity networks, and values associated with the production of alternative urban space in New Orleans?

Q3: How does the existence of alternative space and alternative institutions sustain individual and community in the context of New Orleans?

Moving forward I will provide a brief overview definition of what anarchism is. This definition will serve as a quick orientation and then two brief excerpts and a longer life history narrative gained from field interviews convey the lived subjectivity and the meaning, of anarchism for participants. Anthropological value theory is useful for understanding New Orleans' anarchist milieu and its value system. While value theory will reappear in subsequent chapters this section provides my fullest and most general discussion. This is followed by a discussion of my research methodology: a synthesis of the extended case method and critical realism. This chapter concludes with overview descriptions of the five sites within the milieu that comprise the primary empirical focus of this ethnography.

**Anarchism**

The history of anarchism is global, diverse, and extremely complicated. There are many strands of anarchist thought and practice, taking many forms over the centuries, but anarchism begins with a principled critique of hierarchy and a desire for autonomy.

As Chomsky has succinctly put it, "…the burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met" (2005: 178). As a political philosophy anarchism does not advocate chaos. Historically anarchists have advocated the

advancement of a directly democratic social order. Anarchism is a form of libertarian socialism, a term which also shares certain tendencies with Marxism. However one chooses to define anarchism, it is more than a set of abstract principles. For many it is a deeply internalized value system; it is a structure of sentiment and feeling that serves as a guide to practice. As Graeber (2004: 6) writes, "[a]narchism has tended to be an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice." Here ethics should not be understood as transcendent or derived from theological premises but rather growing out of practical questions about how to live together in a non-hierarchical, egalitarian, society. The following brief excerpts from longer life history narratives illustrate the subjective expression of the abstract principles noted above.

Bert, explaining his attraction to anarchism's anti-authoritarian commitments, stated, "I think it has to do with my personal experience with a lot of authoritarianism and just sort of having a basic disgust at that …" Bert briefly paused, and seemed to articulate his feelings in his mind before speaking. He continued, "…so…you know, I don't like seeing people stepped on and disrespected…and that's like the most basic place from where I'm an anarchist…I don't like being treated like shit and I don't want other people treated like shit and that's what authoritarianism does."

Another interview participant, Trevor, explained why he values anti-authoritarian politics, "…I think coercion detracts from people's autonomy and if we are to build a movement to challenge capitalism, I believe it will just end up replicating capitalism in some other way if it doesn't embody the values right away it espouses. I don't think there is any time to wait!"

Bert and Trevor express sentiments and themes common throughout the anarchist milieu; Trevor's explicit emphasis on autonomy, prefiguration (the idea that political ends and means must be commensurate, and that a movement for egalitarianism must itself practice

egalitarianism), and anti-capitalism were common themes encountered throughout my fieldwork and will be developed in the course of this ethnography.

These themes are also expressed in a brief life history narrative produced by Lu during an interview. Lu self-identifies as genderqueer and prefers designation by non-gendered pronouns. Honoring this and following common convention within the anarchist movement, I refer to Lu as "they" and "them." Throughout this ethnography I use italics to indicate the singular when using conventionally plural pronouns such as *they* or *them*. I also use pseudonyms throughout.

We sat at Lu's kitchen table; the wooden creak of the chair I sat on was surprisingly amplified by ear buds feeding from the small external microphone attached to my smart phone (my field recording device). I fumbled with the volume as I placed the microphone on the small kitchen table resting between Lu and I. When I arrived for our interview, I was met at the door by one of Lu's housemates and was escorted through the clean but slightly jumbled interior of the house to meet Lu in the kitchen.

I first met Lu relatively soon after my arrival in New Orleans. Lu was always friendly but I believe it took awhile for *them* to be sure of my intentions. We became and remain fast friends and eventually ended up living together in the Nowe Miasto housing collective. Lu is tall, lanky and wirily muscled. The southern Louisiana sun challenged *their* relatively pale skin on a daily basis, and the dark inky pigment of the several tattoos doting *their* torso and arms offered no protection. Lu's hair came in several colors, depending on the available selection of dyes. Within New Orleans' anarchist milieu Lu cut a striking figure and was generally considered rather attractive; dressed in *their* usual punk attire, *they* fit the image of a dashing anarcho-punk revolutionary. Lu is a poet by inclination and a website developer when necessary. I quickly

came to respect *their* high intelligence and soft-spoken and sensitive disposition. Lu spoke into

my microphone:

> One of the things I love about anarchism is that people grow through that identity. I think that many younger anarchists start with noticing the authoritarian structures in their lives, the ones just around them, the police in the town they grew up in. For many it's their parents, it's the people who presented authoritarian structures to begin with. It's as far back as something like a bully. Your first interactions with authoritarianism, I think everyone feels resentful and conflicted about it.
>
> As I grew older and I started to recognize that those individual authoritarian figures were actually connected to a really wide network, a culture that enabled them and a culture that encouraged authoritarianism, much to the detriment of me and specifically my friends who I loved, who I cared about. I started to see this distinct split between people who occupied authoritarian positions and people who had different intentions; they wanted to live more peacefully, they wanted to live more cooperatively, or they just wanted to live. So back when I was a kid I saw it in a really black and white way: it was those authoritarians and us. That appealed to me.
>
> As I grew more as an anarchist and as I started to realize that authority was an extension of power and power exists in social spaces that I hold a lot of power and privilege myself, that people navigate through power, that power has a material structure, I began to see more of a structure of capitalism that I thought was not only inane and ecocidal but deeply destructive and deeply wounding to everyone who comes in contact with it. I don't normally like to—to—I think ethics are kind of a moot point in politics but at some point you look at something and you're like, 'I think this is bad.'
>
> You know, I see this [system] taking children away from their parents, I see this putting people in prison, and I see it doing things that I think are detrimental to the human experience or just to the idea of attempting to live cooperatively, which I think many humans are trying to do in any culture. So I think my anti-authoritarianism started out as a way to resist authority in my own life and it grew into a way to socially and materially attack a system that I thought was unacceptable as a way to have human society.

Lu's initial skepticism of political ethics yields to ethical critique that begins as a

personal revolt and develops into a systemic evaluation. The shifting frame of reference within

Lu's narrative is also notable: Lu's narrative emphasis oscillates between the personal and the

structural and this suggests the interpenetration of the two domains. Lu's narrative offers a

critique, a negative evaluation, of the state capitalist system from the standpoint of everyday life and experience. This critical evaluation spurred Lu to counter-commitments, which led to an embrace of the anarchist value system. I should note here that Lu preferred the terminology of "commitments" to that of "values." The language of "values" has gained a bad name among some radicals due to its appropriation by right wing pundits and religiously conservative politicians. I argue, however, that the language of "values" is indispensable for understanding the contemporary anarchist movement.

**Understanding anarchist praxis through anthropological value theory**

Anthropological value theory is useful for understanding and conceptualizing the activities taking place within New Orleans' anarchist milieu. In this section, I first present my theoretical argument and then explain the wider theoretical basis for the approach to value that I put forward. In so doing, I discuss Marx's (1990 [1867]) conception of value and its later formulation by diverse Marxist movements, which I broadly gloss under the heading of autonomous Marxism. I then situate these relative to anthropological value theory and focus on the work of a few of its core thinkers. I close out this section with a consideration of the gift as an expression of value significant to the anarchist value system.

***The theoretical argument***

The importance of the value theory for my ethnographic analysis is that it provides a way to conceive the relation between moral, or ethical, commitments, creative activities, and social forms. In anthropological parlance, it provides the tools to construct a *holistic* perspective on New Orleans' anarchist milieu. With this in mind, and to slightly paraphrase Graeber (2013: 225), I define value as the way the significance of our own creative activities becomes real to us by being realized in some socially recognized form that is simultaneously material and symbolic.

8

This definition suggests a series of interrelated social relationships. As such I conceptualize New Orleans' anarchist milieu as a value system that, "…connects together goods that are affirmed and bads that are repudiated as an integrated way of thinking and acting in the world" (McMurtry 1998: 7). This integrated way of thinking and acting in the world is where "values" and "value" coincide. This perspective suggests a reading of common anarchist terminology, for instance terms such as, solidarity, mutual, autonomy, and alienation, as expressions of anarchist "goods" to be affirmed and "bads" to be repudiated; they express elemental relations of the integrated system; they offer different angles and conceptual vantage points from which to encounter the system. For example, as a value *solidarity* expresses an ethically meaningful category of action within the framework of certain anarchist social relations.

### Marx's theory of value

Marx (1990 [1867]) began *Capital*, his oeuvre on capitalism, with a consideration of the contradictorily relation between use-value and exchange-value as embodied in the commodity. Through an iterative and expansive dialectical analysis Marx moves from the commodity to a presentation of the totality of the system of capitalism. In a sense the entire study can be seen as an exposition on the transformation of value as it moves through the system of capital. However, value, like most categories used by Marx is not an "it" or a "thing" but rather a social relationship (Ollman 2003). As a relational concept, value's apparent meaning shifts depending on its (for expediency one must forgive certain non-relational linguistic conventions) relational constitution: for instance, exchange-value vs. use-value.

Although value's definition shifts with its relationally constituted context, there must be an "essence" that is stable, or at least stable enough, in order for value to have any meaning at

9

all. For Marx, in *Capital*, the material essence of value is socially necessary labor time that meets human needs, wants, and desires, at least in terms of use-value (and relationally exchange-value). This is significant because, as Harvey (2010: 22) writes, "…value is socially necessary labor-time. But value doesn't mean anything unless it connects back to use-value. Use-value is socially necessary to value." It is important to note that the "necessity" of socially necessary labor time is, to one extent or another, historically contingent. To give it a Bourdieuian (1977) inflection, "necessity" resides in the rules (imperatives) of the game (system). Of course, Marx (1990 [1867]) is focused on the imperatives of the system of capitalism. However, the material essence of value found in the relation of objective labor and subjective, or rather socially intersubjective, desire, want, and need is suggestive of a wider reading of value both inside and outside of capitalism.

### *Value inside and outside of capitalism*

Within Marxism, various controversies have emerged over the years that have pitted orthodox (usually rooted in the political and ideological needs of Communist Parties) and diverse heterodox, or autonomous, tendencies. It is unsurprising to find that questions of value have often been at the core of such disputes. Speaking very broadly, the autonomous tendencies have attempted to expand the site(s) of value production beyond the factory to the wider society. For their part autonomous tendencies within Marxian anthropology have aimed to expand our understanding of value beyond capitalism.

### *Autonomous Marxism*

Rubin (1928: 3), an early heterodox Marxist theorist, argued that political economy "…is not a science of relations of *things to things*, as was thought by vulgar economists, nor the relations of *people to things*, as was asserted by the theory of marginal utility, but of the relations

of *people to people* in the process of production." With this sociological emphasis Rubin

centered his analysis of value on a consideration of commodity fetishism (alienation). Rubin,

following Marx, argued that value  "…1) is a social relation among *people*, 2) which assumes a

*material* form and 3) is related to the process of *production*" (1928: 63). Rubin (1928: 67-68)

moved to understand value as qualitative social form or "wertform." Rubin's contemporary,

Lukács (1971: 86), also focused on value form and fetishism, which he reformulated as

"reification" and expanded as encompassing "…universal category of society as a whole."

By the second half of the twentieth century autonomous movements were proliferating.

Caught between the orthodoxies of Communist Party establishments and Capitalism, in many

cases these groups declared a pox on both. In this way these groups can be seen to converge with

anarchism's libertarian socialism and commitment to extra-parliamentary politics, generally

speaking.

Italy's Autonomia movement, preceded by Operaismo, developed the concept of the

"social factory," expanding the sites of value production, and extended the analysis of class

struggle to workers and non-workers alike (Cleaver 2000: 70; Tronti 2010; Federici 2012: 14).

In Germany, theorists of what was to be called Open Marxism (Bonefeld et al 1992)

continued in the tracks of Rubin and Lukács to further refine theories of fetishism, reification,

and the value form.

In France intellectuals associated with *Socialism ou Barbarie* and the *Situationist*

*International* also grappled with alienation and similar concerns to those of Autonomia. For

instance, Lefebvre (1996; 2009) suggested a participatory democratic "right to the city" as part

of his spatial project and put forward concepts of *autogestion* (self-management). Debord (1983

[1967]) posited the "society of the spectacle;" reification and alienation had reached such an

extent that social life was increasingly only represented rather than actually lived in any meaningful way. Debord and his fellow Situationists designed subversive strategic and tactical interventions aimed at appropriating existing cultural forms, particularly mass commoditized cultural images and music, to reveal and subvert the mediation of life by its spectacle representation.

The importance of all of this for my analysis of New Orleans' anarchist milieu is that, in one way or another, all of these theorists and movements redefined the site of value production and struggle to the terrain of everyday life within capitalism. Struggles on this terrain may be understood as value struggles (De Angelis 2007: 30), the antagonistic clash between the value imperatives of capital and other multifarious realms of value creation for aims other than the imperatives of capital. This understanding of value is commensurate with a certain theorization of value developed within anthropology, which allows for a way to begin to perceive what non-capitalist value creation might look like.

***Anthropological value theory***

Anthropological value theory has been concerned with value production and reproduction within non-capitalist social relations. For instance, Turner's (2003: 1) work on the Kayapó of Amazonia suggests production, "…is concerned above all with the production of social persons and the relations, and the social values attached to them." In the case of the Kayapó, beauty and power (the capability to act properly) comprise primary categories of value, which are socially (relationally) produced and embodied in persons as projects of mutual creation. This explication is broadly characteristic of the concerns of anthropological value theorists.

Graeber (2001: 59) lays this out in a highly abstract summary of this approach, which entails starting, "…with a notion of intentional action, productive action aimed at a certain goal.

12

This action produces social relations and in doing so transforms the producers themselves." This abstraction, of course, only indicates a general approach to investigating value in a diverse range of human societies, which in their separate cases require greatly more detailed explication.

For example, Fajans (1997) found that "work" for the Baining, egalitarian horticulturalists of Papua New Guinea, comprised a core social value. The value and organizational aim of work was to transform nature, including uncultivated humans, into society. Fajans (1997: 275) explains, "…the moral commitment to values of work is equally shared as a value of Baining identity. Any development of distinctions between social persons, then, would undermine the value of common identity of all Baining."

This anthropological approach articulated Marxist and feminist concerns with value production and reproduction within non-capitalist social relations (Narotsky 1997: 35-37; Graeber 2006: 71). A genealogical glance at this tradition finds Terrence Turner (1986; 1989; 1990; 2003; 2008), Nancy D. Munn (1977; 1992 [1986]; 2013), and Jane Fajans (1983; 1997; 2006) as early core of developers within anthropology. More recently Eiss and Pederson (2002), David Graeber (2001; 2006; 2011; 2013) and an emerging cohort represented in a recent double issue of *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* edited by da Col (2013) continue to develop this anthropological approach to value.

### *Value and the gift*

Gibson-Graham (2006) has created a theoretical opening to consider forms of non-capitalist value production within the nominally capitalist economy. I argue that the historic and contemporary praxis, the philosophy and practice, of anarchism articulate just such an alternative value system. Undoubtedly, capitalism is an unprecedented social force of preeminent political economic power. However, capitalism—though imbricated in any number of social relations—is

not the totality of society, nor the totality of political and economic relations. Gibson-Graham (2006: 58) has correctly called into question a certain "capitalocentrism" that haunts Leftist thought. "The intricate interdependencies of household, community, and market-based economic activities are rarely explored, and the idea of independent economic dynamics within household economies, the volunteer sector, or neighborhood rendered virtually unthinkable by the hegemony of capitalocentrism" (Gibson-Graham 2006: 58).

Gudeman (2001; 2008; 2009) characterizes this dynamic in terms of dialectical tensions existing between the realms of community and market. To view capitalism as *the* economy is to fall into the kind of fetishistic trap that Marx railed against. To decenter capitalism is by no means to ignore or suppose capitalism as just another social relation among many. Following an insight developed by de Angelis (2007), it is possible to recognize the danger and power of capital's totalizing drive without conceding the existence of a capitalist totality. To decenter capitalism means to begin to appreciate all of the non-capitalist ways people relate to each other in everyday life. It means questioning the value form of capitalism and attending to the articulation of alternative values that potentially give rise to value forms against and beyond capitalism. This was a key motive underwriting the praxis of the anarchist milieu in New Orleans.

Contra to this view is a tendency to naturalize and fetishize the capitalist economy and formally separate the political and economic within capitalism (Wood 1981). This tends to conceptually separate values from economic decision-making. Capitalism is taken as *the* economy and this economy is seen to express an immutable force of human nature. Accommodating this appears only rational. Political interference in the economy is often considered tantamount to political interference in the workings of gravity. This constitutes what

McMurtry (1998) calls a "value program" as distinct from a value system. McMurtry (1998: 15) explains that, "[a] value system or ethic becomes a program when its assumed structure of worth rules out thought beyond it." In as much as capitalism rules out and precludes the possibilities of alternatives, it functions as a value program, a closed system, itself being the only criterion of worth.

Seeing capitalism as a historically produced ethical system opens it up to ethical critiques and challenges from other realms of value. Once the myth of capitalism's social totality is dispelled and the reality of the existence of a complex and heterogeneous non-capitalist economy is acknowledged, then a question of conceptualization emerges. How are the non-capitalist aspects of the economic field expressed?

Within New Orleans anarchist milieu generosity and gifting behavior were significant values. All of my interview participants agreed that generosity, usually materially expressed in gifting one's skill sets and time to collective projects, was important for the functioning of the anarchist milieu.

The gift has long been an object of considerable anthropological interest from the modern founding of the discipline to today (Malinowski 2002 [1922]; Mauss 1990 [1925]; Sykes 2005). Social researchers have also asked what role the gift plays in contemporary societies and its relation to hegemonic capitalism (Parry 1986; Bell 1990; Bird-David and Darr 2009; Godbout and Caillé 2000; Godbout 2002; Silber 2009). The gift represents political and economic principles far older than capitalism, but this should not be read to mean that capital has somehow superseded the principles of gift. In other words, it is a mistake to assume that capitalism is the present and future and the gift is the past.

Even with the evolutionist baggage of the 19th century clinging to his thought, Mauss (1990 [1925]), to his great credit, recognized contemporaneousness of the gift, even viewing it as a necessary corrective of the social failures of the market. Under the heading of "moral conclusions" Mauss (1990 [1925]: 65) asserts that, "[i]t is possible to extend these observation to our own societies. A considerable part of our morality and our lives themselves are still permeated with this same atmosphere of the gift, where obligation and liberty intermingle." By examining the diverse, temporally deep, and geographically widespread phenomenon of the gift, Mauss sought to identify and delineate enduring principles of human interaction.

Following Godbout and Caillé (2000: 20), "[a]ny exchange of goods or services with no guarantee of recompense in order to create, nourish, or recreate social bonds between people is a gift." The definitional element here is the gift's ability to produce social bonds. Indeed, as Godbout and Caillé observe, "…where the gift is concerned, goods circulate in the service of ties" (2000: 20). As an aside, it is worth noting that the two authors cited about are leading figures associated with the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales*, or MAUSS for short, an international network of social scientists who take Marcel Mauss' work on the gift as foundational to the development of a non-utilitarian (i.e. non-capitalist) economics.

With its definitional characteristic as the ability to create and sustain the social bond, the gift entangles the categories of solidarity, agency, autonomy, politics and, ultimately, social creativity. Bell (1991: 166), summing up his formal (but decidedly not neoclassical) analysis of gift economics, notes that, "[a] complex gift economy has a well-developed technology, but its most important technology is a technology of social relations." This suggests another dimension of the gift that is significant for the argument put forward in this dissertation: the gift stands opposed to social alienation. These are central theoretical and ethnographic concerns to this

dissertation, and will be developed going forward. The implications for practice and value lie in the fact that every time one gives a gift, they create value. The gift becomes imbued with significance beyond its material qualities. It is the relationship behind the gift that produces its meaning, its value.

In summary, the autonomous Marxist approach developed an expanded view of value production beyond the factory and applied it to social production more generally. Consequently this led to a conception of broader social struggles, or value struggles, beyond the traditional figure of industrial proletariat. Anthropologists have expanded questions of value production beyond capitalism into the non-capitalist social relations of various societies. I use the work of Gibson-Graham's (2006) decentering of capitalism as *the* economy as a theoretical meeting point between the expanded critique of value under capitalism and the existence of value creation outside of capitalism. Because generosity and giving were important values within my field sites, I use the longstanding anthropological interest in the gift to suggest how non-capitalist value relations can exist, indeed be entangled, in the nominally capitalist economy.

**Methodology: reflexivity, dialectics and critical realism**

My research was structured by the methodological framework of the extended case approach and I deepen this methodology by integrating it with a dialectical and critical realist onto-epistemologies that serve as philosophical underlaborers. In many ways, the extended case approach, as articulated by Burawoy (1998), has already assumed just such an onto-epistemology through its commitment to reflexive ethnography and reflexive science more generally.

Theory is explicitly articulated at the level of exposition and analysis in functionalism, culture and personality, cultural relativism, and similar traditions in anthropology. Theoretical

17

commitments associated with ethnography as a mode of inquiry, at the level of methodology, have traditionally remained much more implicit (Nader 2011). Ethnography, considered as a unified mode of inquiry and a form of written exposition, is a practice of knowledge production that is inextricably theory-laden. As the theory-laden nature of ethnographic methodology often remains in the background, ethnography's core ensemble of data collection techniques have stood in the foreground *as* ethnography. Participant observations, formal and informal interviews, sampling strategies, field notes, and so on are not innocent, but are also theory laden. As a result reflexive ethnography must not only reflect upon the role and position of the ethnographer in relation to fieldwork, but on the mode of enquiry itself and its key onto-epistemological assumptions.

I take dialectical materialism, with its onto-epistemological implications, as my chief methodological premise and warrant. Relational transformation is a core concern of dialectical materialism, and human subjectivity and activity are understood as primary forces of social transformation. Agency, this human force of transformation, is always already meaningfully constitutive and constituted. Social categories are valid in as much as they express meaningful social relations. They may be partial or one-sided but as products of intersubjective agreement and contestation they take on a kind of social objectivity.

I house my dialectical commitment within the conceptual framework of critical scientific realism and extended case ethnography; I develop my dialectical premise and realist framework as a ground for my more concrete deployment of the extended case method. Thus, as a matter of reflexivity, I foreground my onto-epistemological premises as inextricable from my data collection methodology.

18

Considered ontologically, the social rests on a differentiated structure of physical reality, biological processes, chemical processes, and atomic and subatomic processes. We can understand these processes in terms of an interpenetrating hierarchy in which each successive level is grounded in the previous level but also operating according to it own emergent properties. Here *emergence* can be defined as, "[t]he appearance of something new; objects composed of other objects so that new structures, powers and mechanism have appeared" (Danermark et al 2005: 205).

The socio-cultural is a level of reality defined by its emergent properties, which modify and are modified in relation to the bio-physical strata but are irreducible to them. The emergent strata of the social can be designated by seven onto-epistemological characteristics: 1) activity-dependence, 2) concept-dependence, time-space-dependence, 4) social-relation-dependence, 5) relationality, 6) internal complexity and 7) interdependence (Bhaskar 2009 [1986]: 87-90). Although there are a number of important implications that come with recognizing these characteristics, one point must suffice here. The activity-dependence of the social leads to a recognition of the materiality undergirding and ultimately responsible for assumedly immaterial social relations. In other words, social relations are "real" objects. Marx, the arch materialist, recognized this when he explained that, "[n]ot an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as values…we may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing value" (1990 [1867]: 138). Even though "value" is not a physical property of commodities, it is nevertheless material in that it is a production of the organization of human sentiment and activity. To claim the realness of social relations is, however, not to fetishize them as fixed, static, or beyond human intervention.

In terms of the emergent properties of the social, critical scientific realism seeks to develop a science appropriate for it as the object of inquiry. Reflexive ethnography stands out as highly commensurate with this critical scientific realist aim. Ethnography has never quite fit within the positive model of science. This maladjustment can be expressed in the contradiction between the necessity of context to ethnographic enquiry and the positive aim of contextual abnegation. Among other effects, this ill fit has given generations of ethnographers anxiety over the "scientific," and thus authoritative and legitimate, status of their chosen methodology.

The avoidance of *reactivity* and the privileging of *reliability*, *replication*, and *representativeness* as criteria for legitimating ethnographic inquiry as "scientific" have hobbled the development of ethnography as a form of reflexive science. The privileging of the four "Rs" mentioned above has served to exclude and delegitimize methodological consideration of *intervention*, *process*, *structuration*, and *reconstruction* (Burawoy 1998: 14-16). These four reflexive criteria can be understood as dialectical inversions of each of the positivistic criteria mentioned above respectively.

The core distinction of these two models of science is between an onto-epistemology of *separation* (positivism) and one of *relation* (reflexive science). In the conduct of reflexive ethnographic enquiry, *dialogue* and *intersubjectivity* are privileged. As Burawoy explains:

> [i]t enjoins what positive science separates: participant and observer, knowledge and social situation and its field of location, folk theory and academic theory. The principles of this reflexive science can be derived from the context effects that pose as impediments to positive science.
>
> [1998; 14]

None of this should be read as a rejection of positive models of science in total. Rather it is an argument for the greater appropriateness of a reflexive model for ethnography. Though reflexive

ethnography requires a repurposing of data collection, much of the core ensemble of data collection techniques becomes even more suitable to the structure of ethnographic inquiry.

In the course of my fieldwork I employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, regular field note taking, and archival research and collection of movement produced literature such as 'zines and pamphlets. I collected these data with many of the organizations and groups that compose the city's contemporary radical milieu. Below, I provide a basic description of my sample of interviewees. I make no claim to statistical representativeness of the milieu beyond my sample of interviews, but I do contend that the numbers appear consistent with what I learned in the course of observations and participation within the milieu.

Interviews took place in a variety of locations. Many of them took place in the primary field sites. For instance, I conducted a number of interviews at Nowe Miasto, and a few at the Iron Rail: Lending Library and Bookshop after hours. Some interviews were conducted over coffee at Fair Grinds Café. Once someone agreed to do an interview I always asked them where they would feel most comfortable doing the interview. All participants read and signed my Institutional Review Board approved consent form.

I conducted a total of forty semi-structured interviews. Before beginning each interview I administered a brief demographic survey. Of thirty-seven participants who completed the survey and indicated their gender, nineteen identified as male (51%), eleven as female (29%), and seven as genderqueer (18%). For the thirty-two participants who indicated their age, their median age was twenty-nine. The majority of participants had attended college. Eleven (30%) participants indicated that they had attended college but had not graduated; seventeen (47%) had obtained a Bachelor's degree. The majority of participants indicated some participation in the labor force.

Fourteen (40%) reported engaging in wage labor and eight (22%) reported being self-employed. Of thirty-five respondents, the majority reported income between $5,000 and $20,000. Eight (22%) reported income between $5,000 and 10,000. Ten (28%) reported income between 10,000 and $15,000. And five (14%) reported income between $15,000 and $20,000. Of thirty-six respondents, seven (14%) identified as African American and twenty-three (63%) identified as white. There were several bi- or tri-racial identities as well.

**A map to the dissertation**

Beyond this introduction, one ethnohistorical chapter, five ethnographic chapters, and a concluding chapter structure this dissertation. The ethnographic chapters each focus on particular aspects of the value system operative within New Orleans anarchist milieu. The chapters cover history and values around practices of solidarity, autonomy, generosity, and creativity and critique. The concluding chapter explains the significance of this research and summarizes its key findings.

In this chapter two, titled "*History, space, and memory: an ethnohistory of New Orleans radical milieu,*" I construct a radical and contextualizing ethnohistory of New Orleans' radical milieu, using narrative as a starting point to weave together the ethnographic present and the radical past of the city. This chapter details several historical vignettes that collectively span the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These vignettes were chosen because of their saliency within New Orleans' contemporary anarchist milieu.

Chapter three, "*Organizing the APOCalypse: solidarity and difference at an Anarchist People of Color convergence,*" develops an intersectional and strategic conception of solidarity through an ethnographic account of an Anarchist Person of Color (APOC) convergence in New

Orleans titled *APOCcalypse 2012: Survival Strategies for the New Millennium.* One can think of the convergence as a kind of activist conference. This chapter also discusses the history of APOC movement and key figures in its development such as Ashanti Alston (2003), Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (1994), and Kuwasi Balagoon (2003). The chapter concludes with a consideration of how intersectional strategy articulates with the anarchist values of solidarity and autonomy.

Chapter 4, *"The Iron Rail: autonomy and alienation,"* focuses on the anarchist value of autonomy manifested in the worker-managed and consensus-based operations of the *Iron Rail Lending Library and Bookshop.* The "Rail" is a long running project of the Iron Rail Book Collective. The Rail long provided access to radical literature and served as an important hub for the anarchist milieu in New Orleans and beyond.

Chapter 5, "*Community Kitchen: food as gift rather than commodity,*" focuses on the Community Kitchen was a food justice collective which aimed to challenge the commodity status of food. This chapter examines Community Kitchen as enacting radical values of generosity with the aim of prefiguring the de-commoditization of food. This chapter develops a detailed ethnographic narrative of Community Kitchen's operations with a particular focus on the practice of serving food in public spaces around the city of New Orleans.

The focal site of chapter six, "*Nowe Miasto: building the new city within the shell of the old," is* Nowe Miasto, an old lumber warehouse that later became a collective house located in Mid City neighborhood of New Orleans. Nowe Miasto was a radical space of cultural production and reproduction. It was a site of intentional living and the production of music, poetry, street art, and abstract sculpture. This creativity was aimed at critical social intervention as much as it was concerned with aesthetic production.

**Conclusions and significance**

Arguably, we are living in an age of protest. Globally speaking, protest movements have been growing for over a decade and have only increased in the wake the global financial crisis. The reasons for the growth of these protest movements are multiple but their participants consistently articulate, at least, four overlapping themes of grievance that are associated with values. According to Ortiz and colleagues (2013: 14), these themes concern economic justice and anti-austerity; the failures of representative government; human rights, and global justice. Anthropologists studying social movements recognize the salience of values to social movements (Edelman 2001; Nash 2004: 4; Salman and Assies 2010: 230). Occupy Wall Street and similar horizontal movements emerged from anarchist initiatives that valued autonomy and direct democracy; Anarchists have been a numerical minority within the surge of global protests, but anarchist values appear to have had an outsized influence (Graeber 2013).

The significance of this dissertation is that it locates the source of values that are shaping the world of the twenty-first century in the everyday practices of an anarchist milieu. I ethnographically locate the "infrapolitics" (Vodovnik 2013) that underwrites more spectacular forms of public protest, and ask important questions about how value and values are articulated through sentiments and practices taking place within the everyday spaces of New Orleans anarchist milieu. This work contributes an analysis of New Orleans' anarchist milieu as a site of organized creative social production, which materially and symbolically articulates an alternative value system. This work also contributes to the anthropology of social movements by developing value as a potentially unifying theory of meaningful practice for a subfield that has struggled to find a unifying conceptual framework.

# CHAPTER 2

# AN ETHNOHISTORY OF NEW ORLEANS RADICAL MILIEU

In this chapter, I construct a radical ethnohistory of the New Orleans radical milieu, using narrative to weave together the ethnographic present and the radical past. I do not attempt a comprehensive history of radical politics in the city. Rather, my approach is more opportunistic: I follow threads of suggestive commentary that I encountered in the course of ethnographic research in order to explore destinations located in the city's history and cultural memory. New Orleans, perhaps more so than any other Southern city, exemplifies William Faulkner's (2011 [1951]) famous observation that, "…the past is never dead, it's not even past" (73). The present is shaped by the past but, in terms of intersubjective meanings, cultural memory, valuation, and assessment from particular standpoints, the past is shaped in the present as well. In other words, the value of the past is derived from contested meanings in the present.

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the diverse projects and sites that relationally create the anarchist milieu. Lefebvre's (1991; 2009) theory of triadic space and his notion of autogestion are useful for understanding the milieu as a coherent project. I draw on a range of historical accounts to support my discussion of New Orleans' radicalism over the centuries. I then discuss an account New Orleans in the 1850s by Élisée Reclus (1994 [1855]), the famous anarchist geographer. I also focus on the New Orleans slave rebellion of 1811, the New Orleans general strike of 1892, and the Industrial Workers of the World's (IWW) fight to build class unity against racial segregation in the early twentieth century. By the late 1960s the

counterculture was exploding in New Orleans and was documented in pages of the *NOLA Express*, a radical magazine and primary source for understanding New Orleans' counterculture in the late 1960s. This era also saw the rise and fall of the New Orleans Black Panther Party. I focus on their legendary standoff with the police at the Desire housing project. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of my involvement with the *Raging Pelican: Journal of Gulf Coast Resistance.*

**The Anarchist milieu**

The New Orleans' anarchist milieu exists as an overlapping web of social relations structured by a shared anarchist value system. This milieu is composed of many projects and sites of value creation. In addition to my four primary field sites it includes Books to Prisons, The Raging Pelican, the Endless Gaycation Organizing Working Group, the Above Ground 'Zine Library (connected to the Iron Rail), INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence, Critical Resistance, Common Ground Health Clinic, Common Ground Collective/Relief (formally separated from the health clinic), Free the Angola 3, NOLA to Angela annual bike ride, and Women with a Vision, to name just a few in no particular order. Not all of these sites are exclusively anarchist but they generally find support within the anarchist milieu.

Besides my field site of Nowe Miasto I know of three other collective houses: Sycamore, Unicorn Beach, and Apparatus. It is common for collective houses to be named. "Nowe Miasto" means the "new city" in Polish: an aspirational name. Houses are named for any number of reasons. For instance, Sycamore was named for the large sycamore tree residing in the backyard. Both Nowe Miasto and Sycamore are located in Mid City, a few blocks from each other, Unicorn Beach was near the Tremé, and Apparatus was situated in the Upper Ninth Ward.

A collective house is defined by its internal organization: life within the house is structured around anarchist values of direct democratic decision-making; values of mutual aid, solidarity, and autonomy are also embodied in the collective life of each house. Through the production of meaningful and affective relations the space of the house is transformed into a living dynamic place of collective construction. In this way, too, the space of the city is similarly transformed into meaningful places of collective organizing and struggle.

The various projects and houses, with their overlapping memberships and relations, construct the anarchist milieu of the city. These sites and projects have different specific aims but in one way or another tend to coalesce around aspects of the anarchist value system I identify through the course of this ethnography.


**New Orleans' anarchist milieu as a space of autogestion**

Summarizing the spirit of Lefebvre's project of developing a critique of everyday life, Merrifield (2006: 2) writes, "[t]herein lies its most fundamental message: everyday life is so precious because it is so fragile; we must live it to the full, inhabit it as fully sensual beings, as total men and women, commandeering our own very finite destiny, before it's too late." This is where Lefebvre's thought and the value system of contemporary anarchism coincide as a mutual embrace of autonomy and a rejection of alienation. The problem of alienation was central to Lefebvre's critique of everyday life and the production of space (Elden 2004: 41). However, alienation was not simply an abstract philosophical problem. For Lefebvre, "…critique was not simply knowledge of everyday life, but knowledge of the means to transform it" (Trebitsch 2014: 10). This raises the strategic question how might everyday life become transformed and what does/will this transformation look like?

To answer this question, Lefebvre (2009: 138) offers the concept of autogestion. It is worth noting that Lefebvre credits, though not uncritically, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's notion of 'associations gestionaires' (management associations) as inspirational (2009: 144). Of course, Proudhon is a key figure in the development of modern political anarchism. Autogestion is typically understood to refer to collective self-management and connotes a sense of direct democratic participation at all levels of society. According to Elden (2004: 227), "[a]utogestion would require…active participation in the political process, and would dissolve the relations between the rulers and the ruled, the active and the passive, subjects and objects."

This is certainly commensurate with most visions of anarchy. As Brenner (2001) notes, "[d]uring the events of May 1968, *autogestion* became a popular rallying cry for the noncommunist and anarchist Left…" (788). Lefebvre (2009) offers autogestion as a form of strategy analysis: "…*autogestion*—appears in the *weak points* of existing society. In every society, we can perceive the strong points, the whole of which constitutes its framework or, if you prefer, its structure" (144). Lefebvre notes the state seeks to reinforce and fortify the strong points by all available means; once secured they simply reproduce the existing order. However, pointing to the weak areas, Lefebvre explains that, "[t]his is where things happen. Initiatives and social forces act on and intervene in these lacunae, occupying and transforming them into strong points or, on the contrary, into 'something other'" (2009: 144). Regarding New Orleans one immediately thinks of the "weak points" of poverty and historically structured inequality that were exposed to the world in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. However, it was also in these weak points that much of the unique artistic culture of New Orleans strived.

The anarchist milieu in New Orleans can be understood as a project of autogestion as it is commensurate with the anarchist value praxis of autonomy. However, autogestion is not a

standalone concept; rather it is integrated into the broader structure of Lefebvre's thought (and anarchist praxis) concerning the production of space. At a high level of abstraction, Lefebvre (1991) abstracts space into three dialectical, mutually conditioning, moments: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces (33). He also posits the triadic corollary of perceived, conceived, and lived space (40).

Spatial practice is the activity of producing societal space and, as *perceived* space, is grounded in daily life. Representations of space are *conceived* by urban planners and the like, those with the authority to create and structure concrete space through the imposition of the abstractions of designs, blueprints, maps, and so on. Spaces of representation are *lived* spaces, the directly experienced built environment that is always already entangled in symbolism and meaningful signs. The usefulness of this triadic abstraction of space for my ethnographic theorization is that it locates and embeds the small spaces of autogestion within the framework of the system that it opposes. Here I should note a fourth integral component: history. As Lefebvre writes, "[i]f space is produced, if there is a production process, then we are dealing with history…" (1991: 46). At a certain level of abstraction, Lefebvre's triad is general to all cities but it is in the dimension of history that this dynamic shifting triad finds concrete and particular development.

**The historicity of meaningful experience in New Orleans**

The historicity of New Orleans is a social force that resonates in the built environment and the meaningful experience of life in the city. Analysis of semi-structured interviews suggests that the city is experienced as a dichotomy, a kind of contradictory space that dynamically combines a sense of beauty and wonder with pain and tragedy. The theme of dichotomy and

estrangement were expressed in a majority of the interviews. Here I provide excerpts from interviews conducted with Ida, Jackie, and Marguerite that highlight this dimension of estrangement as it is lived by three anarchist women of color. I had worked with each of the three women as part of the Anarchist People of Color convergence.

*Ida*

"How would you describe the city?" I asked Ida as we sat in her small apartment in Mid City.

Reclining on her couch she replied, "I think that it is a city of contradictions. It's a beautiful city, I think it's a very much neglected city, a forgotten city."

Ida was friendly and down-to-earth with intelligent and gentle eyes, and always quick to laugh. She usually wore her hair in an Afro style organized under a bandana. Ida and I had worked together during the APOC convergence and I had come to respect her opinion. I was excited to hear her thoughts on the city.

She continued, "I think that it's a city that has, you know, she's a strong city. I call her a woman a lot, I've thought of her as a woman but I think of her..." Ida paused briefly, holding back a welling up of emotional energy before continuing. "If I were to call her a woman I'd call her a strong woman who has been through an incredible lot. She's survived a lot of abuse and abandonment and neglect but she's still able to fight, she's still fighting. I think that's New Orleans for me."

I asked Ida what role she believed race played in constructing the city. She answered:

I think that race is the core of how New Orleans was built and how it was maintained. This is a city that was constructed along plantation lines. This is a city that was, you know, the way that migration and the way habitation happened in this city was along racial lines. You know, it's a small city but highly segregated but its small so I don't know if it is as starkly segregated as a city like Detroit or Chicago because they're so big you can have entire neighborhoods that are

30

segregated, you know, but here you can only have blocks [cynical laughs] because it is so small and so compact. But you can see the differences between neighborhoods and the racial geography of those areas.

Ida's sense of the city's racial geography is not off the mark. New Orleans is among the nation's most racially segregated cities, ranking 18, with Detroit taking first place (Logan and Stults 2011: 6). This segregation appears to have an effect on quality of life. For instance, "[l]ife expectancy in the poorest zip code in the city is 54.5 years, or 25.5 years lower than life expectancy in the zip code with the least poverty in the city, where it is 80," according to findings released by the *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies* and *Orleans Parish Place Matters* (2012: 1).

Continuing her narrative Ida considered the region's history of slavery and cultural appropriation.

So much about New Orleans arose from how slavery played out in this area. Much of the culture and arts we celebrate today is kind of marketed as "New Orleans" but the folks who made those aren't receiving the benefits of that. That happens on a daily basis, kind of the way that culture was stolen from them and marketed without them benefiting from those things. You know, we can look at the history of how a lot of the housing was structured, the way that, you know, the kind of uniquely weird mixture of races here kind of created these different classes of citizens, like creole, and how that racial dynamic added a new dynamic to the history of the area. It's something we talk a lot about culturally now but I feel like so much of the history of slavery and racism is what we discuss about New Orleans today but we discuss it in a different way [a way that distances or abstracts it] but that history is so present. In terms of thinking of modern day stuff its still a very segregated city. The social scenes are highly segregated but also the political spheres as well.

### *Jackie*

When I interviewed Jackie I asked how she might describe the city. Her answer expressed the contradictory nature of the city and raised questions of social justice:

Beautifully depressing. It is what it is. It's a depressing place. It is a depressing, sad, painful place. And, you know, when people talk about the beauty of the abandoned buildings, I don't see the beauty. To me it's beautifully depressing. I

don't see the beauty of that building with vines taking it over. I think about who lived there? Why is no one in there right now? Why do we have so many decaying buildings? Why can't we get resources? Why? Why?

Jackie grew up in New Orleans in a working class household headed by a single mother. She has known a life of struggle and poverty. Jackie was critical of the tendency by some in the anarchist milieu (often new arrivals) to hold overly romantic notions of the city. Jackie stated plainly:

> I don't have any anarchist illusions of grandeur of being so rough and dirty and raw. I see a pain. It's not a silent pain because the people here screamed to the top of their lungs, 'you're cutting into me; you're cutting into my flesh. And its not listened to or [someone says] 'it's just so beautiful you could write a poem about that.' I don't want to write a poem about it. I want it to not exist. I want it to not be this way. And that's the way I would describe New Orleans. I don't understand the view of it as being this Mecca of some magical revolutionary light because it's so raw and real. It's not that it's raw and real, it's a place of so much severe damage, you know. That's like saying that the girl who got raped and molested as a child is a beautiful amazing poet—yeah she might create beautiful music but it comes from such pain and horror. The pain and horror isn't being addressed here.

Themes of estrangement come out powerfully in Jackie's narrative. Jackie was a committed anarchist and was involved in several anarchist projects around the city but she never held back frustrations with those who failed to appreciate the difficulty of social struggle in the city.

*Marguerite*

Marguerite, like Jackie, was raised in the African American working class milieu of New Orleans. Marguerite has been involved in anarchist and radical politics for much of her adult life and is well respected within the city's anarchist milieu for her organizational competence. When I asked Marguerite how she might describe the city, her reply was unhesitant:

> An abused woman: I feel like New Orleans has been abused so many times. It has been treated badly. New Orleans has also engaged in self-inflicted wounds too. So you know, in terms of thinking of words that come to mind, I think a very abused, a very sad woman who is struggling to maintain. But in the context of gender too, I'm just thinking about a woman who has offered and has so much to offer the world, have birthed so much amazing dynamic, cuisines, culture, traditions,

32

music, resistance moments, right. She has so much to offer and has offered a lot but it becomes more and more difficult. It [race relations] plays a major role both good and bad. And I also think that someone being black or a person of color doesn't necessitate them being on the right side of the argument, right, assuming there is a right side. Many times there is a right side but also when you look at the historical black political elite has done a lot to stifle diversity and to harm working poor black people. This is not only the political elite of the black politics but also Latino and also Asian political elites. I think race is integral in terms of power, who has access to it, who controls it, who is committed to redistributing that power.

I find it notable that all three interviewees gendered the city through the metaphor of an abused woman. This is intriguing as it speaks to their particular vantage points. I have no knowledge that any of the three women has experienced interpersonal violence or abuse in their lives and that is not my suggestion. Rather, I see this thrice spontaneously produced metaphor as humanizing the city. It brings abstraction of structural violence down to the level of lived experience. And the metaphor certainly expresses a sense of the historic estrangement of life lived under often brutal power relations. For a consideration of such power relations I turn to observations of Élisée Reclus, an anarchist geographer who lived in New Orleans for roughly two years beginning in 1853.

**Historic New Orleans through the eyes of an anarchist geographer**

The work of Élisée Reclus was brought to my attention through a chance conversation with J. Cornelius, a local anarchist with deep roots in the city's radical milieu. As a professor of philosophy, Cornelius has long held an interest in the writings of Élisée Reclus and has translated, edited, and published many of Reclus' key texts into English from the original French. I first met J. Cornelius while working a shift at the Iron Rail. I was seated behind the shop's small desk when he stepped through the narrow doorway. A man of mature years, he

wore a tight-fitted black t-shirt and knee length khaki shorts. The blackness of the shirt

contrasted with the thin pale skin of his smooth hairless scalp.

"Hello, I'm J. Cornelius. I came by to drop these off," he said, nodding at a stack of

copies of the long running anarchist magazine *Fifth Estate* held in his arms. We chatted for about

thirty minutes. Discovering my interest in the city, Cornelius recommended that I read some of

the work of Élisée Reclus, and I took his suggestion to heart. In the following discussion I

include Reclus' descriptions of entering New Orleans for the first time and his first hand account

of the goings on at the city's notorious and highly profitable slave market.

Entering New Orleans from a vantage point aboard a large sailing vessel, Reclus

observed:

> We had already recognized the proximity of the great city by the thick black
> atmosphere that hung over the distant horizon and by the high towers softly
> outlined in the haze. All of sudden, as we round a bend, the buildings of the
> southern metropolis came into sight. With each turn of the wheel, a new detail
> was revealed, belfry after belfry, house after house, ship after ship. Finally, when
> the tub boat left us, the whole city spread its vast crescent, two kilometers long,
> before us"
>
> [1994 [1855]: 81]

The "vast crescent" of the city follows the curve of the Mississippi river. The conception and

planning of the city had to take this into account. The city's undulating grid pattern is perhaps the

most salient example of this environmental accommodation. "The plan of New Orleans is, like

that of all American cities, one of extreme simplicity. However, the great curve of the

Mississippi…has prevented laying out the road perfectly straight from one end of the city to the

other," Reclus observed (1994 [1855]: 82). The conceived rational space of the city was

imperfectly realized in its fractured grid. As I write this I can hear Jackie's voice in my head,

boisterously asserting in her southern accent, "this city was crooked from the beginning."

When Reclus arrived in New Orleans, the city had recently expanded to engulf settlements to the west of the French Quarter. This was the time when the city took its present shape, what Reclus describes accurately as a "double crescent" (1994 [1855]: 82). Though many particular features of the city have changed over the years since Reclus' visit the major topographical silhouette of the hard urban core of the city has change relatively little since the 1850s (figures 2.1 and 2.2).

The two years Élisée Reclus spent working as a private tutor in New Orleans gave him ample opportunity to observe daily life in the city. He observed that the "American section" west of the French Quarter was a seat of political and economic activity. In a revealing passage, Reclus juxtaposes the opulence of the area, its beautiful hotels, theatres and churches, against the dehumanizing conditions of the slave market, which was also located in the American section. Describing the goings on at the slave market, Reclus observed that:

> A huge mob always crowd inside Banks's Arcade, the interior of which is dominated by a large counter, abundantly stocked with bottles and glasses. On a platform stands the auctioneer, a large red-faced, bloated man with a booming voice: "Come on, Jim! Get up on the table. How much for this good nigger Jim? Look how strong he is! He's got good teeth! Look at the muscles on his arms! Come on, now, dance for us, Jim!" And he makes the slave turn around. "Here's a nigger who knows how to do everything – he's a carpenter, a cartwright, and a shoemaker. He won't talk back – you never need to hit him." But most of the time there are long whitish rays etched by the whip on their black skin. Then it is a Negro woman's turn: "Look at this wench! She's already had two niggers, and she's still young. Look at her strong back and sturdy chest! She's a good wet nurse, and a good negress for work!" And the bidding starts again amid laughter and shouts. Thus all the Negroes of Louisiana pass in turn on this fateful table…

> [1994 [1855]: 83]

Reclus continues his disturbing description, writing of the treatment and likely sad fate of young children and elderly slaves. As an anarchist, Reclus rejected the institution of slavery but offers little explicit critical commentary on the scene he paints. It seems that he wished to let the horror,

the existential absurdity, of the scene speak for itself, although, he subtly points out the contradictions between the sales pitch of the auctioneer and the brutal reality inscribed on the backs of the slaves. He ends his description on a note of biting sarcasm, writing, "[a]ccording to the advocates of slavery, all this is willed by the cause of progress itself, the doctrine of our holy religion, and the most sacred laws of family and property" (Reclus 1994 [1955]: 84).

Despite seeming passivity witnessed by Reclus, the slaves of New Orleans did not all accept their existence as property. Many resisted. No doubt a great deal of resistance took the form of foot dragging and sabotage, common strategies among the weak and oppressed (Scott 1985). However, there were moments when this quiet resistance gave way to direct and open revolt.

**Slave revolts and the long struggle for Black autonomy in New Orleans**

Sometime around January 11th or the 12th, 1811, anyone traveling the roads from St. Charles and St. John Parishes to the city New Orleans would have been confronted by a horrific sight: severed human heads stuck on spikes lined the roadways at intervals leading into the city (Aptheker 1983: 250). These grisly monuments stood in testimony to the aftermath of a momentous but failed rebellion. The revolt began on January 8th, 1811, but it can be understood as a dramatic and bloody continuation of diffuse and subtle struggles in the daily life of the slave plantation economy throughout the region. Indeed, the failed revolt of 1811 gained inspiration from the example of the Haitian revolution (Rasmussen 2011: 48).

The slave plantation economy was integral to the Atlantic component of the capitalist world system (Wolf 1982; Mintz 1985). As it facilitated the needs of its masters, the system also linked its subaltern multitudes in an informal economy of information, news, and gossip. A kind

of cosmopolitan culture of the subaltern developed in the wake of sailing ships crisscrossing the Atlantic and Caribbean (Linebaugh and Rediker 2002; Sublette 2009).

News of struggles and rebellions traveled like a conflagration. The governor of Jamaica, writing in the 1730s, associated such infectious struggles with 'a Dangerous Spirit of Liberty' that seemed to spread unceasingly among the slaves throughout the region. The decades of the 1730s and 1740s saw "[m]ajor conspiracies unfolded in Virginia, South Carolina, Bermuda, and Louisiana (New Orleans) in the year 1730 alone (Linebaugh and Rediker 2002:194).

However, revolts were never guaranteed success and many unraveled in the planning stages. With the masters ever on alert, the slightest slip in secrecy could end a potential uprising in disaster. Brutal executions were commonly administered to slave conspirators. Sublette (2009) relates the tales of one Samba Bambara and his failed attempt at revolt in New Orleans in 1731. Once discovered Bambara and his fellow conspirators were tortured and broken on the wheel but not before they were forced to watch a suspected fellow conspirator, a slave woman, hanged in front of them (75-76). However, as Linebaugh and Rediker (2002) note, "[t]he slaves of New Orleans were not intimidated by the terror, however, for they rose again in 1732. The following year witnessed rebellions in South Carolina, Jamaica, St. John…and Dutch Guyana" (194). These revolts were diffuse and rhizomatic but the Haitian revolution might be seen as their historic culmination in the establishment of the first free Black republic in the Americas (James 1963). The Haitian victory reverberated throughout the Atlantic world system and beyond.

One significant outcome was the banning of trade in foreign slaves in New Orleans. After 1805 domestic slaves from other areas of the Atlantic coast could be imported to New Orleans but all foreign trade was banned, including shipments from the Caribbean and Africa. Sublette (2009) notes that despite its appearance as a kind of humanitarian gesture, the motives for the

ban were far more politically and economically pragmatic. "It was protectionism. One motive, certainly, was keeping the South free from black revolutionary thought that might enter without prophylactic measures…" (Sublette 2009: 226). However, in the wake of the Haitian revolution and, ironically, the French and American revolutions, the proverbial revolutionary cat was out of the bag. A 1795 investigation into an exposed slave conspiracy in Natchez, Mississippi, just up the river from New Orleans, revealed that the slave had in their possession a copy of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (Rasmussen 2011: 89).

Perhaps five hundred slaves took part in the 1811 revolt near New Orleans. Most of the participant's names have been lost to history. However, the identities of three key organizers have survived: Charles Deslondes, a slave known as Kook and another known as Quamana. The latter two were likely of Asante background (Rasmussen 2011: 106). Charles Deslondes was a trusted slave on the plantation of one Major Andry; he served his master well and at the time of the revolt held the position of slave driver. According to Rasmussen (2011: 85), he was allowed to move about the area between plantations and New Orleans unguarded on errands for the Major. This ability to travel must have been crucial for finding and organizing with fellow insurrectionists. Given his relatively privileged position within the system, one might ask why he chose the path of revolt. Unfortunately, history provides only guesswork and speculation. We only know that Deslondes and his comrades acted.

"They were originally armed with cane knives, axes, and clubs. After killing Andry's son and wounding the Major, they took possession of a few guns, drums, and some sort of flag, and started marching from plantation to plantation, slaves everywhere joined them" (Aptheker 1983: 249).

The revolt began and spread rapidly through the plantation region just thirty or forty miles outside of New Orleans. "The insurgents marched downriver, some five hundred strong, burning plantations as they went, killing two people in the process, and reportedly shouting, 'On to New Orleans!' (Sublette 2009: 261).

According to Aptheker (1983), news of the uprising reached New Orleans by the afternoon of January 9$^{th}$, causing a general panic. Those survivors flooding into the city were described by a contemporary source as having escaped "a miniature representation of the horrors of St. Domingo" [Haiti] (249).

Along with a hastily organized counter-force composed of local planters, a four hundred strong city militia was activated, joined by sixty U.S. army soldiers, and, finally, two hundred additional soldiers were dispatched to New Orleans from Baton Rouge (Aptheker 1983: 250). On the morning of the 10$^{th}$, 1811, somewhere on the road to New Orleans the two sides met. The rebels, armed with their cane knives and a few guns, where decimated. After the ranks were broken the remaining rebels scattered into the woods, fighting in retreat. It took weeks to root out and exterminate the insurgents. A review of opening lines of this section tells of the sad fate of Charles Deslonde, Kook, and Quamana, and several other rebels.

This was the end of a battle in an ongoing social struggle between master and slave and despite their victory the masters could not sleep easy. In December of 1811, the authorities in New Orleans were troubled by word of another insurrection brewing amongst the slaves of the region (Aptheker 1983: 251). Summing up, Rasmussen (2011) writes, "[t]his was New Orleans, and the German Coast, in 1811: a land of death; a land of spectacular violence; a land of sugar, slaves, and violent visions" (163). And, of course, the eventual abolition of slavery brought new struggles and transformed old ones under the wage system.

**Of potlucks at Sycamore and radical labor politics**

"We're having a potluck at Sycamore tonight n id love it if you came by! Starts at 7. Sorry bout the late notice," read a text message that buzzed across the screen of my phone on a hot late August afternoon. I was excited to receive the invitation.

The message was from Trevor. He was a fixture of the anarchist milieu in the city. Trevor moved in many circles and seemed to have a hand in any number of projects. He was well known and liked by most everyone. His regular outfit of jeans and a tight white t-shirt combined with his dirty blonde hair and slightly crooked nose reminded me of some street-tough hero from a 1960s film. I first met Trevor at a birthday party for a local author and anarchist by the name of Daniel. Since our initial meeting I had run into Trevor fairly regularly at Monday night dinners at Nowe Miasto. Sycamore was just a few blocks down the street from Nowe Miasto, and invitation to the potluck was exciting because it gave me the opportunity to see Sycamore and interact with its other residents and guests.

I arrived at Sycamore a bit early. Trevor greeted me at the screen door and let me in. I deposited my potluck offerings of vegetable rice and beer in the kitchen. I chatted with Trevor and a person by the name of Cake. He sat on an old beat up couch stroking a fat house cat.

"His name is Ratsbain Thunderclaw," Cake informed me. We shared a giggle at the ludicrous name. Small talk continued and I learned that Cake held to certain anarcho-pagan beliefs. He explained that crescent moon tattooed on his forearm represented his deity: Luck. Soon enough more folks arrived and some of the housemates prepared two large homemade pizzas in the house kitchen.

An evening breeze blew across the screened section of Sycamore's front porch. Several people lounging on the porch, nursing sweating cans of beer, expressed sighs of relief and thanks

to the cooling breeze for providing momentary relief from the warm, humid summer night. I sat

chatting with Jean, a Canadian transplant to New Orleans. Our conversation drifted into a

discussion of the history of anarchist labor organizing.

"Have you ever read that book about the Wobblies in New Orleans?" Jean asked

excitedly as if he was introducing me to a new flavor of ice cream.

"No, I haven't heard of it," I replied.

"I think the Rail has a copy. You should check it out," Jean suggested.

"I'll look for it next time I'm working a shift," I said.

With that the conversation drifted into other matters and then the smell of fresh, hot

homemade pizza drifted out onto the porch. I followed it back to its source. Munching on a slice

of pizza I mingled and chatted with the other partiers until late in the night. Within the next few

days after the party I located the book at the Iron Rail. Flipping through its pages my attention

was drawn to the title of chapter three: New Orleans Local General Strike.

### New Orleans' general strike

"Not in Seattle, nor in Winnipeg, but in New Orleans occurred the first local general

strike in 'Anglo-Saxon' America," proclaimed radical union organizer and labor historian

Covington Hall in his classic history of labor struggles in the deep south (1999: 32).

Undoubtedly this general strike was among the earliest in North America. However, David

Roedigger (1999), who edited Hall's writing for publication, qualifies some aspects of Hall's

claims: strikes in Philadelphia in 1835 and St. Louis in 1877 are potential contenders for first

general strike. Not to mention various coordinated actions by slaves that W.E.B. Du Bois felt

represented a general strike during the Civil War. Finally, Hall's reference to Anglo-Saxon

America is something of a misnomer. Many of the participants in the New Orleans general strike

were African American and Irish workers, as Roediger points out (247). The issues of race and class, as I'll show, were never far removed from each other during the labor struggles in and around New Orleans. Many unions and their workers were reactionary and committed to white supremacist policies of workplace segregation. However, there was a radical anarchic minority that, given the general cultural conditions of the time and place, can be described as militantly anti-racist. Or perhaps, more accurately, it can be said that they privileged the class struggle over the maintenance of white supremacy.

There had been limited strikes and labor actions in New Orleans previous to the first local general strike of 1892 but it was in this strike that labor demonstrated class unity heretofore unseen at such a scale in New Orleans. At least 20,000 workers, and perhaps a number as high as 40,000, participated in the three day strike, first called on November 1, 1892 (Hall 1999: 44). Hall (1999) reports the strike's outcome as mostly successful, writing, "[w]hen the strike was called off the unions had won their demands for higher wages and shorter hours, and had gained recognition as bargaining parties, but had lost as to the closed shop" (43). However, despite this spectacular display of class solidarity, class militancy and race would remain a permanent point of tension within the labor movement in Louisiana.

By 1905 class struggle militancy even led to a schism within New Orleans' Socialist Party. According to Hall (1999) the conflict came to a head when a faction of radical "red" socialists proposed bringing Daniel De Leon, leader of the Socialist Labor Party and founding member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), to New Orleans on a lecture tour. The proposal was strongly opposed by a "yellow" (conservative wing) faction of the Socialist Party in New Orleans. The "red" faction left the organization and formed a local section of De Leon's Socialist Labor Party. De Leon's visit to the city was a success but eventually after about six

42

months the "red" faction found De Leon's organization too bureaucratic and split with it as well, essentially merging with the local Wobblies (the unofficial and affectionate name given to the IWW).

Inversely De Leon cut ties with the Wobbly movement due to its militancy and anarchic ethos. As Hall (1999) explained, "…we let the 'section' die, and thereafter, gave all our attention to IWW propaganda, to take part in every strike friendly unions got into, and to harry conservative officials of unions…" (70). From the beginning the wider Wobbly movement was militantly integrative. Concluding his survey of the Wobbly movement's relation to African American workers Foner (1970) writes, [the IWW] united black and white workers as never before in our history, and consistently maintained a tradition of solidarity and equality in the labor movement regardless of race or color…" (60). The Wobblies were radically progressive for their era but, of course, they never managed to solve or eliminate racism from their ranks.

### *Class militancy against white supremacy*

In April of 1912 IWW organizers Covington Hall, Vincent St. John and "Big" Bill Haywood traveled from New Orleans to Alexandria, Louisiana, to attend a regional labor convention with the aim of convincing the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) to affiliate with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Upon arrival at the meeting in Alexandria, Hall (1999) was immediately concerned with the apparent absence of black delegates. Hall was told that two conventions would be held, one white, one black. Hall and his companions found this unacceptable. "We protested this; Haywood said, 'you cannot possibly do business this way. Bring the colored delegates in. Hold one convention. Why did you do this?'"(1999: 127).

According to Hall, one of the local organizers explained that the police ordered them to segregate the convention. Hall replied that under the law the police had no authority to demand

separate conventions. The letter of the law demanded only that blacks and whites be seated separately on either side of the room. Hall and Haywood demanded that conventions be united and the local organizers complied. Haywood emphasized that, 'If any arrests are made, all or none of us will go to jail, white and colored together' (Hall 1999: 128). The convention was successfully integrated without incident and the BTW agreed to affiliate with the IWW.

Hall (1999: 165) recounts another incident during a lumber workers strike in Merryville, Louisiana, and lauds Isaac Gaines, a black worker, as "one of the heroes of the strike." The strike situation was tense. One night during the strike a charge of dynamite exploded near the barracks of strikebreakers (non-union workers brought in by the company to keep production going). No one was killed but the strikebreakers fled and the strike continued. The IWW denied any involvement in the incident. The authorities were unconvinced. They arrested Isaac Gains and attempted to coerce him into confessing or naming a fellow striker.

Gains remind silent throughout the ninety-day ordeal. He was put on trial. Hall and the other union members protested outside his trial daily, and eventually Gains was released. Hall (1999: 166) recalls a telling incident that occurred during one of the protest action outside of the trial: a local fellow let it be known that he would never consider joining the union. The fellow explained that he would, 'not join the Forest & Lumber Workers Union, because it took in niggers.' This began a heated dialogue between the antagonist and a union member named Ed. Hall recounts the debate:

> 'There is not a nigger in the Union,' Ed quietly answered.
> 'The hell there ain't,' said the guy.
> 'Not a one,' said Ed.
> 'Well, what in the hell is Gains if he ain't a nigger? He is as black as the ace of spades!' 'Yes,' Replied Ed, 'he is as black as the ace of spades, but he isn't a nigger.' 'What the devil is he then?' queried the truculent one.
> 'He is a man, a union man, an IWW, a man!' Ed shot back, 'and he has proven it by his actions, and that is more than you have done in your boss-sucking life.

There are white men, Negro men and Mexican men in this union, but no niggers, greasers, or white trash!'

[1999: 166]

Despite the IWW's commitment to integrated unions, the specter of racism was never completely exercised and today one could certainly question the IWW's strategy of emphasizing class unity over racial division instead of directly confronting racism as an institution of white power. However, the radical struggles that the IWW waged in New Orleans and across the Deep South is key to understanding why many of the folks I spoke with during my fieldwork hold the IWW in great regard and consider them as part of the anarchist tradition, seeing in their practice an enactment of the anarchist value system and its principles of solidarity and autonomy.

**New Orleans in the long 1960s: the Counterculture and Black Panthers**

The sensitive microphone seemed to pick up the sounds from the street three floors below, but then Mark's voice filled the void of white noise and amorphous street noises:

My coming to political consciousness was certainly an evolution but there were moments, leaps. One leap was in college, actually becoming involved making the step to stop just philosophizing. This was in the period of the anti-war movement against the U.S. military intervention in Iraq [the second Iraq War]. I really felt like I should be a subject, an agent, in history and not just watch.

Mark spoke softly into the microphone that I had positioned between us on the tall wooden table that decorated his spacious room. Mark's room occupied the third floor of a large used bookstore on Decatur Street. He had a longstanding relationship with the owner; he had worked at the shop for a time, but now he simply paid a friendly rate to rent the upstairs room. Books and papers were stacked here and there. Mark's large grey house cat lounged wherever it wanted. Perched about the noisy streets of the French Quarter and permeated with the smell of aging books, the room was nothing if not atmospheric.

However, I wasn't there simply to admire the space. Mark had invited me over to conduct an interview that I had requested several days earlier. Mark had also promised to show me some of the historical materials that he had been collecting on the local underground press that was active in New Orleans during the 1960s and 1970s. Mark and I had discussed previously the importance of small-scale and self-published 'zines (DIY magazines or pamphlets) for communicating and spreading anarchist ideas. Mark had informed me that New Orleans had a striving underground press during the Vietnam War era. After the interview Mark shared several documents that he had unearthed. He provided me with a copy of Darlene Fife's (2000) autobiography of her involvement in New Orleans' underground press and the countercultural milieu that supported it. He also informed me that the Louisiana Research Collection housed at Tulane University had an extensive archive of original issues of the *NOLA Express*. He shared with me a few single page scans that he had made on a visit to the archives. These were helpful but I eventually found my way to the archive at Tulane and made scans of complete issues of the magazine.

Like Mark's description of the development of his own radical political consciousness, many in the generation of the 1960s came to a radical political consciousness emerging out of opposition to the war in Vietnam and in support of the Civil Rights and Feminist movements of the time. Counterculture ideas spread through an extensive underground press movement and in the long 1960s New Orleans was a major hotspot of countercultural activism. The *NOLA Express* was a key magazine (see figure 2.3). The magazine's content was expressive of the counterculture's anarchic value system. Though I focus exclusively on the *NOLA Express*, it is important to note here that other radical publications such as *The Word* (see figure 2.4) were also

active in the city throughout the 1960s. The history of the NOLA Express is, however, the best-documented publication of this era.

From Darlene Fife's (2000) autobiographical account the *NOLA Express* (1967 – 1974) may be described as a LSD-fueled trip through the underground and countercultural milieu of New Orleans' French Quarter that combined radical art and revolutionary propaganda in equal measures. Notably, beat writer Charles "Buk" Bukowski was a regular contributor to the magazine, publishing his famous short stories "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" and "The Fuck Machine" in its pages. The magazine editorialized against the Vietnam War and the structural violence and racism rife in New Orleans society. The audience for the NOLA Express existed in a roiling milieu, a network of individuals with overlapping ties to various radical organizations. These groups included the Movement for a Democratic Society (MDS); Louisiana State University, New Orleans, Students for a Democratic Society (LSUNOSDS); various Trotskyist factions; Progressive Labor; the New Orleans Committee to End the War in Vietnam (NOCEWV), and a nascent Black Panther Party. The *NOLA Express* was part of a national network of underground presses linked through the Committee of Small Magazine Editors and Publishers (COSMEP) and the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS). According to Fife (2000), the *NOLA Express* had a readership of about 5,000 in 1969, 8,000 in 1970, and 11,000 in 1971.

The *NOLA Express* featured poetry, art photography, short stories, satirical cartoons, music and movie reviews, local and national news, and virtually all of it was oriented toward supporting countercultural values and local institutions. Even by today's standards the written and visual content of the *NOLA Express* was radically subversive. Male and female nudity was a regular feature on the magazines cover and its interior pages. The cover for issue thirty-four of July 18, 1969 prominently features a young bare-chested woman as part of a collage of images

including the dead body of Che Guevara juxtaposed with a smiling Richard Nixon and his family, oil wells, a muscled and bare-chest African, Pope Paul VI, and a shadowy illustration of a man raising a Black Power fist. This was all accompanied by a headline exclaiming, "you gotta change" and "make your next trip rebirth." The *NOLA Express* was caught up in a number of political and legal challenges to its publication. One infamous back cover featured a photograph of nude man masturbating to an ensemble of Playboy pin-ups with the tagline: "What kind of man reads Playboy?" Criminal charges of obscenity followed and led to Fife and Head's arrest and trial. Attorneys affiliated with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) represented them in court and managed to get the charges dismissed on grounds of constitutionally protected speech (Fife 2000: 42). Following other challenges, both legal and social, and after one last editorial intervention against a planned nuclear power plant in the area, Fife and Head decided to fold the magazine and leave New Orleans (Fife 2000: 50). The year was 1974 and the long 1960s and its cycles of social struggle were waning. However, for radical African America activists in New Orleans, the decade of the 1970s was dangerously eventful.

### *The Black Panther Party and the struggle for Black urban space*

Histories of the Black Panther Party (BPP) tend to focus on the original Oakland-based organization and its charismatic founding members such as Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton. However, after the BPP's founding in 1966, the Black Panther Party quickly gained a national reach. There were chapters in Seattle, Kansas City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, New York, and New Orleans, as well as any number of chapters in smaller cities across the country. The New Orleans chapter has received relatively little attention by scholars. Indeed, as Austin (2006: 405) notes there has only be a single full-length study (Arend 2003) of the New Orleans Black Panther Party. Arend's (2003) *Showdown in Desire: The Black Panther Take a Stand in New*

*Orleans* is an oral history focused on an armed standoff in 1970 between the Black Panther Party

and the New Orleans Police at the Desire housing project. I draw primarily on this oral history to

inform the discussion in this section.

Steve Green founded the New Orleans chapter of the Black Panther Party in May of

1970. According to Arend (2003), by early June they were being evicted from their headquarters

on St. Thomas Street. They then moved to Piety Street near the edge of the Desire housing

project. Sometime in August, New Orleans Mayor Moon Landrieu held a special meeting with

city officials, including police chief Clarence Giarrusso, to decide on what stance to take toward

the Panthers. The Panthers were again evicted from their office on Piety Street so they made the

fateful move to the Desire housing project. Desire was notorious throughout the city for being a

tough neighborhood in a city filled with tough neighborhoods. It was a deeply impoverished area

and residents lived in fear of street crime and drug-related violence. The Panthers intervened in

this situation in an effort to stem the violence.

Meanwhile the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) had infiltrated the Panthers

with two undercover agents who were eventually exposed and kicked out of the group. A day

after the ejection of the two undercover police a shootout between the Panthers and the NOPD

erupted at a Piety Street Grocery. A young man, a bystander with no affiliation with the

Panthers, was shot and killed by a police bullet during the shooting. Several Panthers were

charged with attempted murder of police officers.

By November 19th, 1970 the Panthers were involved in a spectacular day-long standoff

with the police outside of the Panther's Desire office. Astonishingly, no one on either side was

killed. A team of local Catholic priests attempted to negotiate a peaceful resolution. Meanwhile

thousands of Desire's residents flooded into the area in support of the Panthers and hundreds of

local youth placed themselves in the line of fire between the police and the Panthers. At the end of the day the police were forced to retreat. A week later, on November 26, the police, disguised as priests and postal workers, carried out a raid against the Panthers. One Panther, Betty Powell, was shot by police and arrested with five others on charges of attempted murder and violation of a federal firearms act. Once in jail the Panthers began to organize the prison as they awaited trail.

New Orleans Panthers subscribed to a form of revolutionary socialist politics that synthesized elements of anti-colonial thought, Black Nationalism, Maoism, and Marxist-Leninist thought. The New Orleans chapter adopted the ten-point program and its twenty-six rules for running the organization. Under the heading of "what we want and what we believe" the Black Panther Party program states that: 1) We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community; 2) We want full employment for our people; 3) We want an end to the robbery by the white man of our Black Community; 4) We want decent housing fit for shelter of human beings; 5) We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day society; 6) We want all black men to be exempt from military service; 7) We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people [caps in original]; 8) We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county, and city prisons and jails; 9) We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black community, as defined by the Constitution of the United States; 10) We want land, bread, housing, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations-supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be allowed to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of black people as to their national destiny (Foner 1995: 3-4). The Black Panthers in New Orleans as

50

elsewhere focused much of their efforts toward developing local community poverty alleviation programs. It was this commitment to local community self-reliance and mutual aid that attracted many people to the party and made them respected in the larger communities in which they worked. Following the example of other chapters the New Orleans Panthers established a free breakfast program for school children in the Desire housing project, organized free sickle cell screenings, conducted classes on self-determination, and carried out neighborhood clean up projects. They made headway in reducing black on black crime (Arend 2003: 13).

The Panthers issued strongly worded critiques of what they perceived as an entrenched white power structure but this did not necessarily translate into a general hatred for whites. Malik Rahim, a New Orleans Panther, explained to Arend (1995) that, "…when he came back from Vietnam, he had a hatred for white people. The Panthers had to re-educate him on that." (14). Malik was one of the youngest members of the New Orleans BPP and has remained active in local struggles. In later life he ran for a local election on the Green Party ticket and in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina he was a key organizer of the grassroots Common Ground Collective/Relief organization. I met and worked closely with Malik while conducting field research for my Master's thesis in the summer of 2007. Malik gave me a similar account of his transition from hating white people to developing a more nuanced critique of historically structured systems of white supremacy.

Nearly three decades before Katrina Malik Rahim was confronted with a different struggle as a participant in the standoff at Desire. Rahim's account is tension filled:

> There were 12 of us in the party office at the time, and almost a hundred police with everything from a 60 caliber machine gun and armored cars down to their revolvers. We had about 9 shotguns, and a couple of handguns, 357 revolvers. But everything we had was legally purchased and it was registered to our office. Our position was African Americans should no longer be lynched or beaten or attacked and have their rights taken away without any form of resistance. We

believed that you had a right to defend yourself. You had a right to defend your community. You had a right to defend your family. And you had the right to defend your honor as a human being

[Arend 2003:17]

According to Arend (2003) as the police poured into the Desire project residents rushed to the scene to do whatever they could to protect the Panthers. Perhaps 5,000 people stood between the police and the Panthers by the end of the day. Under pressure from the crowd and two Catholic priests who intervened to negotiate a peaceful resolution, the police staged a retreat. They left the Desire project with the Panthers still held up in their offices. Desire erupted in celebration that lasted well into the night.

The peace would not last long, however, for many law-abiding residents of Desire, the police were not felt as a positive force in their lives. Posing as priests and postal workers several days later, a team of undercover police managed to return to Desire undetected. They raided the Panthers' office, shot one of their members, and took everyone to Orleans Parish Prison. Awaiting trial, the Panthers continued their organizing work behind bars. When the Panthers finally came to trial the ten black and two white jurors delivered a unanimous verdict of not guilty, after a brief deliberation. The Panthers involved in the Desire standoff were free but their struggle continued. Over the decade of the 1970s their numbers thinned and the national party folded in 1980.

**The Raging Pelican**

I wish to include one last brief vignette based on my participating in the publication of the *Raging Pelican: Journal of Gulf Coast Resistance*. I use this section to suggest some of discourses indicative of the value system operative within the contemporary milieu. I also use

this section to suggest something of the network of overlapping relations within the milieu, as a few already mentioned reappear below.

Organizers describe the project as, "…an independent publication providing the people of South Louisiana and the Gulf Coast with a voice in reaction to the wholesale human & environmental slaughter perpetrated against us by government and industry." *The Raging Pelican*'s (2013) table of contents lists an "interview with a Tar Sand Blockader," a poem titled "Creole Tomatoes," an essay of historical geography titled, "A Land Called Louisiana, part II: Undermining Slavery from the Cypress," and an op-ed titled, "The Roosevelt Hotel: Aid & Comfort to our Enemies," (the hotel is a common destination for visiting politicians and oilmen). Several other pieces with topics ranging from poetry to coastal restoration also appear. I contributed an essay concerned with local traditions of anarchism within New Orleans' African American communities.

A number of *The Raging Pelican*'s organizers have already been mentioned in the course of this chapter. Daniel, Trevor, J. Cornelius, and several others held production meetings at Nowe Miasto, using its dining room as a conference room. It was in this context that I first encountered the project. In keeping with anarchist values of solidarity and mutual aid the Pelican is made freely available at distribution points across the city. No one is paid; all work is carried out on a voluntary basis. In keeping with the anarchist value of autonomy all production decisions are made by consensus. *The Raging Pelican* articulates the discourse prevalent in the city's anarchist milieu and this is a discourse that draws inspiration from the past as it struggles for a different future.

**Discussion**

In this ethnography, these narratives of history help to contextualize the contemporary anarchist milieu. However, their real importance is that folks in the contemporary milieu already use them to create context. The invocation of these historic narratives is an act of signification, meaning creation, and contextualization. The identification with past struggles lends the present value and meaning. These historical significations are entangled in daily praxis of the contemporary anarchist milieu. It is this act of signification that draws together these historic episodes into a historic narrative.

Perhaps this is why Lefebvre (1991) indicates the crucial importance of history to his spatial triad but does not include it in the high abstraction of the triad itself. History is a specifying process, the concrete realization of otherwise abstract space. Lefebvre (1991) notes, "…the contradictions in the social relations of production… cannot fail to leave their mark on space and indeed revolutionize it" (46). As Ida put it during our interview, "I think it [New Orleans] is a city of contradictions…" The struggles over these contradictions have marked the space of the city. However, these markings, this "code" as Lefebvre (1991: 7) would term it, allows, "...space not only to be read but also to be constructed." In this chapter I have demonstrated how the city's history helps construct the social space of its anarchist milieu.

**Conclusions**

This chapter contextualizes and historically deepens our understanding of the contents of the ethnographic present. Considered reflexively, this chapter did not so much create a historic context for the anarchist milieu but rather it ethnographically revealed historic significations already existing within the anarchist milieu. This is why it was necessary for the narrative to

weave between the ethnographic present and the past. By using the lens of radical history to

reveal values and disvalues in the ethnographic present, this chapter also signals certain historic

tensions that persist in the space of the city's anarchist milieu. As I demonstrate in chapter three,

race remains a crucial alienating fault line within New Orleans' anarchist milieu.
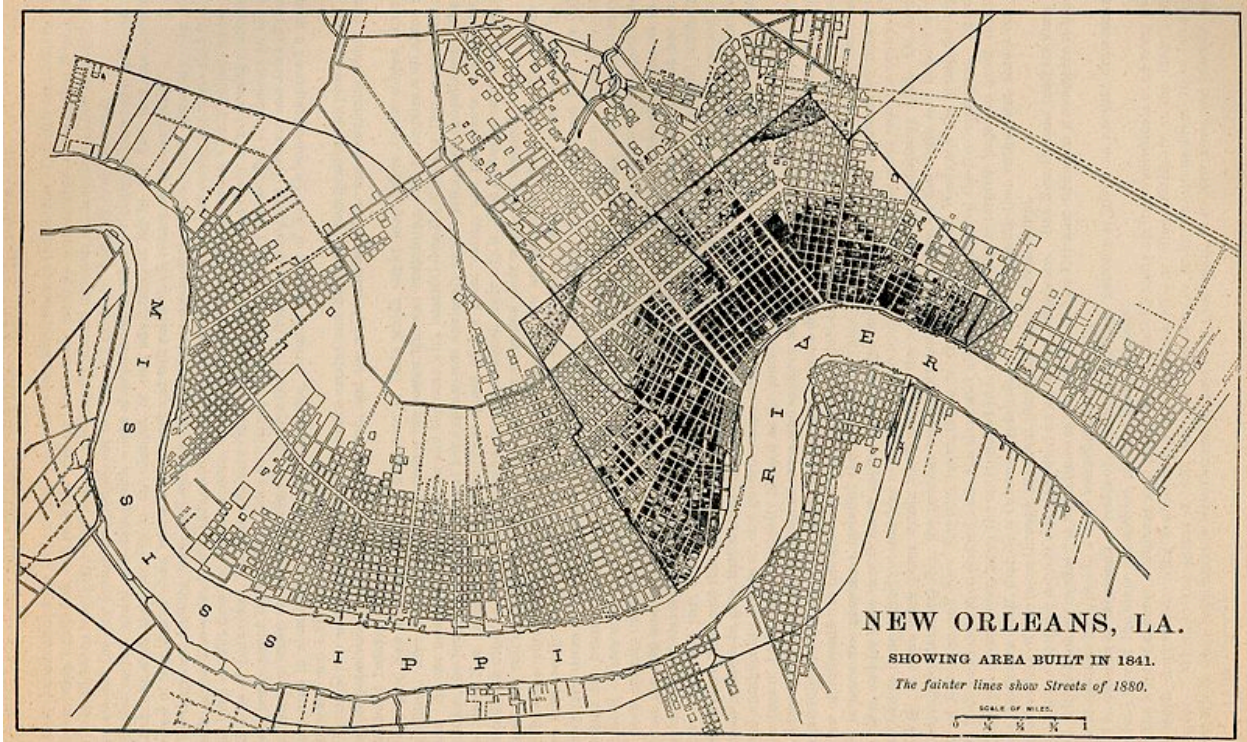
Figure 2.1 Map of New Orleans in 1841.


Figure 2.2 Map of contemporary New Orleans (source: Peter Fitzgerald, OpenStreetMap).

Figure 2.3 Cover of the 1969 NOLA Express

Figure 2.4 Back cover of *The Word: Situationist comic*

# CHAPTER 3

# ORGANIZING THE *APOC*ALYPSE

**Introduction**

*APOCalypse 2012: Survival Strategies for the New Millennium* was a three-day anarchist people of color (APOC) convergence, somewhat analogous to an academic conference. Given that the first four letters of "apocalypse" coincide with the APOC acronym the title is a somewhat cheeky play on words. However, "apocalypse" seemed to appropriately evoke the city's tragic past and difficult present. Our introductory program explained that, "[w]ell, when it comes to the apocalypse, we've kind of already had one. After Katrina, we had a moment of complete industrial collapse and a declaration of martial law. We saw the best people could be to each other; we also saw the worst." The "best" was manifest in the people's collective capacity for cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid. "Communities had to organize autonomously to support each other and survive, not only in the aftermath of the storm, but the years of rebuilding that continue to this day." Commenting on the unique history of New Orleans the organizers assert that, "[o]f all places, we know the imperatives for creating and sustaining alternative models of community interdependence."

This chapter provides a reflexive ethnographic account of *APOCalypse 2012: Survival Strategies for the New Millennium*. This chapter draws on interviews with core organizers. Eight sites spread across the French Quarter, Marigny, and Bywater neighborhoods constituted the event spatially. These sites provided spaces of encounter and dialogue between those attending the convergence. This chapter highlights some of the topics discussed within these forums. In

addition to the ethnographic present this chapter also explores the antecedents, origins and

development of the APOC movement as a self-conscious project within anarchism. The

existence of an APOC movement within anarchism raises a number of intriguing conceptual

questions of solidarity and difference. I discuss these questions and their implications for

understanding the wider anarchist movement. I conclude that the APOC movement provides

grounds for an intersectional and strategic conception of solidarity. I view solidarity as a core

value within the anarchist value system.


**Anarchism's white privilege**

In order to understand the general impetus behind the efforts to organize *APOCalpse*

*2012* it is necessary to briefly consider certain antagonisms within the anarchist movement. The

anarchist people of color movement developed out of two overarching and interrelated concerns.

On the one hand, the movement coalesced around dissatisfaction with the hierarchical organizing

style of earlier people of color (POC) revolutionary groups such as the Black Panther Party. This

dissatisfaction led some to embrace anarchism. On the other hand, the movement today seems to

increasingly problematize the perceived homogeneity of the wider North American anarchist

movement. This apparent lack of diversity is often critiqued in terms of anarchism's white

privilege. Not only are movement members conscious and critical of the white supremacy within

the wider society, they are also self-conscious of their position within anarchism as anarchists of

color and they are critical of perceived white privilege within the movement. I asked Aisha about

navigating these relations as an anarchist woman of color. Aisha initiated the organizing work

for *APOCalypse 2012* and her answer indicates some of the experiences that motivate her efforts:

> What is the title of that book? 'All the men are black, all the women are white, but
> some of us are brave' that's Marguerite's favorite quote because, like, ok, I walk

60

into a woman's space and they're talking about mainstream white women's shit or radical white women's shit, which is just as irritating because they're talking about deconstructing a construct that doesn't even apply to me. And then acting on those things without doing the base work necessary for all women's liberation. You know, you go into radical black spaces and being a feminist is divisive. Go into radical white spaces and you might become an authority that gets to tell all the white kids what to do. That happens sometimes. That's anti-racist pandering. You can be the one person of color in the room but your presence seems to valid their whole process. I've noticed being a woman of color in predominantly white spaces there are definitely roles that you can fulfill. You get that or you get eliminated, 'there aren't any people of color here.' And I'm like, 'I'm siting right here' [cynical laughs]. What? Do I not count? I think also the way that I present, the way that I talk, I get discounted in certain communities. I've had friends be like, 'you're not really black.' I'm like, 'please tell me what that means?' I know what they're saying but I just think it's bullshit. They're saying that I speak eloquently and therefore I'm not black. They are saying that I'm knowledgeable about things and therefore I'm not black. They are saying that I have a middle class background and therefore I'm not black.

Aisha's statement suggests some of the ambiguities and complexities involved in navigating relations of race, gender and class as an anarchist woman of color. Her comments also suggest the need for a critical look at the ambiguities in the term *anarchist people of color*. Just as it announces the presence of diverse non-white identities within the anarchist movement it also glosses those identities in the abstract generalization of *people of color*. The term is a useful and expedient abstraction but it must be emphasized that behind the abstraction of *people of color* exists ever more concrete and diverse historically produced subjectivities, standpoints, and differential positions. Beyond race this diversity includes lesbian, guy, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities as well. Even within the category of race many people view themselves in terms of bi- or multi-racial identities.

61

**Preparing for the APOCalypse**

My first contact with the local convergence organizers was more serendipitous than planned. I stopped by a local radical bicycle collective called Plan B. I had hoped to make the site a focus of research but ultimately ended up focusing elsewhere. Plan B was located on Elysian Fields avenue. It was sandwiched between a private residence and an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting space. Plan B's entrance was gated but open. I walked past the large front gate and progressed down a side alleyway overhung by tree branches. I entered a crumbling courtyard. A few local punks were hunched over bicycles, busy with repairs. Behind them, to the right of the courtyard, I noticed the small building that served as the collective's headquarters and bicycle workshop.

When I walked through the stiff doorway I immediately noticed Jackie seated behind a high counter near the shop's entrance. I was hoping to find Plan B's public liaison, with whom I had previously communicated via email concerning my research. I approached Jackie and kind of rattled off my name and my research interest in Plan B. I'm not sure what Jackie made of all this but she was friendly and enquired about my erstwhile email interlocutor. He was not available. I chatted with Jackie instead. Eventually Jackie gave me a walking tour of the little garage compound and explained the in-and-outs of joining the collective. During our chat Jackie mentioned the APOC convergence and suggested that I might want to get involved. "Yes, I'd love that," I exclaimed.

Jackie was one of the core local APOC organizers. We exchanged contact information and Jackie explained that she would be in touch about the next organizing meeting. About a week later I received a text message from Jackie. She informed me of an APOC planning meeting that would be held later that night and asked if we could meet for coffee a bit before

hand. I replied that I was excited about the meeting and would be more than happy to meet a bit early for coffee.

Jackie's message caught me in the middle of a shadow shift at the Iron Rail. New Iron Rail members were required to shadow a more experience collective members before being allowed to open and manage the shop alone. In order to meet Jackie at the time she specified, I had to leave my shift a bit early. My shift trainer said that it would not be a problem if I left early so I headed out in time to meet Jackie.

Rain began to fall. A late afternoon shower cloaked the city. Leaving the Iron Rail I scrambled for my truck, parked a few blocks away. Without an umbrella I used the overhanging balconies along the French Quarter's Decatur Street as temporary cover as I ambled along. Fat raindrops wetted my shirt as they fell though gaps in the dilapidated floors of overhanging balconies. Half-soaked, I arrived at my destination, St. Coffee on St. Claude Street. The rain had turned into a real downpour. Such rainstorms are common in the late afternoon of the New Orleans summer. One can almost watch the atmospheric water cycle in real time.

I had arrived at the café a bit early so I ordered a coffee and waited for Jackie. The café was small with only a few tables. I watched the rain through the front window. It had only been raining for about forty minutes but water was already pooling up on the streets. Drainage is a constant problem for the city. Sections of the city could easily experience minor flooding from a heavy rain.

Jackie, soaking wet, burst through the café's entrance.

"Sorry, I thought I was going to be finished with work at the co-op sooner," she explained.

"Oh, you're right on time," I replied as we greeted each other.

We mostly engaged in small talk about life. I told her about my life in Athens at the University of Georgia and she told me about getting her undergraduate degree in Hawaii and her plans to continue her education with an advanced degree. I got the feeling and Jackie confirmed that our conversation was a kind of a final interview before she introduced me to the rest of the group. The fact that the APOC organizers were engaged in completely legal and constitutionally protected activities was no guarantee against spying by any number of law enforcement agencies. Jackie explained that some of the others in the APOC collective had raised the possibility that I might be some kind of government mole. Jackie did not necessarily believe that and explained that in her opinion it really would not matter if I were because the whole project was completely above board. "Noting the see here, folks," we joked, as if talking into a secret microphone.

Jackie grew up in New Orleans and felt a deep sense of connection to the city and its African American community and culture. Jackie explained that one reason for wanting to continue her education was to be better positioned to give back to her community.

Jackie played up a persona as a loud, Southern, and tough as nails black woman. Her strong lean body and multiple piercings complimented her persona. This was not an act. Jackie was indeed loud, Southern, and tough as nails but her bright eyes, quick smile, and smart humor softened her image a bit. Jackie wore her humanity on her sleeve.

Jackie and I got on fine. One key to our initial bonding was our shared life experience as black southerners. We both joked about our unapologetically Southern accents and growing up in the South. Our discussion of life in the South intermittently converged with considerations of anarchist politics. Jackie suggested that in many ways African Americans in the South had been practicing forms of anarchy for a very long time but as a practice and not a conscious political commitment. As we talked the rain slacked to a light drizzle. It was time to head to the meeting.

64

***Meeting at Kwende's house***.

After leaving St. Coffee I followed Jackie to the organizer's meeting at Kwende. Kwende was tall and lean with a thin angular face. I think it was Kwende's broad smile and personal confidence, even a bit of swagger, that reminded me of Barack Obama. Kwende was a bi-racial child of a working single mother who raised him and his two siblings with spotty assistance from his father. In his youth Kwende spent time as a "traveling kid," hopping trains and crisscrossing the country. Kwende had lived in New Orleans for about nine years. He was employed as an emergency medical technician, or, as he described himself in a later interview, "a black urban medical professional."

Beyond his job he put his medical training to use as a street medic at protests and convergences around the country. He also was a core organizer of *Louisiana Books 2 Prisoners* (B2P). Books 2 Prisoners was a small collectively run and consensus-based organization focused on providing books and reading material to prisoners. The organization had a small space on the bottom floor of Nowe Miasto. Once a week B2P volunteers gathered to package books and send them to prisoners incarcerated in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas. I would learn all of this much later. At the point of our first meeting the focus was on hashing out details of the upcoming APOC convergence.

Kwende had recently bought an abandoned and hurricane damaged home. The house was somewhere between a home and an industrial construction site. The house was a DIY project with Kwende and his housemate carrying out virtually all the repairs themselves. Entering the house behind Jackie, I introduced myself to Kwende and another organizer by the name of Jawanza. They were both friendly but a bit standoffish. Aisha was supposed to be at the meeting but had sent a text message explaining that she would not be coming due to having to work late.

We sat around a dusty dinner table and talked practical matters of publicity, securing facilities, finding volunteers and so on. Being new to the city I had little to contribute in terms of finding resources so I mainly just tried to listen and ask appropriate questions. The meeting lasted about an hour. There were a number of suggestions tossed around but not many concrete decisions were made that evening. Some matters had to wait until Aisha could report back on her efforts. We decided to meet again next week.

### *Coffee with Aisha*

Before the next meeting I was invited to coffee by Aisha. As Jackie put it, "Aisha wants to make sure you're not some crazy or something." This meeting was at a different coffee shop, Fair Grinds Coffee. I was seated at a table under a large window near the front entrance, facing the street. Late afternoon light illuminated the interior of the café. Slowly revolving ceiling fans lazily moved the otherwise still air. The morning rush far behind it, the café was mostly empty. Even the group of five or six guys who usually sat on the front porch reading the Times Picayune and gossiping about local news had dispersed.

"Hi, are you Pat?" Aisha asked after scanning the mostly empty room for likely candidates.

We exchanged greetings. Aisha unshouldered the wide strap of her messenger bag, setting it near her seat across the table. Her knee length shorts matched her black tank top. Light skinned, she wore her hair in dreadlocks and had a small piercing on the side of her nose. Interpersonally, She was charismatic and projected a sense of strength and confidence.

Aisha had lived in New Orleans for about ten years. She had lived for a time at Nowe Miasto but our time at Nowe did not overlap. She is the daughter of immigrants. Her family genealogy is rooted in Germany and Sub-Saharan Africa. Her parents prospered and provided

her with what she described as a middle class childhood. "Broke," was her response when I ask how she might describe her class status today. She worked in New Orleans' burgeoning film industry. In recent years New Orleans has become a popular destination for movie production. She had worked in various capacities as an assistant on several film sets but, despite the glamour, it did not pay well.

Over the decade she had lived in New Orleans she had been involved in numerous radical anarchist and feminist projects. INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence, The Women's Health and Justice Initiative, Critical Resistance, an international network opposed to what is commonly called "the prison industrial complex" in activist circles, The People's Hurricane Relief Fund, and Survivors Village, a temporary tent city erected 2006 by public housing residents advocating the right of return for displaced residents of the city. She also worked on smaller scale affinity projects.

Aisha was a committed local activist who gave of her time to projects that she valued. In a later interview I asked her what role generosity played in her political work. She answered in the affirmative and then went on to elaborate. "It's hard [to articulate] because it's like deconstructing self. Like, I can say that it's important to be selfless but it's also important to shift how we identify self in the singular, like the capitalist mode of the individual." I asked her to elaborate on her understanding of a more extended sense of self:

> I would say that you have your own distinct boundaries of who you are but you don't isolate your needs to yourself. A lot of people say, like, you know, you do things for causes but they're not causes to me because they're the communities that I live in. It's very direct. Also realizing what's good for the whole is also good for you. I don't think the capitalist model of thinking really allows for that. It's more of 'what's good for me is good for me and I'm not going to think about where this coffee came from, where my gas came from because that's not me' and I'm like, that is me because I'm fucking somebody I can't even see.

67

This notion of generosity and its elaboration as an extended sense of self affected Aisha's

conception of the *APOCalpse 2012* event. As she said during a later interview after the event,

"All of APOC was a gift. That whole thing was a gift. People just gave and people gave space,

yeah." This notion of the gift seems to intersect with a conception of solidarity I will discuss and

develop later to help understand the APOC convergence in theoretical terms but now it worth

turning to the event itself: its spatial constitution and the topic on which it was focused.


**Spaces of the APOCalypse**

The APOCalyse 2012 occurred between July twelfth and the fifteenth. It encompassed

eight sites spread across French Quarter, Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods (see figure 3.1).

Plan B: The New Orleans Bike Project served as a first day registration point for attendees who

had not already registered online. Other sites hosting convergence events were Allways Lounge

and Theatre, Resurrection After Exoneration House (RAE), the Fourth World Movement,

Healing Center, Dragon's Den, Gay and Lesbian Community Center, Sankore, and Mudlark

Public Theater.

Usually showcasing racy burlesque and LGBTQ themed cabaret acts, the Allways

Lounge and Theatre served as a primary hub for tabling and updates concerning scheduling and

event space changes and the like. Attendees set up several tables loaded with books, 'zines (DIY

magazines/pamphlets), small art pieces, patches, and other materials. The literature on display

dealt with the history, theory, and practice of the APOC movement. The writings of early

anarchists of color such as Kuwasi Balagoon's (2003) A Soldier's Story: writings by a

revolutionary New Afrikan anarchist, Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin's (1994) Anarchism and the

Black Revolution, and Ashanti Alston's (2003) Black Anarchism. Autonomous Marxist such as C.L.R. James (1963) also had table space.

Resurrection After Exoneration House (RAE) hosted APOCalyse 2012's opening Barbeque and Community Anti-violence Forum, which was well attended. RAE was founded in 2007 by John Thompson, a man exonerated after eighteen years spent in prison and with four on death row for a crime he did not commit. RAE assists recently exonerated individuals reintegrate into society.

The Fourth World Movement, an international grassroots anti-poverty movement, donated its local space to host some of the convergences workshops. These workshops focused on topics from the deadly serious, "Combating Police Terror in the United States" to the more tongue-in-cheek, "Preparing for a Zombie Apocalypse."

The Dragon's Den was a music and art space that donated both its ground and second floors for APOC workshop sessions focused topics such as, "organizing within migrant and immigrant diaspora communities," and "whores and politicians: sex work, anarchy, and race politics," and "strategies toward indigenous anarchism, decolonization, and indigenous-anarchist solidarity."

A project of the New Orleans Women Artist Collective, Sankore is an art space that facilitates arts, crafts, and urban gardening skill sharing and training programs. The workshop session at Sankore all focused on various aspects of healing, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The Mudlark Public Theatre is a small black box theatre and performance space and its hosted an eclectic mix of sessions concerned with everything from "rope-climbing and knot-tying" to "community in spite of itself, conflict, solidarity, self care, and Robert Altman," to

"looking for trade: erotic autonomy, diaspora, and the displaced," as well as a number of other sessions.

The Gay and Lesbian Community Center hosted sessions concerned with safe sex practices and sexuality, discussions on consent, and a discussion about coming to anarchism from a childhood within a Maoist family.

The New Orleans Healing Center is a large building housing several businesses such as the consumer co-op that employed Jackie. It also rented space to a Turkish restaurant, a yoga studio, and an interfaith center, a cooperative bank and microloan facility among other businesses. The Healing Center proved a controversial choice of venue. I recall one anarchist referring to it as a "Yuppie mall." Many in New Orleans' anarchist milieu strongly critiqued the Healing Center and its president as a force for gentrification. By the time I came along the event's sites had already been selected. I was not part of the decision-making process that led to the selection of the Healing Center as an event location. However, after talking with some of the other organizers it seems that the choice was made based simply on the pragmatic need for event space. As it turns out no workshops were actually held in the Healing Center. Part of the space was reserved for collective childcare for convergence attendees.

**Anarchist people of color: the global history of non-Western anarchism(s)**

This section provides a brief sketch of the historical roots of the Anarchist People of Color movement. Unfortunately, this section can provide only the barest suggestion of the rich global history of non-European anarchism before focusing in on the anarchist of color tradition and its antecedents within the United States. Though the self-consciously anarchist people of color movement is fairly new, 2003 marked the movement's first convergence event, people of

color have hardly been absent from anarchist and anti-authoritarian movements. Exploring a bit of this experience is important for understanding the formation and historical context of the contemporary APOC movement.

Anarchist historiography has tended to focus heavily on the classic tradition of European political anarchism. For instance, Peter Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, and Emma Goldman are well known luminaries of the Euro-American anarchist tradition. Kôtoku Shûsui, a major figure in history of Japanese anarchism (Crump 1998), and Rabindranath Tagore, India's anti-colonist and anti-nationalist poet (Ramnath 2011: 179), and Luis Cusicanqui, a Bolivian anarchist union organizer (Cusicanqui 2005) are far less well known.

It is not that European anarchists have completely ignored non-European anarchism. Peter Kropotkin (2002: 159), for instance, famously argued that certain ancient Chinese Taoists were among the earliest self-consciously anarchist philosophers. Also by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries anarchism was a global movement with anarcho-syndicalist unions existing from Chicago, to Johannesburg, to Beijing (Schmidt 2013). As Anderson (2013: 2) points out, "…anarchism, in its characteristically variegated forms, was the dominant element in the self-consciously internationalist radical Left." This was, perhaps, facilitated by a powerful intellectual and practical openness to encountering the new and different. Anarchists of the classic period such as Rocker (1989 [1938]: 31) argued that, "[a]narchism recognizes only the relative significance of ideas, institutions, and social forms. It is, therefore not a fixed, self-enclosed social system, but rather a definite trend in the historic development of mankind…" By the early twentieth century anarchism was, arguably, the world's first global mass secular political movement.

Yet, despite a number of works on non-Western forms of anarchism from China (Scalapino and Yu 1961), to Africa (Mbah and Igariwey 1997), to India (Ramnath 2010), to my knowledge, no one has ever written a general history of non-European anarchist movements. Adams (2003: 4), who has probably done the most work toward a more global analysis, writes, "[i]n order to truly understand the full complexity and interconnectedness of anarchism as a worldwide movement however, a specific focus on the uniqueness and agency of movement amongst the 'people without history' is a deeply needed change." The autonomous Mayan communities of Chiapas, Mexico, and their Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) (Marcos 2002) are perhaps the most salient examples of the articulation between the global anarchist movement and movements rooted in local histories of autonomous struggle. However, the "people without history" (Wolf 1982) are not confined to the global South for the "South" exists in the "North" in that diaspora subjects were brought from the periphery to the core of the world system.

**Anarchism, Marxism, Black feminism and the Black freedom struggle**

This section sketches the historical relationship between anarchism, Marxism, Black feminism and the Black freedom struggle within the United States. Within the overarching context of the Black freedom struggle—encompassing everything from slave revolts to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements—anarchism, Marxism, and Black feminism have often been dynamically entangled and antagonistic. To understand the contemporary Anarchist People of Color movement it is necessary to untangle some of the strands of the Black freedom struggle that informed its development in the United States.

A critical reassessment of the Black Power movement has, in recent years, extended the historical periodization (1950-1980) and has extended the compass of inquiry into long overlooked areas. This move has also stressed the overlap and interconnectedness of the many, often obscure, movements and projects that collectively comprised the Black freedom struggle, an overarching term encompassing both the Black Power and Civil Rights movements, in the United States (Joseph et al 2006). A common narrative of the Black freedom struggle has maintained a two-stage course of development of the Black freedom struggle in the United States: the moderate Civil Rights movement followed the radical and Marxist influenced Black Power movement. However, Kelley (2002: 62) explains that, "…a vision of global class revolution led by oppressed people of color was not an outgrowth of the civil rights movement's failures, but existed alongside, sometimes in tension with, the movement's main ideas."

Marxism has had a long and substantial influence within the Black freedom struggle. One notable but obscure example is the Alabama Communist Party and its sharecroppers union organized in the 1930s (Kelley 1990). Another example that has had wider and enduring influence was the Johnson-Forest Tendency. Founded by C. L. R. James, Raya Dunayevskya, and Grace Lee Boggs, the Johnson-Forest Tendency was a small group of intellectuals and radical activists. James is undoubtedly the most well known of the three. His (1963) *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* is a text of revolutionary politics and history. Dunayevskya and Boggs were prolific writers as well. The three collaboratively wrote *State Capitalism and World Revolution* (James et al 1986 [1950]), an influential autonomous Marxist critique of Soviet authoritarianism. Introducing the text and its intellectual significance Paul Buhle (1986: xii) wrote that, "[t]he insights expressed here takes us

73

from the world of Trotsky, Stalin and Norman Thomas to the world of the New Left, Black Power and Polish Solidarity."

The Johnson-Forest Tendency's work and activism influenced a generation of radical youth associated with the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and the Detroit based League of Revolutionary Black Workers, later known as Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). Joseph (2006: 262), commenting on the influence of Grace Lee Boggs and her husband, James Boggs, notes that the two, "…mentored a generation of black student radicals who would go on to play pivotal leadership roles in the Black Power Movement."

The Black Panther Party is the most well known of groups within the Black Power movement, so much so that in the popular imagination the Panthers have become virtually synonyms with the Black Power movement as a whole. Reducing the Black Power movement to the activism of the Panther is going too far but Panthers, or at least several of their members, have provided a crucial link between the Black Power movement and the development of groups of self-conscious anarchists of color.  Given the Black Panther Party's commitment to a hierarchic model of organization, it seems unlikely that the Black Panther Party should be recognized as an important antecedent to the contemporary APOC movement. However, it was exactly these organizational deficiencies that inspired several Panthers to seek out theoretical and practical alternatives to the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology developed by the Black Panther Party (BPP). Kuwasi Balagoon (2003), Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin (1994), and Ashanti Alston (2003) are all important figures in the early development of the APOC movement; all are former Black Panthers.

*Kuwasi Balagoon*

Balagoon was a charismatic figure within the Black Power movement. He was a poet who lived a life of considerable violence. He was a U.S. soldier in Vietnam, a tenant organizer in Harlem, a militant in the Black Panther Party and then the New Afrikan Black Liberation Army, a bank robber, a killer, a prisoner, and an early victim of the AIDs crisis. "Kuwasi Balagoon was an anti-authoritarian like Bakunin and Richard Flores Magon, one who found his voice in a remarkable life of illegality and danger in the struggles of the oppressed," (Sakai 2003: 21).

Balagoon believed the condition of people of color within the United States to be the condition of a colony, a condition of captive colonial subjects. In a letter from prison in 1983 Balagoon (2003: 73) wrote, "…on top of forcing us to live as a colonialized people, the government of the United States has been and is practicing genocide against us, it is our right, duty and natural inclination to defend ourselves and provide for the safety and well being of our people." Balagoon saw himself as a guerilla fighter in an urban anti-colonial war within the borders of the United States.

It is worth noting here that there have been long and ongoing debates amongst anarchists about what constitutes violence and when, if ever, is it justified. Historically, there have been anarcho-pacifists. Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian novelist, is perhaps the most well known anarcho-pacifist. However, most contemporary anarchists have adhered to a practice of strategic non-violence. This approach accepts that, at times, defensive or offensive forms of violence may be necessary but generally violence causes more problems than it solves so violence should be avoided in political struggle.

Despite his commitment to armed struggle Balagoon recognized that violence was not an end in itself. Explaining his vision of anarchy, Balagoon (2003: 75) wrote, "[w]ith anarchy, the

society as a whole not only maintains itself at an equal expense to all but progresses in a creative

process unhindered by any class caste or party." Contrasting anarchism with other currents of

radical politics Balagoon (2003: 75) seizes on anarchism's egalitarian ethics as a key distinction,

"…the goals of anarchy don't include replacing one ruling class with another, neither in the guise

of a fairer boss or as a party. This is key because this is what separates anarchist revolutionaries

from Maoist, socialist and nationalist revolutionaries who…do not embrace complete

revolution." Balagoon goes on to elaborate his vision of anarchism even further with the specific

suggestion that:

> Where we live and work, we must not only escalate discussion and study groups,
> we must also organize on the ground level. The landlords must be contested
> through rent strikes and rather that develop strategies to pay the rent, we should
> develop strategies to take the buildings. We must not only recognize the squatter's
> movement for what it is, but support and embrace it. Set up commons in
> abandoned buildings; sell scrap cars and aluminum cans. Turn vacant lots into
> gardens. When our children grow out of clothes, we should have places where we
> can take them, clearly marked anarchist clothing exchanges and have no bones
> about looking for clothing there first. And of course we should relearn how to
> preserve food; we must learn construction and ways to take back our lives, help
> each other move and stay in shape.
>
> [2003: 79]

It is in this light that Balagoon's critique of the Black Panther Party should be

understood. "The idea of collectives was alien to the Panther Party. We had different survival

programs and people were involved to be part of them, to donate time, afford to git things/stuff

[from] businesses operating in the community, to use the space of institutions such as churches,"

Balagoon (2003: 115) explained. These BPP initiatives seem commensurate with forms of

anarchist organizing. Balagoon, however, notes a crucial difference, "…the Party being a

hierarchy simply could not simply initiate alternatives—it felt that it had to lead them—it was to

be in its mind and words not just the leading party but sole representative of the Black colony."

This stance on the part of the Black Panther Party was untenable for Balagoon and he was not alone.

***Ashanti Alston***

Other former Panthers praised the organization for its community self-help programs and its black empowerment initiatives but other former members such as Ashanti Alston were also critical. Ashanti Alston, like Balagoon, began to look for alternatives to the Party's hierarchy. Alston (2003: 3) wrote, "[a]lthough the Black Panther Party was very hierarchical, I learned a lot from my experience in the organization. Above all, the Panthers impressed upon me the need to learn from other peoples' struggles. …that is one of the reasons why I'm an anarchist today." Since his political conversion to anarchism Alston has been active in organizing the Anarchist People of Color movement. Although, Alston did not attend the 2012 APOC convergence in New Orleans, he was a key organizer involved in the original 2003 convergence in Detroit. Today he remains active in anarchist politics.

Alston first discovered anarchism while incarcerated. Anarchism provided Alston with a practical and theoretical critique of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology adopted by the Panther. This critique was important because it was a revolutionary critique from the Left of the Panthers. Anarchism provided a political perspective that agreed with many of the critiques that the Panthers leveled against the white power structure but it went deeper by critiquing the very idea, the necessity, of power structures in general. As Alston explains:

> I learned about anarchism from letters and literature sent to me while in various prisons around the country. At first I didn't want to read any of the material I received – it seemed like anarchism was just about chaos and everybody doing their own thing – and for the longest time I just ignored it. But there were times – when I was in segregation –that I didn't have anything else to read and, out of boredom, finally dug in (despite everything I had heard about anarchism up to the time). I was actually quite surprised to find analyses of peoples' struggles,

peoples' cultures, and peoples' organizational formation – that made a lot of sense to me.

[2003: 3]

It is a common practice for many anarchist collectives to send reading materials to prisoners. For example, as mentioned earlier, the Books 2 Prisoners collective that operated out of Nowe Miasto performed just this function. Although, the Books 2 Prisoner collective sends a wide variety of literature to the incarcerated and does not focus on anarchist literature. Other groups exclusively focus on sending radical literature to prisoners.

Alston benefited from such materials but as he continued his studies of anarchism he began to notice that people of color were not represented in the pages of the material he was receiving in prison. Alston (2003: 4) explains that, "I tried to figure out how this applies to me. I began to look at Black history again, at African history, at the histories and struggles of other people for color." For Alston this search was an attempt to reassess history and social movements from the perspective of anarchism and make anarchism relevant to the struggles of people of color. Of his research Alston states that, "I found many examples of anarchist practices in non-European societies, from the most ancient times to the present. This was very important to me: I needed to know that it is not just European people who can function in an anti-authoritarian way…we all can."

### Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin

Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin has produced the most sustained theoretical and practical consideration of the intersection of anarchism with the political struggles of people of color. Drawing from Gramscian terminology Heynen and Rhoades (2012) have rightly characterized Ervin as an organic intellectual, a member of a subordinate group who promotes the interests of

that group against the hegemony of a dominant group. Ervin's (1994) *Anarchism and the Black Revolution* is a foundational document of the Anarchist People of Color movement.

Ervin's (1994) intellectual production appears inextricable from his life of militant struggle. He draws heavily on the lessons he learned over decades of radical activism. In this way it may be more accurate to view Ervin's (1994) text as an exercise in strategy more so than "pure" social theory. By "strategy" I mean theory put to the service of action. At the core of Ervin's mission is a strategic call for black and white class solidarity to overcome white supremacist capitalism. To this end he developed a strategic analysis of the intersections of class and race. As Ervin (1994: 3) writes, "[i]f an effective resistance is to be mounted against the current racist offensive of the Capitalist class, the utmost solidarity between workers of all races is essential." Later Ervin (1994: 6) places black and white solidarity at the forefront of his thirteen-point outline of action necessary for realizing radical social transformation along anarchist lines.

While Ervin views anarchism as the most appropriate political vehicle for building this solidarity he does not hesitate to take ostensibly anti-racist white anarchists to task for often failing to reach out the black community. Ervin (1994: 4) explains that, "[o]ne reason there are so few Black Anarchists is because the movement provides no means to reach people of colour, win them over to Anarchism – and help them organize themselves." Despite this critique Ervin remains dedicated to building a mass multiracial and working class based anarchist movement. Ervin (1994: 60) notes that, [t]he Anarchist movement in North America is overwhelmingly white, middle class, and for the most part, pacifists so the question arises: why am I a part of the Anarchist movement, since I am none of those things?" He explains:

> Well, although the movement may not now be what I think it should be in North America, I visualize a mass movement that will have hundreds of thousands,

perhaps millions of Black, Hispanic and other non-white workers in it. It will not be an Anarchist movement that Black workers and other oppressed will just 'join' – it will be an independent movement which has its own social outlook, cultural imperative and political agenda. It will be Anarchist at its core, but it will also extend Anarchism to a degree no previous European social or cultural group ever has done. I'm certain that many of these workers will believe, as I do, that Anarchism is the most democratic, effective, and radical way to obtain our freedom, but that we must be free to design our own movements, whether it is understood or 'approved' by North American Anarchists or not. We must fight for our freedom, no one else can free us, but they can help us

[Ervin 1994: 60]

Ervin's vision corresponds to the actual sentiment and practice of many of the younger generation of APOC activists. Of course, the contemporary APOC movement has a long way to go before it reaches a "mass" stage. But in terms of it basic solidary aims the APOC movement appears to be broadly moving in the direction of Ervin's strategic analysis.


**APOCalyptic solidarity**

Solidarity was an important theoretical and practical category for a number of the core organizers of APOCalypse 2012. This section explores a bit of this sentiment around solidarity and its perceived importance to furthering the aims of the APOC movement. It is hardly surprising that solidarity and its corollary mutual aid are important topics for a movement that seeks to organize a heterogeneous body of participants. This section draws on interview excerpts to give a bit of ethnographic flesh to the categories of solidarity. This section is meant to ground the theoretical discussion on solidarity to follow.

*Jackie*

When I asked Jackie if the values of solidarity and mutual aid were fundamental to the kind of political activism and organization she engaged in her response was affirmative but qualified. "The words are but they need to be expanded. When I say that I mean when I hear

80

someone say 'solidarity,' 'solidarity,' 'solidarity,' I say okay but with the understanding that you can't understand." Jackie seemed to suggest that to enact solidarity one must be willing to learn from those whom one seeks solidarity with. "For me solidarity is an action and not just a thought or notion. To me it's realizing that I'm just one part of something. Solidarity means being humble. That's what it really means to me. It's being humble," Jackie explained. To elaborate her point she drew upon her own experience as a non-native activist in Hawaii during her college years. "To me you show solidarity by being the black girl from New Orleans who goes to Hawaii and asks 'what do you want me to do?' Not 'I'm going to come up in all yo shit and such.' That's not solidarity," Jackie explained and continued, "I'm not going to organize a protest on the behalf of the native people of Hawaii. No. It don't make no sense. That's not solidarity. That's I'm taking your shit over. That's colonialism." Again she emphasized the need to come together over matters of shared political interest. "Solidarity is realizing that, alright, I'm going to be with my people, you going to be with your people but we're going to exchange resources and we're going to have each others back. That's solidarity," she said. When asked Jackie drew a connection between solidarity and generosity in the action of mutuality and dialogue. She explained, "…educate each other; generosity of knowledge is the most powerful gift you can give each other and listening, listening, to me that the greatest generosity."

### Jawanza

I asked Jawanza if solidarity and mutual aid were fundamental to his activism, he replied, "[i]f you define solidarity as standing alongside, struggling with, then that sounds like a principle that is fundamental. Now, if we look at mutual aid as generous action that is flowing between the people struggling together in solidarity then certainly [I see solidarity as fundamental]. Later Jawanza contrasted the relations of solidarity and mutual aid with those of the state and

capitalism. "The state and capital work in very selfish ways and solidarity and mutual aid—I would say, laying out how I kind of defined them in a short and concise way—I would say that capital just wants to perpetuate capital and the state just wants to maintain state power." In contrast Jawanza emphasized that, "so therefore these things with solidarity, we're about struggling toward liberation, we're about being cooperative." "You know, solidarity and mutual aid and cooperation, we're about being better and with a lot of conscious thought behind that, not just, you know, saying this is good for me but saying this is good for us." Jawanza then offered an expansive meaning for "us." "I mean, it depends on what kind of analysis you have what 'us' means. I mean for me 'us' means the whole planet and not just me and my family," Jawanza explained.

### *Kwende*

When I asked Kwende whether solidarity was fundamental to the kinds of activism that he engaged in, he did not hesitate, "Yes, yes, absolutely," he said. And he then provided an example from his activist experience; articulate themes of solidarity and generosity. "The first time I experienced jail solidarity, I got out of jail in New York and I got a hug, a bagel, and a phone."

When organizers plan protest actions they usually anticipate that some of their numbers will be hauled off to jail at some point during the event. Jail support is often an integral aspect of protest planning. Depending on available resources support work may include pro bono legal support or it may include simply someone providing a ride home after the jailed make bail. In Kwende case, "there were literally people lined up who took it up on themselves to meet every person who came out of jail and give them a hug, give them something to eat and 'here use my cell phone and call who you need to call.'" Beyond particular practical manifestations such as

jail support, solidarity for Kwende means recognizing that, "we're all in this together. We are in a collective struggle."

Kwende went on to elaborate this in terms of his life in the local community. "And even if you don't identify it as a struggle, the people you live next to in New Orleans, you're all in this together. You're all on the same block together. If you all don't maintain your gutters, your street is going to flood when it rains." "If you don't know your neighbors something is going to go wrong and you're not going to have any help. If you don't keep track of your friends, they're going to disappear." Finally, Kwende summed up the bottom line stating, "solidarity. If you want it to work, if you want this community that is can live and can stand on its own, then you all have to be there for each other."

**Discussion: APOC and solidarity as strategy**

This section discusses an approach to solidarity that recognizes and values difference as well as commonality, a solidarity across differences, or intersectional solidarity. Solidarity is a key value within anarchism's value system. This discussion is approached from both a theoretical and reflexive standpoint. By *theoretical* I mean to bring solidarity into relation with the feminist theory of intersectionality at an abstract level and reconstruct and extend the concept of solidarity and intersectionality in relation to each other. By *reflexive* I mean that I do this as a form of strategy, theory in the service of action. As a researcher *and* a participant organizer of APOCalypse 2012, I want to use this discussion to develop some strategic insights that may serve to promote ethnographic and practical understanding of the relational processes at work in the development of such a heterogeneous movement. This discussion is also meant to act as a

corrective to the heavy focus on black *male* anarchists and their roles as seminal figures in the development of the APOC movement.

The APOCalyse 2012 event was not only multi-racial but it was also multi-gendered. In addition to binary male and female identities, many participants identified as genderqueer and transgender. Social race and ethnic identities were also heterogeneous. Several participants identified as Bi-racial, Chinese, Chicano, Latino/a, Filipino/Chinese, Korean American, Dominican, Kurdish, Xicana, Native American, Native America, Cherokee and Ojibwe. It must be kept in mind that these categories suggest but do not capture the whole story of the diversity at the event because each individual's understanding of their identity and its history is unique. In other words, the APOC participants cannot be understood simply as static categories but as living people and agents in history. Recognizing this diversity means grappling with its articulation in solidarity.

### Black feminism and the development of an intersectional analysis

The theory of intersectionality is the result of a lengthy and hard-won process of critical praxis within the feminist movement. Introducing the term *intersectionality* Kimberle Crenshaw (1989; 1991) affected a brilliant synthesis of currents of thought and practice that had been roiling the feminist movement for much of the twentieth century.

The Combahee River Collective (CRC) wrote in their 1977 manifesto that, "[w]e believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race." And, significantly, they added, "[w]e also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (CRC 1986: 267). These were early pioneers of the intersectional approach but they were hardly alone.

The Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) was a black feminist group that grew out

of the efforts to confront sexism within the Student Non-violence Coordinating Committee

(SNCC) and the broader Black Power movement (Ward 2006: 120) during the late 1960s and

1970s. The movement away from SNCC saw the group transition from its initial phase as the

Black Women's Liberation Committee (BWLC) to the Black Women's Alliance (BWA) to its

final form as the Third World Women's Alliance. These transitions were more than a change of

titles. These reflected theoretical and practical developments. As Ward (2006: 128) writes,

"[t]he resulting conversations were an example of the group's most significant activity in these

initial months, namely the creation of a dialogic, collective process through which

members…developed their ideas." One key idea was expressed on the masthead of the group's

newspaper, *Triple Jeopardy*. Published monthly from 1970 to 1975 *Triple Jeopardy* implicated

racism, economic exploitation, and sexism as interlocking systems resulting in the oppression of

women of color (Ward 2006: 138). However, this was not the first time an interlocking political

analysis of the oppression of women of color was issued.

As early as 1949 pioneering communist feminist Claudia Jones identified the "triple

oppression" of race, class, and gender as a convergent challenge to black women's emancipatory

struggle (McDuffie 2008: 85). And, of course, later on Angela Y. Davis (1983) explored the

convergent problems facing women as they are confronted by oppressive and exploitive systems

of race and class.

Crenshaw's (1989; 1991) articulation of intersectionality partook in a long-standing

dialogue among feminists, particularly feminists of color, about difference and commonality.

Crenshaw (1989) recognized the analytical distortion that occurred when only one dimension of

the subject is taken into account. She outlines her reasoning, stating, "[w]ith Black women as the

starting point, it comes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis." She continues by explaining the significance of her observation, "…this single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged [white] members of the group" (1989: 140). This tendency on the part of some white feminists to downplay race and class in favor an ideal of feminist, often heteronormative, sisterhood has been a significant point of division within the global feminist movement.

Here it must be noted that, contrary to some assertions, the theory of intersectionality is not merely an additive approach that simply seeks to add categories to existing feminist criticism. At its best it functions as a dialectical critique. Crenshaw (1989) argues that the relevant categories and the practical experiences these categories represent are not to be understood as discrete events occurring at different moments of a subject's existence. Instead, she insists on the "multidimensionality" of subjective experience. "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw 1989: 140). For an early generation of feminists solidarity was seen as born from a commonality of sex and gender. This notion of solidarity proved insufficient when confronted by the actual existing diversity within the feminist movement. As demonstrated above, new conceptual and practical approaches had to be developed. And this development continues.

*Intersectional solidarity*

This section of the discussion considers and reconstructs intersectionality as a form of strategic solidarity praxis. Recognizing the significance of subjective and intersubjective self-definition is an important conceptual start. Hooks (1986) argues that solidarity should not be sought in a sense of shared victimhood but rather it should be based on bonding through shared strengths and resources. For Hooks solidarity is not a pre-existing condition of existence, or primordial essence, solidarity is a political achievement (1986: 127-128). Collins (2000: 98) observes that, "[t]he voices of African American women are not those of victims but of survivors. Their ideas and actions suggest that not only does a self-defined, group-derived Black women's standpoint exists, but its presence has been essential to U.S. Black women's survival."

John Holloway (2010) famously conceptualizes the struggle for self-definition as a negating-creative scream, a scream of becoming. At the level of practice this becoming—this negation and creation—of self-definition is intrinsic to intersubjective critical dialog. The need for dialog leads to the construction of safe spaces, spaces wherein one can speak freely. This was the force behind the development of feminist conscious-raising group meetings and the formation of collective projects of autonomy such as the Cambahee River Collective or APOC Convergences. These spaces are often incubators of autonomous social movements. Collins (2000: 101) notes that, "[t]hese spaces are not only safe—they form prime locations for resisting objectification as the Other." Solidarity is a political achievement operative within a social dialectic of condition and subjective, and intersubjective agency.

The concept of intersectionality was meant to serve as an intellectual tool of emancipatory struggle and not as just another academic object of discourse. As Chun and colleagues (2013: 921) observed, "[y]et the action imperatives of intersectionality that have not

always been well understood in the academy have enjoyed a rich and flourishing existence inside social movements—especially those organized by women of color." Intersectional solidarity is something that is built, not simply given by some ideal category like "sisterhood."

There is no metaphysical essence to solidarity; a truly materialist conception of solidarity will jettison metaphysics and recognize that solidarity is a form of praxis, a revolutionary accomplishment in Hooks' words (1986: 127). With this recognition the question moves from asking what solidarity is, in an essentialist sense, to asking how solidarity is created? This is not the knowledge of the academy but rather it is a knowledge of social struggle, perhaps the most crucial knowledge of social struggle. However, this does not mean that solidarity is simply a matter of political will. Understanding the dialectic of agency and existing conditions is central.

In this sense solidarity is an assertion of agency as a form of intervention in existing conditions through the creation of new conditions—micro-systems of cooperation and mutual aid whose existence are themselves an act of practical criticism. These micro-systems of autonomy are safe spaces, the networks, and the communities of resistance. Chun and colleagues address the dynamic of this solidary use of intersectional praxis:

> Collective political struggles require the creation of strategic group positions adaptable to forging coalitions within and across identity groups. These positions are always partial, perspectival, and Performative. They never encompass all dimensions of people's identities. Yet as an analytical tool intersectionality can be used strategically to take inventory of differences, to identify potential contradictions and conflicts, and to recognize split and conflicting identities not as obstacles to solidarity but as valuable evidence about problems unsolved and as new coalitions that need to be formed. Group identities are vital for collective mobilizations for rights, resources, and recognition, yet every collective identity expressed through solidarities of sameness runs the risk of occluding differences within the group. In its most sophisticated articulations, intersectionality acknowledges both the plurality and diversity of identities that comprise any group and the common concerns that create aggregate identities.
> [2013: 923]

Chun and colleagues (2013) developed this understanding from an in-depth case study of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA), an Oakland and San Jose based workers' organization. From this example it is clear that self-definition is not simply a matter of creating a new label or a new category. Rather, it is a form of relational activity that generates new situational and interpersonal dynamics. The idea that intersectional analysis can assist in the process of "forging coalitions," as Chun and colleagues put it, harkens back, again, to Crenshaw's (1991) early formulation.

Crenshaw (1991) admits that coalitional politics is not easy and she illustrates this with the case of the collapse of the New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence due to internal conflicts between working class black and Latina women and middle class white women and their differing perspectives on the coalitions direction. She points out that none of the participants ever started out on the same footing in relation to the organization. Middle class white women formed the organization. Women of color were included only after the "coalition" was put together. The women of color expressed feeling excluded even in their inclusion because their perspectives and insights were downplayed in favor of those of the white women. The short-lived coalition eventually collapsed when the women of color left the group in mass.

From this case Crenshaw (1991: 1226) notes, "[t]he struggle over which differences matter and which do not is neither an abstract nor an insignificant debate among women." Crenshaw continues by arguing that, "Indeed, these conflicts are about more than difference as such; they raise critical issues of power." Her analysis of power leads Crenshaw to the conclusion that, "…the struggle over incorporating these difference is not a petty or superficial conflict about who gets to sit at the head of the table." Consequently, as Crenshaw notes, "[i]n the context of violence, it is sometimes a deadly serious matter of who will survive—and who

will not." And yet from her intersectional perspective Crenshaw saw reason to be hopeful about multi-dimensional political struggles. "A beginning response to these questions requires that we first recognize that the organized identity groups in which we find ourselves in are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed," (Crenshaw 1991: 1299). The notion that intersectional analysis suggests the possibility of concrete and practical coalitions, solidarity, the grounded and already coalitional cross-cutting aspects of identity of particular subjects appears to have been mostly overlooked by researchers. But as the case of AIWA indicates activists have been enacting similar analysis in praxis for decades.

Recently Anna Carastathis (2013) has taken up and developed Crenshaw's (1991) early formulation of the potentially coalitional aspects of collective identity struggles. Carastathis (2013: 941) challenges the often-drawn distinction between identity politics and coalitional politics. "Yet this distinction…focuses exclusively on differences between groups, failing to consider differences within groups, which an intersectional critique of identity categories illuminates." She rejects the critique of identity politics that sees it as inevitably resulting in an endless fractionalization along lines of increasing narrowly delineated difference. She argues, "…intersectionality—as a critical project—reveals politicized identity categories to be held together variously by tacit, unspoken, deliberate, and explicit acts of alignment, solidarity, and exclusion, about which we must become more reflective and critical…" (Carastathis 2013: 942). From the perspective I've developed in this chapter, Carastathis' (2013) analysis seems to move the traditional and somewhat reductive conception of *coalition* in the direction of a more holistic, dialectical, notion of solidarity.

Solidarity cannot be assumed in advance, though it always potentially exists, and can be brought into existence as a project of alignment. This is exactly what the Anarchist People of

Color (APOC) convergence was in many ways about, a project of solidarity. Carastathis (2013) explains the significance of, "…conceptualizing identities as coalitions—as internally heterogeneous, complex unities constituted by their internal differences and dissonances and by internal as well as external relations of power…" And, noting the practical effects of this conception, she asserts that it, "…enables us to form political alliances that cross existing identity categories and to pursue a liberatory politics of interconnection…" (2013: 942). These are the types of political alliances that make possible the formation of the anarchist people of color movement.

**Conclusions**

Solidarity is a key value within the anarchist value system. This chapter has reconstructed the concept of solidarity in relation to the concept of intersectionality. The value of solidarity is ultimately in its practice. To understand this practice this chapter provided a reflexive ethnographic account of *APOCalypse 2012: Survival Strategies for the New Millennium*. An event organized in New Orleans by a local and national network of anarchist people of color (APOC)This chapter draws on interviews with core organizers. The event was constituted spatially across eight sites the French Quarter, Marigny, and Bywater neighborhoods. These spaces were crucial to the practice of the kind of intersectional solidarity that I outlined about. These sites constituted solidary spaces of encounter and dialogue for event participants. In addition to the ethnographic present this chapter also explored the antecedents, origins and development of the APOC movement as a self-conscious project within anarchism. This was important not only to provide some contextualizing history and background but also to provide a basis from which my reconstruction of the solidarity in relation to intersectionality could

91

proceed. Through the course of this chapter I have demonstrated that the APOC movement

provides grounds for an intersectional and strategic conception of solidarity. This chapter is

constitutive of my wider ethnographic consideration of the anarchist value system operative

within New Orleans' anarchist milieu.
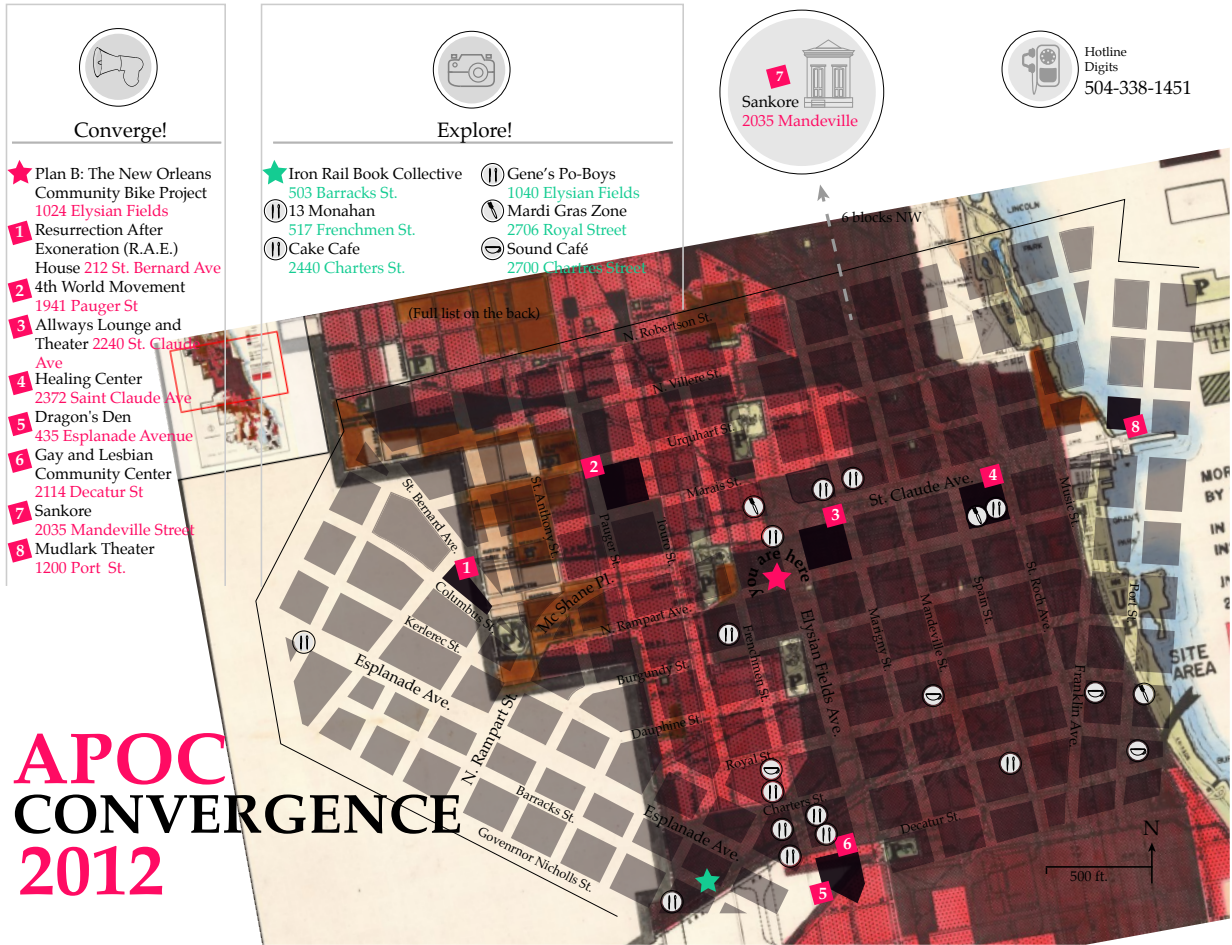
Figure 3.1 Map of APOC convergence

# CHAPTER 4

## THE IRON RAIL AND THE VALUE OF AUTONOMY

**Introduction**

Autonomy is one of the core values within anarchism's value system. As such autonomy

is understood ethnographically as an integrated way of thinking and acting in the world

(McMurtry 1998: 7). Autonomy is not a static category but rather it is subjectivity and

intersubjective relationships within New Orleans' anarchist milieu. The Iron Rail Lending

Library and Bookshop, a worker-managed and consensus-based project, was an ethnographically

salient manifestation of autonomy within New Orleans anarchist milieu.

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which the Iron Rail Book Collective and those

associated with it conceptualize and enact the value of autonomy as a form of praxis. The Iron

Rail was more than just a lending library and bookshop; it was a nexus of relationships

embedded within the wider New Orleans anarchist milieu. Drawing on interview data and

ethnographic participant observation this chapter details the meaning and practice of autonomy

within New Orleans' anarchist milieu.

This chapter's first section contextualizes the city's anarchist milieu by drawing on

interview data to provide a sense of the ways in which New Orleans is experienced, perceived,

and evaluated by local anarchists. This section reveals an incredibly consistent dualistic

perception of the city. The existential space of the city is understood to be conflicted and

antagonistically contradictory. One side of this divide is a social realm of meaningful human

relationships and alienation, separation, and estrangement appear on the other side. Focusing on these perceptions of the dualistic and estranged urban reality of New Orleans establishes the ethnographic contexts of the local anarchist project of autonomy.

The second section of this chapter is concerned with the ways in which New Orleans' anarchists critique capitalism and state centric politics. Values are often defined in terms of their meaningful difference (Graeber 2005: 439). For instance, the value of autonomy is contrasted to the disvalue of alienation. In its critical dimension anarchism's value system is defined in opposition to the value programs of capitalism and the state. Drawing on interview data I detail the critical and evaluative contrasts participants constructed between their anarchist values and those entailed capitalism and state centric politics.

This chapter's third section then focuses on the circulation of non-market goods and services within New Orleans' anarchist milieu. Drawing on interview data this section considers the ways in which local anarchists are practically enacting forms of exchange that are not based on the logic of accumulation but are rather based on values of generosity and mutual aid. This is significant because it ties directly into the project of autonomy within the city anarchist milieu. This section only provides a general description of this economy of goods and services as detailed by interview participants. This economy will be considered in greater ethnographic detail in chapters five and six. If the previous section demonstrated the negative critique of capitalism, then this section is meant to showcase general initiative within the milieu to construct a practical critique based in the values of generosity and autonomy.

Autonomy is considered in ethnographic and theoretical detail in this chapter's fourth, fifth, and sixth sections. Section four considered the anarchist project of autonomy as a form of prefigurative politics, a politics wherein means and ends are commensurate. Section five

provides an ethnographic account of the Iron Rail Book Collective's weekly organizing meeting. Enacting directly democratic processes of consensus-based decision-making is a materialization of the value of autonomy. Autonomy appears as a core structuring value within New Orleans anarchist milieu. All anarchist collectives in New Orleans operated on some form of consensus process so understanding the relationship between autonomy and consensus is key to role of value within the milieu.

Finally, section six ends the chapter with a theoretical discussion and reconstruction of autonomy. This discussion explores the implications of an anarchist conception of autonomy as opposed to the notion of autonomy associated with classical liberal philosophy. Thus this discussion reconstructs the value of autonomy in meaningful contrast to its conception in classical liberal philosophy. Anarchism is shown to value a non-alienating form of autonomy premised on direct democracy in contrast to liberal conception of autonomy, which it quietly assumes as a starting premise.

**The Meaning of New Orleans**

This section is concerned with the way in which anarchist meaningfully experience New Orleans. The city's anarchist milieu finds much of its context within the city. In chapter two I developed this context through a series of historical vignettes illustrative of the city's radical history and the meanings ascribed to that history in the contemporary anarchist milieu. This section focuses exclusively on the ethnographic present and urban context of New Orleans as experienced by anarchists. Drawing on interview data I show that the experience of New Orleans is often a dichotomous one for many of the anarchists living in the city. Interview participants generally expressed a dichotomous, oppositional or, perhaps, contradictory, experience of the

city. Participants commonly juxtaposed concepts such as life and death in their characterization of the existential nature of the city. Focusing on these perceptions of the dualistic and estranged urban reality of New Orleans establishes the ethnographic contexts of the local anarchist project of autonomy. This is significant because this is the context in which the anarchist project of autonomy took place. The Iron Rail was not simply a physical space but rather a nexus of relationships within the city's wider anarchist milieu.

### Flame

When I asked Flame to describe the city *they* immediately expressed a sense of the oppositional character of New Orleans. Flame explained that, "…so the thing that people always say in our little community is 'magiedy' it's kind of silly but I think it's really real. Things are silly and cheesy but they resonate with a lot of people. Magic and tragedy is the combination."

Flame had only lived in New Orleans for about a year but *they* had visited the city on and off for a couple of years before settling. "I was one of those travel kids that are well known in New Orleans. I did a lot of anti-cop work, noise demos, and direct action tactics," Flame explained. At twenty-one Flame was energetic, young, and enthusiastic. With a bright hopeful face, intense blue eyes, shoulder length curly blonde hair, a strong and well-defined jawline, and a petite and lean physique, Flame hardly fit the stereotype of the grungy anarchist traveling kid.

Flame continued *their* narrative of the city. "This place really has a really alive sense of ecstasy and sorrow living in every single place. It's really the most that I've ever understood the idea of the sacred and profane as one," Flame explained. *They* elaborated this relationship by framing it in spiritual terms but cautioned, "I don't mean spiritual in a religion way, I mean spiritual in a sense of seeing every action of your life impacting the ones around you in a way that sort of like intangible or something like that."

Speaking to the emotional life of the city, Flame observed that, "[p]eople show how they feel here a lot. There are fights in the streets and crying and Second Lines. There are all of these things that make this city intense." Second Lines are carnivalesque street processions with a long tradition within the city's African American community. The joyous revelry of the Second Lines is sometimes marred by street violence.

Flame expressed this sense of intensity by relating it to the ultimate existential antagonism between life and death. "This city is full of death and grieving and there's a willingness to recognize that there is a lot of death and tragedy but also that there is something to live for and that something is this intense, strange, titillating, intangible thing that lives here. I don't know exactly what it is," Flame explained.

### *Dane*

Flame was not alone in *their* assessment of the city. Many interview participants expressed similar themes to those expressed by Flame. For example Dane observed that, [i]t's a soulful city, it's a musical city, and it is a magical city in a very real way. I think there is magic in this city that's not in other cities." Dane had lived in New Orleans his entire life, thirty-three years. He knew the city intimately.

Dane sported a large tattoo on his right calf depicting a nighttime scene of a city street lit by one of New Orleans' characteristic street lamps. Dane not only lived in the city he had its streetscape inked unto his body. Dane's demeanor was always friendly but very composed. Dane was physically fit with a medium build and neatly trimmed dark hair. Dane was, what is called in the punk and anarchist milieus, straight edge. He practiced a strict vegan diet and abstained from drugs and alcohol. Dane was also a practitioner of Zen Buddhism. Dane worked at a local pizza

place and he was a fixture within the city's anarchist milieu. Dane was respected for his consistency and reliability. He was a regular attendee at the Iron Rail's weekly meetings.

During our interview session Dane attributed the city's magic to its culture of art and creativity. "I think it's because the creative culture is strong in New Orleans and that creative culture lends itself to interacting with the universe in a much more magical and direct way so there is actually more magic in this city then anywhere else." Dane, however, juxtaposed this perception with a more critical analysis of the city. "It's also a city of addicts and a city that enables people to be addicts and I'd like to see that change. It's also incredibly corrupt in just about everyway possible. Of course, it's exceptionally violent."

### *Bert*

Bert's experience of the city articulates well with those of Flame and Dane. I interviewed Bert at Apparatus, the collective house he shared with several housemates. "Beauty and passion, heat, not just temperature, the oldness of it," Bert said in a kind of free associative stream. He then took a long and introspective pause before continuing his narrative of the city and its anarchists. "I think New Orleans feeds that sort of really romantic image of something that is both beautiful and tragic and something about that combination is really attractive, perhaps because that is how many anarchists self-identify." Bert continued by elaborating on the psychology of all this. "A lot of people I know, a lot of anarchists I know, I don't think they've had the hardest lives but there's something, something happened at some point. Everything wasn't cheery all the time, certainly," Bert continued to elaborate, "[y]ou know, and they have like these—you know, the anarchist life narrative always has these fundamental moments fundamental moments of betrayal, they were betrayed and became angry."

As Bert spoke, I recalled the name of the famous but now defunct anarchist network the Love and Rage Federation. I asked Bert if those two words got to his meaning. He answered in the affirmative. "Yes! Yes, exactly. There is like this great anger." Bert continued, "I mean, it's interesting you asked me [in a previous discussion] if I loved humanity. I wanted to say yes, but I'm totally disgusted by the way people act so often—but—I mean, I love screwed up people, I prefer them. They have passion and experience and a reason why they do things."

For many of the anarchists that I spoke with this sense of rage and betrayal was channeled into a systemic critique. The sense of betrayal and rage often developed from dissatisfaction with the constraints and estrangements of existing society.

## Anarchism's anti-Statism and anti-capitalism

The anarchist value system is fundamentally opposed to the value program of capitalism and the state. Anarchists have been opposed to capitalist states and states, like the old Soviet Union, that were ostensibly non-capitalist but authoritarian. The anarchist critique of capitalism and the state is ultimately premised on the disvalue anarchists identify in hierarchy and alienation. The anarchist critique of capitalism and the state tend to be rather visceral. John Holloway (2010) aptly characterizes this visceral rejection of alienation and hierarchic domination as a pervasive collective scream. "Faced with the mutilation of human lives by capitalism, a scream of sadness, a scream of horror, a scream of anger, a scream of refusal: NO," Holloway (2010: 1) exclaims. This powerful and rather poetic characterization is highly commensurate with the sentiments I encountered among participants in New Orleans anarchist milieu. There was unanimous agreement amongst interview participants that the value program of capitalism and the state were anathema to the value system of anarchism.

100

This section draws on interview data to illustrate the antipathy toward capitalism and state centric politics felt by New Orleans' anarchists. In order to understand what anarchists are for it is necessary to understand what anarchism's value system opposes. This section contributes to the overall argument of this chapter by showcasing this opposition in the words of interview participants.

I conducted my interview with Axel as we sat on the sidewalk outside of the Iron Rail Lending Library and Bookshop. We had planned to use the space of the Rail for the interview before the weekly collective meeting but folks began to arrive earlier than expected so we moved the interview to the relative privacy and quiet of the sidewalk. It was early evening in the middle of an uneventful week so the French Quarter was quiet and the sidewalk was mostly free of foot traffic. A mosquito bit my forearm as our interview resumed. "I believe in anarchism. I believe in advocating for that. I believe it is the most worthwhile and liberatory ideal to be working toward. I believe in fighting for that ideal and putting it into practical application," Axel explained of his attraction to anti-authoritarian politics.

"I think I've always had anti-authoritarian leanings. I've always been an avid reader. I think I started reading anarchist theory in High School and I was getting into punk rock so I think it was a combination of reading a lot of literature and music," Axel explained of the development of his political consciousness. "I think when I started identifying as an anarchist it was definitely in a crimethinc-y dropout kind of way, you know. I grew up in the suburbs in Atlanta. For me it was a kind of way to validate my hatred of that…," Axel continued.

Crimethinc: The Ex-Workers Collective is a well-known and controversial anarchist publishing collective. On the one hand, Crimethinc has been incredibly successful at spreading anarchist ideas among young people. The Iron Rail carried a number of their titles. On the other

hand, Crimethinc has been critiqued within the anarchist movement for promulgating an overly romantic and quasi-bourgeois image of anarchist struggle. Crimethinc has been very successful at crafting affective narratives of societal alienation. Based on conversations with many other anarchists, it seems that Axel's experience of political development, while certainly not universal, are common among a certain generation of anarchists.

Axel saw a fairly clear distinction between his values and those he associated with capitalism and the state. "Yeah, I mean ain't nothing for free under capitalism, right. You have to buy and work for everything and that's the whole logic of the system, individualistic. I think most anarchists are opposed to things that kind of set you up on this life of strife." He went on to observe that, "[a]lthough, there is that romantic tendency [within anarchism] that I can do it on my own but I think we'd rather say 'let's build something beautiful together that we can all benefit from.'" Finally, Axel stated, "I think the intention with capitalism is to make a hierarchy, especially an economic hierarchy, and I think that's something we're working against and I think solidarity is important for building that resistance."

During another interview I asked Trevor about the difference he saw between anarchist values and those of capitalism and the state. Trevor's reply was confident and matter-of-fact, "The values of the state and capitalism are all about fucking over someone else so this [anarchism] is the antithesis of that. It's the idea that we shouldn't be basing our success or happiness on our ability to accumulate wealth and power at someone else's expense." In an it-goes-without-saying tone, he added, " [w]e should base it [evaluative criteria] on something a little less vapid, a little less brutal."

Dane juxtaposed the anarchist values of mutual aid and solidarity to those of capitalism and the state and noted their antagonistic opposition. "Mutual aid and solidarity are the cancer of

the state, they will absolutely destroy it," Dane asserted. Dane, Trevor, and Axel's views were in-line with the sentiments expressed by all other interview participants. Anarchism understands capitalism in relation to the state as a political economic system that, as part of its normal operation, perpetuations exploitative, alienating, and hierarchical social relations.

I will go into all of this further in this chapter's discussion section. For now I simply wanted to register the opposition to capitalism that is essentially a definitional feature of anarchist political praxis. In the next section I will showcase local anarchist perceptions of the exchange of non-market goods and services within New Orleans anarchist milieu.

**Access to non-market goods and services**

Classical and contemporary anarchists tend to have little interest in waiting for "the revolution" to erupt. Anarchists have tended to maintain the necessity of "building the new society within the shell of the world," as the old slogan has it. Within New Orleans' anarchist milieu the circulation of non-market goods and services enacts a practical critique of capitalism and the state that is commensurate with anarchism's value system. The Iron Rail was a part of this flow of non-market goods and services. It was a constituent element of the Iron Rail Book Collective's project of autonomy. This section is only intended to be illustrative of this practice within the milieu. Chapters five and six, which focus on housing and food, will provide more detailed ethnographic accounts of this radical economy.

I sat on the couch in Saul's living room; a strong breeze from the Mississippi river blew in through an open window. Abandoned in the wake of hurricane Katrina, the house began its post-Katrina life as an illegal squat. Saul shared the house with a couple of housemates. They

had been busy repairing and reconstructing the house but at the time of our interview it was still under reconstruction.

I first met Saul at the Iron Rail. Saul was quiet and soft-spoken but usually insightful. Saul's participation in the money economy, by *their* estimate, approached about $5,000 a year, which *they* made from odd jobs when necessary. Saul relied on the resources provided within the anarchist milieu for much of his sustenance.

During our interview I asked Saul about access to non-market goods and services. Glancing around the room *They* replied, "Pretty much most of the stuff in this house we kind of just like found. In terms of goods, most kind of household stuff like furniture and stuff can be found…its crazy all the stuff that we find." Emphasizing the often random things they find, Saul noted that he and his roommates had recently found an untapped beer keg. "So we're going to have a party some time this weekend once we get a tap," Saul said after I expressed my enthusiasm for the find.

Saul, perhaps more than most, spent a good deal of time scavenging the streets of the city. Saul was also a prolific dumpster diver. "I was looking through a dumpster and found a DVD player and it worked. We found a keg that was completely untapped. Though Saul was probably more consistent in his practice than many, dumpster diving, or dumpstering, was a common activity within the anarchist milieu. Even if individuals rarely dumpstered themselves, the majority of interview participants reported directly benefiting from the practice in the form of shared food. Saul often shared *their* findings.

Saul recognized the practice of urban scavenging as only made possible by the excess of the system of production. Saul had no illusions about the practice's efficacy in directly undermining capitalism or the state. Saul saw the practice of dumpstering and urban scavenging

104

more generally as a basic urban survival tactic and not as direct counter, in-and-of-itself, to capitalism or the state. However, this ready access to basic needs such as food and housing did provide Saul with the time to commit to various projects such as the Iron Rail and Community Kitchen.

Saul also pointed out that services were fairly readily available within the milieu. "In terms of services, it's kind of like any electrical, any plumbing, any construction work we need there is probably like five people off the top of my head that I could call." Glance around the living room, Saul continued, "[w]e did most of the work in the house ourselves and I think, in terms of the monetary economy, think how much those services would cost, probably a couple thousand dollars." Because of the value placed on "doing-it-yourself" many anarchists within the milieu concerned themselves with learning a diverse array of practical skills, construction skills, weaving, cooking, screen-printing, programming, self-defense skills, and many others. And these skills and expertise were readily shared within the milieu.

During another interview I asked Ken about access to non-market goods and services. "We can eat pretty well. If we need a truck we can probably find one. Healthcare is a little harder but you can figure it out, I mean more on the less critical end. There are some blank spots but just some of the basics like housing, and food, and transportation are pretty easy to get," Ken replied. Ken was an up-and-coming indie comic book artist and writer. The security that the anarchist milieu afforded him allowed Ken to devote much of his time to developing his art.

Lu offered one of the richest discussions of non-market exchange of goods and services within the milieu. I quote *their* statement at length:

> To start with you have things like excess, capitalist excess, things like dumpstering, things that we get for free or cheap because they are overly produced, when we scavenge things, when we take things off of peoples hands, things like free stuff off of Craiglist. Because we're connected to our

105

communities, these people will say 'I'm getting rid of this couch' it's not a market exchange but it is an exchange of goods and services. So you've got excess and that's probably the easiest one to justify. No one cares if you take something they're going to throw away any way.

And then you have things that are re-appropriated, which we use as a euphemism for what most people know as stealing. There is a strong radical tradition of saying because all the means of production and the things that are produced are stolen from workers, stolen from wages, and are themselves produced through violence we don't recognize corporations rights to own these things at all.

And the radical ethic is that there is almost no theft between individuals within anarchist communities. It would be shocking and confusing for someone to say that this person stole this from me, partly because we have little to no sense of ownership and partly because the things that would be stolen we'd freely give. And for the most part people will not steal from independent stores, they won't steal from Mom and Pop shops, they won't steal from individual places owned by people. We mostly steal from corporations. Not many anarchists will say that its good to do that but we'll mostly all say that it's not bad. If it advances our ability to live our lives, to perpetuate resistance, then we're fine with that.

Then there are the things that we create and give away for free. So many of our shows, our spaces, our literature, things like free 'zines, things like free albums. Much of the anarchist infrastructure is generated by things like donation, which though it involves capital its not actually a market. It says that you can come to the show, you can take this CD, you can drink these drinks even and if you haven't got something to give—again returning to generosity, not being a certain value but being an ethic—if you've got something to give, if its twenty-five cents and if that's all you got someone like me who makes good money at my job and say I've got twenty dollars in my pocket I can give you this.

You know, we produce things as a community, sometimes on a really admirably scale. The Raging Pelican is our newspaper that we produce [distribute] all over the Gulf Coast that is totally free. And services as well: Plan B, the bike shop here for example. It's not like the capitalist notion of free: it's 'free' but really there are strings. We're actually trying to advance a culture where it's not expected that a good or a service will tie you to a capital debt.

My own experience within New Orleans' anarchist milieu confirms much of Lu's account. I should, however, state here that I never witnessed nor took part in any act of theft but I can confirm that many within the milieu would agree with Lu's assessment.

Beyond the immediate use of any particular good or service obtained within the milieu, the overall value of this system of circulation of non-market goods and services was that it facilitated individual and collective autonomy. This is not to suggest that New Orleans' anarchist milieu operated a completely parallel non-capitalist autonomous economy. Instead, as the interview data presented in this section suggests, many of the projects operative within the milieu were entangled with the capitalist economy and the institutions of the state. Despite this entanglement the social logic and value system underwriting this circulation of goods and services was antagonistic to that of capitalism. The values of generosity, solidarity, and autonomy were all present within the social relations of circulation. The significance of these non-market relations is that they prefigure the kinds of relations most anarchists would like to see proliferate throughout the wider society.

## Political prefiguration

The praxis of prefiguration is a significant innovation within contemporary anarchism and wider horizontal movements globally (Maeckelbergh 2009). This section examines the idea of prefigurative politics as it relates to the goings on in New Orleans' anarchist milieu. Understanding prefiguration will help make sense of the praxis of consensus decision-making within the ethnographic context of the Iron Rail. If one asks the basic question what are anarchists doing when they practice consensus process, analysis of prefiguration helps provide an answer. In fact, prefiguration is important for understanding many of the practices and projects that have been and will be described in the course of this ethnography. For example, the APOCalypse 2012 event described in the previous chapter as well as the Community Kitchen

and Nowe Miasto projects, the focus of chapters to come, can be better understood through the concept of prefiguration.

What is prefiguration? The premise underlying prefigurative politics is that means and ends should be commensurate. If one wishes to build a cooperative and egalitarian society than one's practice toward achieving that goal should embody the principles of cooperation and egalitarianism. Anarchist prefigurative practice rejects a two-stage revolutionary sequence that envisions a vanguard party takes the apparatus of the state and then, ostensibly, uses it to build egalitarian communistic social relations. Accepting the premise of prefiguration has widespread consequences; indeed, it changes the vary parameters of what might be considered revolutionary organization. As Maeckelbergh (2011: 9) argues, "…organization does not refer to any bounded group, but to a network structure that relies on practices of horizontality and diversity –or, in other words – process. Process is precisely about getting organized." This organizational process is ultimately about dealing with power and offering a practical critique of its operation by demonstrating alternatives existing in the here-and-now rather than in some idealized post-revolutionary world.

The terminology of "direct democracy" is often used interchangeable with "consensus process." And this is reasonable enough but some distinction could be made. For instance, direct democracy might refer to a form of collective decision-making operating without representatives or intermediaries. In this scenario decisions are made directly by all participants through a process of majoritarian voting; this can be elaborate or a simple show of hands can suffice depending on the group involved. The key distinction between this form of direct democracy and consensus process is the group's reliance on majoritarian vote to arrive at a decision. Consensus process, in contrast, depends on the building of consensus so that whatever the final outcome

might be everyone involved will have agreed to it. Of course, not everyone will be perfectly happy with the final collective decision but, at least, everyone will find it tolerable. Some groups use a kind hybrid of consensus and voting.

## Meanings of autonomy and consensus decision-making

Consensus decision-making is a core element of contemporary anarchism because the process acts as a practical critique of alienation and embodies and prefigures the kinds of egalitarian relations of autonomy that anarchists wish to proliferate across the social field. Everyone who participated in the semi-structured interviews I conducted agreed that autonomy was an essential aspect of anarchism. In response to the question of whether autonomy was intrinsic to horizontal forms of organization, one interview participant, Ruth Stew, explained that it is only within the anarchist milieu that *they* feel a sense of autonomy:

> Yeah, it depends, it can be. In my life right now the only two circumstances in which I do not feel like I have autonomy are my employment and my housing situation because I pay rent to a landlord. Outside of that there is virtually no interaction that I have where I'm not given, where I don't have complete autonomy personally. Therefore it tends to make rent and work feel really oppressive. I hadn't really thought about that without collectivity and horizontal organizing structures there would be a lack of autonomy in other areas of my life, guaranteed. If most of my of my friends weren't explicitly anarchist I wouldn't receive autonomy in my communications, in my relationships. I have fewer than five close friends who aren't anarchists and whenever I spend a legitimate amount of time with those people there is a degree of autonomy and personal choice that is lost simply by not wanting conflict and not wanting to address some oppressive nuanced thing that person is doing but [I'm] feeling inherently oppressed by it.

Ruth Stew suggests an important point about the autonomous orientation of anarchist relationships. Anarchism offers a wide-ranging analysis and critique of the oppression located in daily life. As such this critique ties together macro and micro social forces. Gender oppression is a macro-social force that can be seen to play out in the labor market and mainline politics.

However, gender oppression is always experienced at the subjective and intersubjective level. Ruth Stew explained that she felt oppressed by what we might call micro-aggressions that she felt powerless to do much about, even though it was Ruth's "friends" who perpetrated these micro-aggressions. As Ruth notes, the sense of oppression comes from the fact that her friends were usually unwilling to address their acts of micro-aggression. Despite going by a female gendered name Ruth is genderqueer and prefers the terms they/them to she/her. So the verbal imposition of a binary gender identity and a simultaneous unwillingness to even regard Ruth's identity as valid would constitute a form of micro-aggression. For some such a thing is easy to discount but imagine how a person of male identified gender might feel if everyone around him simply refused to accept his male identity. The result would likely be maddening. In contrast anarchists tend to recognize that such micro-aggressions are both the result and ongoing condition for oppressive force at a macro scale. For anarchists revolutionary change must be deeply embedded in the relationships of daily life.

Mary Mayflower, another interview participant, also addressed the theme of autonomy in daily life:

> I do believe in degrees of empowerment around your autonomy and appreciation and acting with that autonomy, which means checking in with yourself, your own boundaries that aren't blockades placed on you by other people or systems but rather boundaries you place for your own safety, security and desires. So I believe that healthy autonomy is necessary for a balanced relationship within a collective structure. Understand that you have the freedom to move and the freedom to express; so self-efficacy I think is really rad and important in collective organizing because sometimes we wait for [others] of a little bit of mistrust we have some decision to be made as a collective whole that we can freely express with the good of the collective and the freedom of our spirit in mind. It means being present; bring conscious awareness to our points of unity and commitment myself to the realization of those points so that they're not just theoretical but they are placed into practice and constantly active and enlivened and enliven your own being. Secondly, there is a responsibility. Saying that I'm honored to be part of a working group, a collection of individuals that shared common interests, common goals, beliefs, politics and etc. We want to discuss them or create actions that

have our principles of unity in mind. So there is a lot of responsibility but I would say showing up and really wanting to be there and listening actively to what is going on and engaging intimacy of collective structures and collective spaces is fundamental.

This narrative expresses many of the same or similar concerns as Ruth's statement. Autonomy is a relation of freedom between self and other and this is constructed on a basis of consent and mutual recognition. I include one more comment on the subject offered by Bill Stew, who sat for an interview:

I think the values of solidarity and mutual aid as expressed in anarchism are completely antithetical to the functioning of capitalism in that it [anarchism's value system] based around respecting individuals and communities as valuable in and of themselves. Capitalism turns people and institutions and everything into things that only have value in terms of money. Whereas the entire premise of mutual aid and solidarity is that value exists in people in themselves. People are deserving of generosity regardless of any idea of quid pro quo; people are deserving of solidarity regardless whether you think they will give that back to you.

Yes, there is always a tension between the individual and collective that's the nature of humanity...even if you look at anarchist theory we're very divided between the communists and individualists, between those who favor a more collective view of anarchism and a more individualistic view of anarchism. I don't think those are mutually exclusive. These are both terms that are in tension within the world and within anarchism. I believe the desire for individualism is a valid impulse in anarchism. One of the things I appreciate about anarchism is its openness to a multiplicity of different visions of anarchism; we're not proposing that there is one anarchism because that's antithetical to anarchism. Anarchism, as long as it means an existence free of systems of oppression, then it must make room for some people believing in greater degrees of collective living and those who want to be loners and not be accountable to anyone. Anarchism is able to contain that tension specifically because within an anarchist society that tension is able to resolve itself. That's one of the things I appreciate about anarchism is that it is open to resolving those tensions; I have no illusion that any of these tensions will magically resolve themselves with the destruction of the state or capital but its more about the constant fluidity of an anarchist society, a society in which you view people as people. Ideology is based around viewing ideas as some way superior to people. Anarchism, if we're doing it right should be based on a rejection of ideology for that very reason.

Autonomy is an ideal in my opinion and as such is clearly not obtainable in its total sense; autonomy is the ability to make one's decision for one's self but, you know, as intrinsically social individuals our autonomy is based on a series of compromises with each other.

This statement suggests some tension between autonomy as an ideal and as a practice and it provides segue way into a more theoretical and abstract discussion. So I will not belabor the points made in the foregoing commentary.

**Ethnographic description of consensus process**

This section provides an account of a typical weekly organizational meeting at the Iron Rail Lending Library and Bookshop. The meeting described here is a composite sketch based on several meetings that occurred over a period from August to December 2012. A narrative composite helps streamline several complex and messy narratives. While overall meetings were ordered and followed a general pattern, the various strands of conversation, topics of discussion, inside jokes, references to other collectives, local events, and so on would appear too fragmentary and incoherent if presented closer to a one-to-one transcription. This chapter constructs an ethnographic narrative of consensus process within the Iron Rail Book Collective. This section contributes to the overall direction of this chapter by illustrating a core form of autonomous praxis, an enactment of anarchism's value system.

Meetings at the Iron Rail took place every Wednesday evening. Meetings started at 8:30pm and would last from an hour to two hours, depending on how much shop business had to be handled. The 8:30pm start time helped facilitate attendance by folks with jobs or other commitments that made earlier meeting times difficult.

I was the first to arrive. Seeing that the shop's front door was still locked I decided to walk across the street and have a cup of coffee at Café Envy. I took an outside seat at a table situated on the sidewalk just across from the Iron Rail (figure 4.1 and 4.2). When others began to arrive I would notice. The sun was setting and the evening was cooling; humidity began to

condensate on the café windows. The Mississippi river was only about half a block away. Coming off of the river a breeze, smelling of industry, blew along the channel of buildings aligned on either side of Barracks street. I noticed Axel entering the Iron Rail across the street so I decided to walk over and wait with him until it was time for the meeting to start.

Soon enough the small space of the Iron Rail began to fill up. The box fan to one side of the rectangular room buzzed as it circulated air in the cramped space. Daniel, Ruth, Bill, Dane, Shane, Mary, Axel, and myself were in attendance for the start of the meeting. Lu and Tom arrived a few minutes late. It was a good turnout for a nondescript Wednesday evening in late August. We sat in a rough circle, perhaps more of an oval, against the walls of the rectangular room.

Dane volunteered to be the evening's facilitator. "We may not need it but I'll keep stack," Axel volunteered. Having a dedicated Stack Keeper is essential for smooth process at larger consensus meetings but the roles of facilitator and stack keeper may be combined during smaller meetings. The same can be said of the dedicated role of Time Keeper. Usually at the Iron Rail the Facilitator or Stack Keeper would double as the Time Keeper or, even more commonly, everyone would just recognize the need to be attentive to time so we usually did not have a dedicated role for a Time Keeper. Overall the Iron Rail collective tended to favor a more informal approach to consensus.

We usually began each meeting with a silly question to get people talking and set a good mood. The question was usually made up on the spot. "If you were a wrestler, which wrestler would you be," asked Daniel. The replies quickly circled the room. "Macho Man Randy Savage, Mike Tyson, Hacksaw Jim Duggan, Chubby Lightning, Love and Rockets, Mr. Perfect, Rey Mysterio, Big Boss Man, Papa Shango, Junk Yard Dog, Jake the Snake Roberts," came the

responses. It didn't matter that Mike Tyson was not a wrestler or that Love and Rockets is a famous indie comic book. Once everybody had a good laugh over the question, we would usually turn to organizing the evening's agenda.

The agenda was always a mix of permanent and new items. Shift scheduling, new proposals, finances, report backs concerning ongoing projects and initiatives, and announcements comprised the bulk of the weekly agenda. We usually started out with filling the weekly shift schedule.

"So who wants to work a shift tomorrow," Dane asked.

"I can do Thursday," I replied.

"Okay, Pat's got tomorrow. Friday, anyone up for Friday?"

"I could do the second part of a half a shift on Saturday," Axel said.

"Great," replied Dane. "Friday is still open. Anyone?"

"We can do if no one else wants it but we might be a little late opening," Ruth replied, speaking for her partner Bill. Eventually the schedule filled up and we moved on to new proposals.

Most proposals were of a practical nature and tended to concern the internal operations of the shop or external relations with other groups or projects within the city's anarchist milieu.

"Depending on our finances, I think we should make a big re-order of books that been pretty popular lately," proposed Ruth.

Quickly raised hands indicated that a few people had responses to Ruth proposal. Acting as Stack Keeper, Axel noted the raised hands in the order they appeared and began to call on them.

"I really just have a question," noted Mary. I have not been in the shop for a while so what is really selling?

"*Evasion* from Crimethinc has done pretty well the past couple of weeks and we're out of *The Ethical Slut*. There are some other things. People have been coming in and asking about Slingshot planners and we're out of those too," Ruth answered.

"Okay, maybe you could make a list of books we need to order and put it up on the listserv so other folks who aren't here tonight can add to it or comment before we order," Mary suggested.

"Shane it's you and then Tom," Axel said acknowledging their place on stack.

"Yeah, was going to ask the same thing Mary did. Can we just go ahead and take consensus on Ruth and Mary's proposals," Shane asked.

A few people gave low-key twinkle fingers to show their support, others nodded their heads. Sensing the general agreement, Dane, in his role as facilitator, enquired if anyone objected.

"Tom, you're next on stack did you have something to say before we make the consensus formal," asked Dane.

"No, I just had a suggestion for an order. It was Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* but I'll add it to the list once its up on the listserv," Tom replied.

"Okay, so we're all on board with making a book order once others have had a chance to comment on the listserv," Dane asked.

"What about our finances? Do we have the money for a big order," Axel asked. Dane grabbed the beat-up notebook that functioned as a shift log and ledger and started calculating.

"Yes, after paying rent and utilities, it looks like we've got about one-hundred and fifty dollars for an order. So maybe just put the list on the listserv and then consider culling it if it ends up being too big for this month," Dane suggested.

Consensus was reached and there were a few other proposals. Mary proposed another tabling session at the Big Top on Sunday afternoon. And Shane proposed a copy run to make copies of our free 'zines to refill the 'zine rack. Both proposal passed consensus.

"Okay, if we're finished with proposals does anyone have any announcements," Dane asked. Lu announced that Endless Gaycation was coming up in October with a weekend of shows, parties, and "queerlesque" performances. The organizers, Lu was among them, needed some help housing folk from out of town. Tom announced that there would be a Community Kitchen benefit punk show at Nowe Miasto the following weekend. Shane announced that the community center he worked at was in need of more volunteers. And Mary announced that Women with a Vision would be holding a benefit show on Friday and the Print Shop would have a benefit at the Allways Lounge on Saturday night.

After announcements the room kind of broke into small talk with people pairing off into little conversations and that was a sign the meeting was at its end. Compared to the dramatic displays of consensus process at major protest events or at the Occupy Wall Street encampment that I experienced in New Orleans, the small and unglamorous process enacted at the weekly meetings may seem a bit underwhelming. That is until one recalls that the Iron Rail had operated on a basis of consensus decision-making for roughly a decade. As Elden (2004: 111) notes, "[a]lienation can be economic, social, political, ideological, and philosophical…alienation goes beyond the economic, with everyday life the terrain of struggle, just as production is broader

116

than that of things and encompasses all that constitutes social life." The Iron Rails practice of consensus operated as a practical struggle against the alienation of everyday life.

**Discussion: autonomy and alienation**

Anarchism is a form of political praxis that aims toward the development and proliferation of non-alienated and autonomous forms of social relations eventuating in an ever-widening emancipatory and egalitarian social order. In this chapter I examined autonomy as a core value of anarchism. I drew upon insights developed from ethnographic research I conducted within New Orleans' anarchist milieu, understood as the network of anarchist collectives and reoccurring social situations in the city.

There were a number of ways that the value of autonomy was expressed within the city's anarchist milieu. The circulation of goods and services based on non-market principles enacted a limited form of autonomy economy. The Iron Rail Lending Library and Bookshop manifested the value of autonomy in its practice of collective consensus based decision-making. The key here is the commitment to balancing the relationship between individuals and collectivities. To develop these insights in the foregoing discussion I pay considerable attention to anarchism's political philosophy and its relation to other political tendencies to have emerged from the Western European Enlightenment.

*Autonomy*

Autonomy is a core value of anarchism and as a value it is productive, operating as an organizing, or structuring principle, a significant aim of collective activity. Autonomy is not to be understood as a metaphysical category. It can be tackled at a high level of abstraction but turning it into a metaphysical category would betray its social purpose as a politics of freedom;

autonomy conceived as an ideal and changeless category is only useful for philosophical speculation. Autonomy's meaning is always subject to its articulation in praxis; autonomy is never finally achieved in any absolute sense. Autonomy exists as an activity. Holloway (2010) argues that it exists as a form of "doing," as "power-to," in contrast to "power-over." Autonomy is a collective project that can certainly be stabilized but never finalized.

Anarchism is about creating social relations premised on the value of autonomy, what one might call a "free bond." Creative activity and autonomy presuppose one another, though neither is wholly reducible to the other. If creativity is one crucial dimension of autonomy then collective commitment is another dimension. At a certain level of abstraction this dynamic of freedom, creativity, and obligation becomes essential aspects of the social field.

Commitment and obligation are essential to anarchist organizing and anti-capitalist struggle but anarchists reject unreasonable forms of social constraint. However, autonomy is not the special domain of anarchism. Though anarchists tend to be more self-conscious of its practice and try to organize its elements in daily life. Whereas alienation is indirectly social, autonomy is a form of direct sociality. Anarchists do not claim the praxis of autonomy as an anarchist invention or that it necessarily exists only in anarchist spaces. If autonomy had to be invented or imposed the anarchist struggle would be much more desperate; rather the aim is to develop, organize and expand what already exists within daily life. This is commensurate with Lefebvre (2009: 142-143) theory of autogestion, which was inspired partly by Proudhon's anarchist theories of collective self-management.

In liberal tradition autonomy is understood as a transcendent condition inhering to the individual. Thus there is a common misperception of autonomy as synonymous with individualism. Kant emphasized a notion of autonomy as a form of possessive individualism. For

many anarchists autonomy means something different. Autonomy can be understood as a social relation of freedom that is premised on the freedom of others. Michail Bakunin, a luminary of 19th century anarchism, critiqued the liberal version of individualism. As Bakunin put it:

> According to them individual freedom is not a creation, a historical product of society. They maintain, on the contrary, that individual freedom is anterior to all society and that all men are endowed by God with an immortal soul. Man is accordingly a complex being, absolutely independent, apart from and outside society. As a free agent…he necessarily forms his society by a voluntary act, a sort of contract, be it instinctive or conscious, tacit or formal. In short, according to this theory, individuals are not the product of but, on the contrary, are led to create society by some necessity such as work or war
>
> [2002 [1871]: 235]

Recognizing the political implications of this liberal ideology, Bakunin (2002[1871]: 235) wrote, "[i]t follows from this [liberal bourgeois] theory that society, strictly speaking, does not exist. The natural human society, the beginning of all civilization, the only milieu in which the personality and the liberty of man is formed and developed does not exist for them." In contrast the concepts of society and the individual in Bakunin's thought are much more dynamic, dialectical. This is made clear as Bakunin states:

> I can feel free only in the presence of and in relationship with other men. In the presence of an inferior species of animal I am neither free nor a man, because this animal is incapable of conceiving and consequently recognizing my humanity. I am not myself free or human until or unless I recognize the freedom and humanity of all my fellowmen. … I am truly free only when all human being, men and women are equally free. The freedom of other men, far from negating or limiting my freedom, is, on the contrary, its necessary premise and confirmation.
>
> [2002 [1871]: 137]

Individual autonomy is constituted through social relations based on mutual recognition.

Bakunin's (2002 [1871]) conception of the relationship between individual and community lays strong emphasis on the always already social condition of humanity. For Bakunin sociality is an inextricable aspect of our humanity and no conception of freedom or

119

autonomy is complete without this recognition that individual flourishing must take place in relation to society.

Commenting on a similar anthropological notion of human flourishing Lambek (2008: 116) observes that, "[w]ell-being entails the means to act with respect to the telos of human flourishing (eudaimonia), hence it is life in which means and ends are not fully distinguished." For Lambek this ideally entails a, "…condition that enables people not only to act well but to cultivate positive moral character in carrying out their practices, rather than prefigured and standing outside of them, making 'rational choices' between abstract needs or desires." This conception of the good life resists the atomization of the individual and instead presupposes a dynamic balance between individual and collectivity, with significant consequences for some of the basic liberal notions of political participation. As Lambek concludes, "hence the meaning of 'freedom' in such a model cannot be the same as that primary value lauded by liberal conceptions of well-being as freedom of choice, whether at the ballot box or the market."

Immanuel Kant's conception of autonomy strongly informs liberal political and moral philosophy (Kelly 2005). In formulating his conception of autonomy Kant was faced with a conundrum: how to square his commitment to the fundamental premise of individual autonomy with the also premised necessity of social hierarchy. Kant develops his concept of *right* as a synthesis of the dichotomous notions of autonomy and hierarchy, or *heteronomy* in Kant's terminology.

A society composed of autonomous individuals all pursuing the rational ends of acquiring and protecting their property would be chaos. Concerning the overcoming of this condition Kant wrote (Kant's emphasis):

> The end, then, which is such an external relation is in itself duty and the supreme formal condition…of all other external duty, is the *right* of human beings *under*

120

> *public coercive laws* by means of which it can be determined for each what is his
> own and the latter can be secured against the infringement of others
>
> [2006: 44]

This "supreme formal condition" was essential to Kant's political philosophy. The duty of obedience was such that for Kant rebellion, even rebellion against a tyrant, was illegitimate. "Nonetheless it is wrong in the highest degree for the subjects to pursue their rights in this way [rebellion], and they therefore would have no cause to complain of injustice if they were defeated in their endeavor and subsequently subjected to the most extreme punishment," Kant (2006: 105) wrote. And yet Kant maintains that freedom is the basis of law (2006: 44). His reconciliation of coercion and freedom is worth considering as it has influenced liberal thought throughout the centuries.

Kant concedes that law, or *right*, must be externally imposed and yet Kant maintains a fidelity to his initial premise that the supreme law, the very definition of enlightenment, is found in the exercise of one's autonomy. "The subordination of individual freedom to the general authority of coercion is," as Marcuse (2008: 39) explains, "…no longer grounded in concupiscence of the 'created being' and in the divinely ordained nature of government, but grows immanently out of the requirements of bourgeois society as a condition of its existence." Kant's solution is to introduce the idea of an original social contract; this original contract presupposes that autonomous individuals recognized and agreed to the necessity of a hierarchical social order thus allowing, legitimating, coercion against autonomy.

This was accomplished by presupposing authorization of societal coercion by the autonomous decision of societies members. "The possibility of a synthesis is found in the idea of an original 'collective-general' will to which all individuals agree in a resolution of generally binding self-limitation under laws backed by power" (Marcuse 2008: 40). The materialist

121

assertion that society is made by its members was quite a revolutionary proposition. However, this is countered by the fact that apparently the order of society can only be made or decided upon once; the social contract does not seem to include a provision for its own abolition or transformation. Kant takes the order of his emerging bourgeois society as the ideal and at its center is a rational legal order protecting private property. Kant did not invent liberal bourgeois society he simply abstracted his conceptual system from it and in so doing created a philosophical justification for its existence.

Kant's position can be understood now as a contractarian perspective; Rousseau and Hobbes came to similar conclusions and with Kant stand as three of the most significant philosophers of Western political modernity. The contractarian perspective remains a central feature of liberal conceptions of the good life. As Jiménez notes of John Rawls, perhaps the leading social contract theorist of the 20th century:

> "Rawls's starting premise shares the foundational assumptions of the classic contractarian philosophies of Hobbes or Rousseau: the idea of an 'original position' or primordial state of affairs, where people who do not know how they fare in life today, nor what kind of tomorrow awaits them, have to negotiate and choose the institutions that will regulate their social lives thereafter"
>
> [2008: 4-5]

In its reliance on a "primordial state of affairs" as a justification for the existing, but idealized, political order, social contract theory can be seen as a kind of mythology, precisely a myth of origin or creation. However, this is a myth without divinity as a prime mover. Instead, the gods are replaced by rationality and *the creation* is readily admitted to be an "as if story" though, for contractarian political thought, its consequences are no less significant. Horkheimer and Adorno (2007 [1944] recognized and critiqued the mythic foundations of modern political rationality.

In a rather contradictory fashion the classical liberal conception of autonomy incorporates and even relies on alienation as a structuring principle. István Mészáros (2005:183) explains that,

"[a]ctivity is alienated activity when it takes the form of a schism or opposition between 'means' and 'ends', between 'public life' and 'private life', between 'being' and 'having', between 'doing' and 'thinking.' With this definition in mind it is possible to see that these separations, estrangements, run through the liberal conception of contemporary society. From this brief definition it is worth progressing into a full discussion of alienation.

### *Alienation*

Alienation is the antithesis of anarchism's conception of autonomy. Alienation is essential to the economic organization of capitalism. From an anarchist perspective alienation is the core structuring process of the capitalist economy. However, in its broadest sense alienation can refer to forms of social estrangement entailed in non-capitalist social relations as well as capitalist ones. Capitalism has simply integrated alienation into the core of its productive apparatus.  The problem of alienation has been central to both anarchist thought and Marxist theory. In fact, alienation can be seen as the central focus of critique threading through Marx's early writings.

When Marx returned to the concept in Capital (1990 [1867]) he referred to the more capital specific concept of *commodity fetishism* rather than alienation as such. *Fetishism* more directly addresses the relational praxis of capitalist commodity production and is crucial for understanding Marx's theory of value within capitalism. Perlman (2010 [1968]: 5) argues that the three concepts, alienation, commodity fetishism, and value are approaches to the same problem, "the determination of creative activity of people in the capitalist form of economy." In other words, what is alienated is human creative power and potential. The alienation of labor from its product is the core feature, actively produced and reproduced daily, of the capitalist economy. It is often mistakenly assumed that alienation from the product of one's labor locates

the problem more-or-less at an individual level: the object of labor, say, a commodity is taken from the worker with alienation occurring after the appropriation of the commodity for the market. In reality the point of alienation is in the process of production itself; it is the activity of labor itself that is alienated (Collier 2008: 23).

The totalizing logic of capitalist production and reproduction and its requirements for ever-expanding accumulation increasingly become the evaluative basis for the regulation and allocation of social labor. Work discipline means conforming to the needs of capital; free creative activity is replaced by obedience to a narrow economic rationality perceived to be grounded in a narrowly defined human nature. This rationality appears as a natural necessity beyond the control of human agents. Within capitalism labor is objectified as commodities for sale on the market. While the labors of production rest behind the presentation of commodities on the market, it is the market that realizes the values of commodities in exchange due to equalization of labor through the abstract character of money.

For commodity exchange to be possible there must exist a generalized potential of equivalence between all commodities. Two pairs of boots equal a yard of linen, for example. Money is the expression of this equivalence of values, a symbolic representation of the equalization that takes place in the capitalist relations of production and reproduction. Marx called this "socially necessary labor time," or the average of all productive labor within the economy (1990 [1867]: 129). Money is central because it has the potential, through exchange, to become any other commodity. Money is a universal equivalent and, as such, it mediates all exchanges within the capitalist marketplace.

The organization and process of production and market exchange has the effect of obscuring the sociality underlying production and exchange. As John Holloway explains:

124

It [the commodity] stands on its own to be sold on the market, the work that produced it forgotten. The labour which produces it is social (labour for others), but it is indirectly social, it is labour for others which exists in the form of labour for oneself. The sociality of doing is ruptured, and with it the process of mutual recognition and social validation. Mutual recognition is removed from the producers and transferred to their products: it is the product, which is recognized socially, in the process of exchange.

[2010: 46]

It is important to note that this is not simply a slight of hand by capitalists or simply a misapprehension on the part of laborers; it is not a false consciousness that could be corrected with correct education, per se. Fetishism is simultaneously material practice and symbolic reification. The term *fetishism* should be understood to reference the central organizing rationality of the capitalist economy and the experience of living within this form of production and reproduction.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which the Iron Rail Book Collective and those associated with it conceptualize and enact the value of autonomy as a form of praxis. Beyond its character as a lending library and bookshop, the Iron Rail was a nexus of relationships embedded within the wider New Orleans anarchist milieu. Drawing on interview data and ethnographic participant observation this chapter has developed an analysis of the meaning and practice of autonomy within New Orleans' anarchist milieu. The chapter's first section drew on interview data to contextualize the city's anarchist milieu in terms of the experiences, perceptions, and evaluations of local anarchists. The second section was concerned with the ways in which New Orleans' anarchists critique capitalism and state centric politics. The third section focused on the circulation of non-market goods and services within New Orleans' anarchist milieu to demonstrate the practical critique of the logic of capitalism within city milieu. Autonomy proper

125

was considered in ethnographic and theoretical detail in this chapter's fourth, fifth, and sixth sections. By focusing on the anarchist value of autonomy this chapter contributes to the overarching ethnographic concern with the value system operative within New Orleans' anarchist milieu.

Figure 4.1 The Iron Rail's street sign

Figure 4.2 Exterior of the Iron Rail.

# CHAPTER 5

# COMMUNITY KITCHEN: FEEDING THE MULTITUDES

**Introduction**

This chapter considers the ways in which the members of the Community Kitchen Collective de-commoditize food through practices that promote values of radical generosity and gifting. Community Kitchen was a small food justice collective founded in January of 2012 and operates out of a residential house in a quiet tree shaded neighborhood in the Mid City area of New Orleans.

In the first section of this chapter I provide an ethnographic vignette of an incident that occurred during an afternoon of serving homeless folk around the city. This vignette is drawn from my experience serving with Community Kitchen and it illustrates some of the interpersonal and systemic dynamics that Community Kitchen participants encounter and must navigate as they actualize their project of de-commoditized food access.

This section is followed by an account of Community Kitchens origins provided by its core organizer, Nick. By recounting Community Kitchens origins and sources of inspiration Nick's narrative simultaneous provides insight into the values and political commitments that guide his struggle for greater food access for the population in the city of New Orleans.

The next section provides a general overview of Community Kitchens operations drawn from my direct participation working with the group. In the following section I provide an ethnographic description of the social milieu existing around one of Community Kitchen's

129

primary public serving areas, Duncan Plaza. I include interview data with Michelle, a regular participant that prepared and served in Duncan Plaza.

I then devote a brief section to the reaction of city officials to the Community Kitchen serving food in the Plaza across from City Hall. Finally, I develop a theoretical discussion of gift practices, radical generosity, and its opposition to the alienation entailed in commoditized food access.


**Food access and direct action: an ethnographic vignette**

"Are you here to feed us?"

"We are but, I mean, we're just dropping this food off. The folks in the shelter will divvy it up," I said.

My questioner, short, dark skinned, with a weathered face, asserted, "We'll never see it!"

"What?" I asked.

"If you take it in there, we'll never see any of it. They give us a sandwich and that's all."

"What? A sandwich?" I repeated incredulously. "I was told you guys would get this food once we dropped it off?"

"Just a sandwich," my questioner repeated with a desperate sincerity that made me believe him. Several yards down the street, from the open gate of the shelter's courtyard, a crowd waited, pensively. "They gonna feed us!" my questioner said, yelling at the crowd gathered in the courtyard entrance and waving them over. The guys gathered at the entrance yelled at those inside the courtyard as they moved toward us. Within seconds a crowd of about fifty or sixty people, mostly African American men, had gathered around us.

"Should we just go ahead and set up here and feed these guys?" I asked Aaron, my partner for the afternoon.

"Wait here with the truck and I'll go and talk to them inside."

Aaron disappeared inside the building. I was left outside with about sixty new friends. I took the opportunity to enquire about the claim that the mission was not distributing the food. Everyone agreed that they would not get the food if we left it with the shelter's staff.

It was late in the day and this was our last stop before heading back to Community Kitchen's kitchen. We had already served hot meals to folks gathered in Duncan Plaza, the park across from City Hall. Afterwards we set up under the Calliope Street overpass (figure 5.1). The Catholic shelter was the last stop on our weekly circuit. Once we served the population surrounding the park and those under the overpass we usually brought the remainder to the Catholic shelter. This arrangement had been worked out between Community Kitchen and the shelter at some point before I began working with Community Kitchen.

Though concerned they might miss the opportunity to have a meal, the crowd surrounding my truck's were orderly and patient. I explained that I would be happy to serve them then-and-there but since I was new to the scene I wanted to make sure it was cool with the shelter's administration.

"Respect," said one of the guys nearest me, adding, "I understand. You got to show them some respect."

"Yeah, I guess," I replied. Aaron reappeared and explained that officials inside the mission wanted us to bring the food in. A few of the guys heard this and, again, protested that they'd go hungry. Aaron had been involved with the collective for sometime but he usually

prepared the meals back at the kitchen instead of serving them. He wasn't sure what was going on with the mission.

"I'm here to feed people," Aaron said, breaking the impasse. "Yeah, let's just do this. I'll pull the truck a bit further down the street and we'll just set up the tables and serving trays."

"There isn't much left; it'll go quick," I replied.

We moved down the street and as we began to set up an employee of the mission approached us. "They say that you can feed everyone in the courtyard. They're worried about what the neighbors will say if they see the line of people on the street."

In New Orleans, dire poverty and excessive wealth have existed side by side for centuries and today it is no different. The shelter was located near the Central Business District (CBD) and was being developed as an upscale and increasingly gentrified space. "Look man, no hard feelings but we're basically set up and these people are hungry so we'll just go ahead and serve them here. Sorry for the confusion," I said. He looked annoyed but did not add anything to his initial offer. He just shrugged a little, turned, and walked back to the shelter.

We scooped pan-baked stuffing and potatoes au gratin into the bowl-like disposable paper serving containers; a small spinach salad and homemade vinaigrette, rounded out with a piece of "artisanal" bread "donated" from a high-end grocery chain.

Unfortunately, we ran out of food before everyone got a complete meal but almost everyone walked away with a bit of food, even if just a piece of bread. Again, this was our last stop after an afternoon of serving in the park and under the overpass. The food was just leftovers that we believed would add a supplement to the shelter's evening meal. As we began to leave a number of the folks hung around and offered to help us pack up the truck.

132

Once back at the kitchen we consulted with the collective's primary liaison to the shelter about what had happened. It turned out that the mission did distribute our leftovers along with their own food resources, but only if one had an assigned bed in the mission. The mission was already at capacity and the crowd that we encountered was overflow. I later heard that the reason for the overflow was, at least partly, due to the police instituting a policy to push the homeless from the streets to shelters. Later, on another day serving near the overpass, I witnessed a police cruiser use loudspeakers to command a crowd of homeless folk to leave the streets and find a shelter. Some of the folk I talked to said that the police had given them twenty-four hours to get their belongings off the street and find an official indoor shelter.

**Community Kitchen: An origin story**

Anarchists are always creating social institutions; many emerge to address a particular need or desire and then dissolve after either successfully accomplishing their ends or not. Some endure for years and others never even get off the drawing board. Organizers move on and often begin creating new institutions. Intersubjective networks are created and some individuals come and others leave. Such institutional networks extend in both space and time; ideas, practices and repertoires are passed through these intersubjective networks both synchronically and diachronically. Because of this diffusion it is sometimes difficult to pin point a definitive origin for some of these little institutions. Depending on how one approaches it Community Kitchen has multiple points of origin. This flow of inspiration the diffuse creative spirit that suffuses these little institutions was evidenced to me when I sat down to interview one of Community Kitchen's key organizers, Nick:

> It depends on who you ask: there were a few people including one of the founders
> of Community Kitchen who was part of Occupy and it did kind of flow from the

133

Occupy camp ending and being evicted and Community Kitchen beginning in January of this year. But my influence—and I created the original structure of how Community Kitchen runs—based upon the inspiration and influence of this group called FUCNO, which was Food Under Claiborne New Orleans, it started after Katrina when there was a tent city under Claiborne Bridge. And there was a group of kids, some of which I was friends with, who started serving under there. They were making meals once a week, or even more, and serving under the bridge and then that just – you know as that tent city got pushed out by the city and the homeless folks were dispersed the project kept going and served in a variety of places.

I was part of a lot of the gathering of food, collecting donations, scheduling every week, and any sort of behind the scenes figuring out how the project could keep going. And so it stopped because it was at somebody's house who eventually got kind of sick of it, you know, making a mess every week and taking up a lot of space in the kitchen. It was sort of—no it wasn't a collective house—it was just a group of three or four people living together and, uh, it had a hiatus for like two years and I always wanted to try and get it up and going and for whatever reason it took a couple of years where I finally felt stable and strong enough.

It took me renting my own house and saying that I can do this. I was the only one living at my house and so I'm a key part of this and I'll clean up when there's a mess. It's like a key part of my life so I'm not going to kick it out. All those things helping having it come together. I think Occupy kind of gave me the momentum to also keep something like that going. I was working everyday with Occupy to find food and kitchens to cook it in so I think Occupy built momentum, but a lot of the ideas…[emerged from before Occupy].

There is a certain flux and flow to this kind of activism; intersubjective networks of participants expand and contract over time. Repertoires, skills, and ideas pass through such a network and, as with Nick, are adopted and modified as needed. Here there is no intellectual property, no copyright, or trademarks.

This is not to claim that there is no interpersonal recognition or even prestige. Nick was well respected throughout the anarchist milieu as a person who got things done and could work well with others. Many people I spoke with during informal interviewes expressed great affection for Nick and the efforts of Community Kitchen. In as much as Community Kitchen's practices involved networked reciprocities they partook in the

spirit of the solidary gift and were motivated by a force of generosity. Nick explained this

from his own personal standpoint:

> I guess it's just like—to me first and foremost its just part of being human
> and I guess I got that from my grandmother. I owe a lot of credit to my
> grandmother for putting a spirit of generosity in me. She was just very
> much into volunteering in her community and it was a huge part of who
> she was and when she died everyone remembered the work she put in at
> the hospitals and the schools. At an early age that was an influence on me,
> and when I think about the energy I put into generosity I'd rather put in
> full time work, without being paid, helping others who have been
> disadvantaged in one way or the other rather than having a paid job. But
> I've had to - the hard way to learn that, you know, – I have to be able to
> pay my bills and support myself and maintain a certain level of self-care
> so I've had to have a job often. I think taking it into the activist
> community is really important because when you're trying to rally behind
> a cause, you know, I really strongly believe in groups of people trying to
> figure out how we can most effectively work together. And also there, you
> know, this is a tough thing on the left. There is so much fighting—I
> experienced this during my anti-war organizing in Chicago, so much
> fighting between socialists, and communists and all this. And I think the
> spirit of generosity is just like being open and listening to someone, you
> know, and that's like the first level. When you can listen to what people
> need or what their basic needs are you can work on a spirit of giving.

From Nick's narrative it is clear that his understanding of the "spirit of giving" is

multidimensional. It goes beyond the simple circulation of material goods of some kind. It is a

motive value that leads to action and in this way it is possible to see how Nick's "spirit of giving"

is closely aligned with a conception of solidarity, understood as a positive obligation to act

(Bayertz 1999: 4). Indeed, the praxis of Community Kitchen and its volunteers can be

understood as a collective enactment of the solidary gift.

**Community Kitchen: an overview**

This section provides a general overview of Community Kitchen efforts based on my

experience working with them over several months. In addition to this general description I end

this section with a brief profile of one of Community Kitchen's participants, Michelle.

Community Kitchen is a direct action food justice collective. In terms of praxis, Community Kitchen is similar to the much more famous and widespread Food Not Bombs (FNB) movement. One notable difference between the two is that Community Kitchen uses and serves meat and has no commitment to veganism or vegetarianism in matters of food preparation and distribution.

Community Kitchen relies on gifts of food from local groceries and, unlike FNB, the occasional item plucked from a dumpster. In a sense Community Kitchen was less a collective and more of a loose network of local anarchists and anti-authoritarians. The operation had a hardcore of organizers but many of its networked participants drifted between Community Kitchen and other anarchist projects active in the city.

Meals were prepared and served every Tuesday and the meals were usually tasty and nutritious. The cooks took a great amount of pride in producing mass meals that actually tasted good and were appealing. Usually a meal would consist of a protein- and carbohydrate-rich main dish accompanied by a vegetable side and a dessert. Water was always provided with drinking cups and often the cooks would brew up some lemonade or iced tea as a treat. The cooks started early on Tuesday mornings and cooked throughout the afternoon so that the food would be ready by the time servers arrived to pick up the meals and take them to usual serving locations around the city. Some people alternated between cooking and serving. Recognizing my limited skills in the kitchen I opted to always serve. My pickup truck was a real convenience for carting food. I would arrive at the kitchen around 2:30 pm and chat and help out with whatever final touches needed to be performed before loading up my truck and heading to Duncan Plaza, the park directly across from City Hall and the former location of Occupy NOLA. Serving teams almost always consisted of at least two people, often three.

136

Duncan Plaza provided a good place to begin the afternoon food service for two primary reasons. Homeless folk frequented the park and the surrounding area. The public library, situated on the other side of the wide mostly flat field of the park was a common hangout for homeless or traveling train-hopping kids. If there was not a crowd already assembled near our usual set up location, one of us would walk around to the library and other locations and inform people free food was available in the park.

The reason for setting up in the park was strategic. By serving free meals in a public and highly visible space directly across from City Hall we hoped to offer a practical critique of the city government's stance toward the homeless, which seemed to oscillate between indifference and petty antagonism. This was part of Community Kitchen's direct actionist stance; the organization never sought official permission for any of its activities and serving in public a push back against the city's apparent attempts to corral and contain the homeless behind the walls of official shelters, which are private, mostly religious charities that cooperated with city government. Community Kitchen rejected the common notion of the deserving and undeserving poor on principle, and also rejected the capitalist notion of scarcity. Everyone should have access to tasty and nutritious food regardless of one's ability to pay.

### *Michelle*

Community Kitchen's direct action approach to food justice and their ability to deliver on this commitment in a non-hierarchical, non-bureaucratic, or alienating way is one of the reasons participants like Michelle decided to become involved with the group. "When I was a teenager we were working class. I was on food stamps most of my childhood. My dad didn't come back until I was ten so… [it was just mom and me]," Michelle explained as we started our interview. "I'm still working class," she added. Michelle was in her mid-twenties. Petite with clever eyes, a

quick smile, and thick shoulder length brown hair, Michelle looked like the proverbial "girl-next-door" but this belied her radical political inclinations.

Michelle had been involved in a number of street demonstrations over her still young activist career. Early in our interview Michelle recounted some of her more memorable experiences. "We were protesting them [the U.S. military] using [a] port for military transport and that was my first experience with police brutality. I mean, seeing it not just hearing about it. I saw eighteen-year-old students get beat up by these massive cops in full gear," Michelle recalled. Michelle did not receive the brunt of the police force although she did not escape unscathed. "That was the first time I'd been exposed to tear gas and pepper sprayed. It was just like 'holy shit this is really happening! I mean, we had a legitimate reason to be there," Michelle explained. After this event Michelle explained that she took some time away from activism but she did return. "Then at the G20 [Sept. 2009 protest in Pittsburgh] …I broke my arm there; I got shot in the arm with a rubber bullet. That was pretty intense. That was also the first time they used LRADs [Long Range Acoustic Device] against U.S. citizens," Michelle recounted, her voice tensing with the memory. Despite the potential dangers direct action remained significant to Michelle. When she arrived in New Orleans she sought out groups that shared a direct action ethics and this led her to Community Kitchen.

Michelle was not motivated to action simply for action's sake. "It's important to me that everyone get a fair chance and that's not something that is true for anybody in this country. Someone said to me 'we're all equal' but we're not all equal, unfortunately," Michelle explained. She continued to explain the values that motivated her to participate in activism generally and Community Kitchen in particular, "I don't mean that we shouldn't be all equally valued but its true we're not all equal. So I guess equality is what it comes down to. I also like to have smaller

circles of relations so that is one reason I don't like working with large national organizations."

And she expressed a solidary notion of generosity, "Yes, but only in a way that it [generosity] just becomes part of your nature. I don't want it to be something that people think they have to do but I hope people are generous because they think it will make the world move smoother."

Michelle provided a narrative illustrative of her approach to solidarity. "…I used to volunteer at a jail up in Pittsburgh and it was really hard. I mean, I wanted to volunteer for something I could relate to. I mean, I didn't want to be this white girl being like, 'oh I can help, I know what's going on.'" She, however, was personally connected to the jail. "…my dad was in jail so I went to the jail and worked with kids who were visiting their parents," She explained.  She used this connection as a way to relate to other people in a similar situation. "For me solidarity is about acting in situations that I may not have experience with but I can still feel comfortable that I'm not giving someone a Band-Aid or pretending that I know what's going on. It's like I understand this is an issue and I'm learning about it but I can still try and offer some support around it," Michelle explained.

Michelle and I worked together serving food in Duncan Plaza and other spots around the city. Once we set up our serving tables she would often take a walk around the area for a couple of blocks informing people that free food was available in the plaza. She always wanted to make sure everyone was served. She also exhibited a genuine rapport with the folks we served. She was very open to listening to the folk who arrived for food. She seemed interested in hearing about their struggles on the streets. The streets were full of stories.

**Duncan Plaza's Milieu: homeless folk, traveling kids, and crusties**

I intensively participated with the Community Kitchen project for roughly four months, from October to December 2012. Mostly homeless folk and members of the working poor populated our regular Tuesday serving sessions. Occasionally young grungy train hoppers would show up, always in small groups of three to six. New Orleans appears to be a major hub for "traveling kids." They are also known as "crusties." The "crusty" moniker can be a more-or-less neutral description of members of the group or it can be derogatory, but the terms "oogle" or "gutter punk" tend to be used if the intention is to insult. The exact meaning and origin of the term "oogle" is hazy. During an impromptu and informal group interview I was told that the "oogle" terminology began as an in-group insult. "Crusties" would insult other crusties by calling them "oogles" and eventually the term gained wider currency among other groups that live close to the street.

When "traveling kids" show up in town and they often occupy themselves by hanging around the streets, panhandling tourist areas, begging or "spanging" at intersections, and "flying flags" or holding a foldable cardboard sign asking for spare change. These signs are often of a different genre than the common "God bless, anything helps" genre. Crusty signs are often witty or surreal. "My family was killed by a rival clan of ninjas, now I must pay for Kung-Fu training so I can avenge them," read one memorable sign. "Need money for beer" or "I have a vision: a cheeseburger," read some others.

Usually housing is provided by abandoned properties that are transformed into temporary squats before once again being abandoned. They have a fairly consistent and common manner of dress. Their basic style relies heavily on denim and leather usually in some combination of dark shades of green, brown, and black colors. These shades are made darker still by accumulations of

140

dirt and grease gained from traveling in train cars and perching on busy city sidewalks and not bathing for varying periods of time. It is common to see large and small patches of various sorts sewn onto jackets, hoodies, and pants. Piercings and tattoos are common, including facial tattoos. They generally travel with well-stuffed duffle bags or rugged camping backpacks. Quality leather boots are prime investments for many of these folk. Small dogs, almost always mutts, are regular companions. Such dogs often sport little bandanas around their necks. There was a fair mix of genders and sexes represented among the traveling kids but whites were a majority in terms of race.

Their style of dress and organization is not haphazard but rather a method of survival. I was told that police harassment of "traveling kids" and "crusties" was common. Beyond police harassment they are exposed to various forms of street violence. Theft, beating, and rape are terrifying and brutal facts of life for many these folk. They try to minimize risks by traveling and sleeping in groups. Many carry knives or box cutters for personal protection. Their little dogs can also offer a bit of security. Along with panhandling acts of petty theft such as shoplifting are survival tactics.

Individuals hit the road for various reasons. Some people value the independence and freedom of the road and for others the road and the street, as brutal as they can be, offer escape from an abusive home life. These folk are not simply victims or outcasts and their lifestyle is in many ways intentional and planned with learned repertoires of survival. When arriving in a town finding available access to food is key. Hare Krishna temples often prepare and serve meals to all comers and can be a food resource for traveling kids just entering a new town. The Hare Kristna temple in New Orleans regularly provided food to a host of folk. Most large cities have organizations like Community Kitchen, usually Food Not Bombs groups, and traveling kid seek

these out. And Community Kitchens weekly serving sessions provided me with the opportunity to interact with traveling kids and hear some of their stories as they passed through the city.

The "traveling kids" showed up fairly regularly but they were always a minority of folks we served. The more "traditional" homeless and working poor made up the majority of people we served. By "traditional" I mean, to use classic Marxist terminology, the lumpenproletariat, a class of necessary victims of the operation of the system. For whatever reason, old age, physical infirmity, mental illness, or simply structural unemployment, they cannot command a wage and so they are, for the purposes of capital, simply redundant people. This is not to claim that they are completely ignored by the system. As components of what we might call the Non-profit Industrial Complex they are prime subjects of biopolitical production. They are a population administered to and managed by a network of public-private bureaucracies, including the police, religious charitable organizations, and other Non-Governmental Organizations. These organizations impose rules that are often aimed at correcting these folk by fostering personal responsibility and initiative. Lacking systemic analyses the fault of the destitute is seen as their own and the solution to their poverty is believed to rest in the inculcation of religious values, normative attitudes, and, of course, practical interviewing skills. The role of the police in disciplining this population cannot be underestimated, particularly in regards to the management of space. There are certain areas of the city that are virtually off limits to the underclass and other areas where they are expected to congregate and the police motivate them to do so.

**Community Kitchen: between shelters and City Hall**

Duncan Plaza was a contested space. Directly across the street from the front entrance of City Hall served as the location of Occupy NOLA for its brief public existence, but more

142

consistently it was a space for the homeless to gather. This was a fact that the city government was not happy about. During brief informal interviews with homeless folks I was told that the police would occasionally sweep through the park and clear it of its homeless occupants. The city preferred the homeless to stay in designated shelters. I encountered no one who preferred the shelters and spoke with several individuals who disliked the shelters because of their heavy-handed policies and overcrowding. It seemed that many people actively avoided shelter life as much as possible but the shelters did provide beds and food, upon condition.

The space below the cover of the overpass near Calliope Street provided an alternative to shelter life. Once we had served food in Duncan Plaza we would pack up and relocate to this area under the overpass. This was an almost totally concrete and spare environment, a concrete floor, concrete pylons supported the concrete, steel, and asphalt ceiling above. The noise of traffic was constant.

During any single visit there may have been several dozen people occupying this stretch of urban space. Occupancy varied from transients just passing through the area for a few hours to those attempting a near full time residency. At one end of the occupied area several mattresses had been put down. Each was a little territory of respite and limited comfort. Some people seemed bedridden and unable to get up and come over to our serving table. Often a friend or family member would walk over and take an extra plate for the bedridden.

No doubt interpersonal violence was common enough but I got a sense that there was a lot of solidarity among these folk. After all, cooperation is as much a method of urban survival as predation. This was not simply an aggregation of isolated individuals simply trying to pursue their own ends. Within this spatial aggregation there were networks of affinity, family,

143

friendships, and enemies: a human community. Recognizing the humanity of the homeless was always at the core of Community Kitchen's concern.

Community Kitchen never tried to manage or administer the homeless and destitute. This was a population that needed food and we provided it. Even though Community Kitchen cooperated to a limited extent with shelters and other organizations it rejected the idea that the homeless people were a problem that needed to be kept hidden or excluded from public spaces. Community Kitchen accepted the autonomy of those struggling within the political and economic system of capitalism. Accepting and honoring the autonomy of individuals is quite a bit different than attempting to cultivate in those same individuals a vague but a priori "personal responsibility." These folk were undoubtedly oppressed and alienated but they were not simply passive victims. They struggled for autonomy and dignity within a system that often seems to disinherit them from both.

As an anti-authoritarian and direct actionist organization Community Kitchen sought no official recognition or permission from the city government. Indeed, freely feed all comers in Duncan Plaza was something of a provocative action. It often seemed that the city government would like nothing better than for the homeless and the underclass to simply disappear. In addition to witnessing the police pressure crowds of homeless folk to get off the street and find a shelter I was also told by one of Community Kitchen's core organizers, Nick, of a disturbing phone conversation he had with a city functionary.

The story begins during a hurricane, Hurricane Isaac of 2012 to be exact. The weather forecast during the last week of August indicated the likelihood that the Gulf Coast and New Orleans would experience a hurricane event in the next few days. As the days progressed the so-

called "cone of uncertainty," the predicted parameters of the storm's path, increasingly collapsed in greater certainty: the city would experience a hurricane.

Preparations began. The folks at Community Kitchen began discussing options for food relief if the need arose. Nick called City Hall to inquire about the city's plans for the homeless. The person on the other end of the line took the opportunity to inform Nick that the Mayor's Office was aware of Community Kitchen's practice of serving food to the public and did not appreciate it. The person also, somewhat vaguely, informed Nick that the city was planning to take some unspecified action against Community Kitchen if they continued the practice of publicly feeding the homeless.

Nick was surprised, but not so much by the threat itself because one quickly got the sense that the city government tolerated Community Kitchen's activities but did not particularly like them. I was told, for instance, how periodically police would approach a serving session and subtly suggest legal repercussion for Community Kitchen. The thing that surprised Nick was the timing of the threat. With a hurricane barreling down on the city, someone—the voice on the other end of the line never gave a name—claiming to be connected with the Mayor's office thought a productive use of their time was to threaten a small grassroots organizer as he sought information about the city government's plans to protect the homeless. Additional shelters were opened and to my knowledge nothing dramatic ever came of the threat. Fortunately, Hurricane Isaac proved to be a relatively mild storm so the urban core of New Orleans was spared serious injury even though a number of outlying perishes did experience severe flooding.

The organizers of Community Kitchen did not generally conceptualize their work as charitable work. The guiding idea was solidarity rather than charity. And their efforts to practically demonstrate the de-commodification of food did not exclusively focus on the

homeless. Community Kitchen's other aim was to serve New Orleans' radical community. Other groups and organizations within the city's radical milieu would regularly ask the folks of Community Kitchen to cater events and Community Kitchen usually did so. No money would ever change hands; this was not a commoditized or commercial service. Catering an event was a form of solidarity an egalitarian gift, an enactment of the principles of mutual aid and solidarity. The premise of Community Kitchen's existence was to undermine the idea that food should be exchanged as a commodity. Under hegemonic capitalism this aim is not an easy one and, of course, available resources limited the practice of anti-capitalist principle of food for all.

**Discussion: Community Kitchen and the anti-authoritarian gift**

Community Kitchen is a practical critique of the commodification of food and as such it is directly antagonistic to a definitional feature of capitalism, the monopoly on the means of subsistence. This practical critique is at the same time a material expression of the value system underwriting anarchist politics. That value system includes what Nick called the "spirit of giving." This "spirit of giving" should not be confused with altruism or complete "disinterest." This confusion is often present in shallow critique of radical activism but activists themselves can also fall victim to an aspiration to too-high a standard of altruism, complete selflessness. This generally leads to what organizers call burnout followed by a personal retreat from activism. Sometimes burnout produces lasting affects and a permanent retirement from social activism. At other times burnout is overcome by taking time off before returning to activism reinvigorated. Successful activists learn to manage burnout by recognizing the misplaced emphasis on some kind of abstract and, ultimately, impossible notion of altruism. This can be seen in Nick's statement above when he recognizes the necessity of self-care.

146

The "spirit of giving" and the motive force of a sense of generosity that Nick mentions should be seen as entangled in both interest *and* disinterest, as Mauss (1990 [1925]) used the terms. One reason for this confusion on the part of some activists comes from a wider cultural contradiction. As Keith Hart and colleagues (2010) observe, "[t]here are two prerequisites for being human: we must learn to be self-reliant to a high degree and to belong to other, merging our identities in a bewildering variety of social relations" (5). This proposition in itself is not a contradiction at all but rather, as Hart suggests, a prerequisite for human community; the contradiction emerges from particular historically generated cultural assumptions that are somewhat unique to capitalist societies. Again, as Hart and colleagues note, the problem arises when "[m]uch of modern ideology emphasizes how problematic it is to be both self-interested and mutual, to be economic as well as social, we might say. When culture is set up to expect a conflict between the two, it is hard to be both" (5). As I have demonstrated throughout this ethnography, the anarchist value system, with its emphases on gift, solidarity, mutual aid, and autonomy, has generally rejected the duality entailed in the culturally posited contradiction between interest and disinterest.

Community Kitchen had two primary orientations to practice: on the one hand, there were public serving sessions carried out around town every Tuesday afternoon. On the other hand, there was its service and participation within the city's networks of radical affinities, its anarchist or anti-authoritarian milieu. The latter relationship, between Community Kitchen and other radical groups, is easily understood as an enactment of the anarchist value of mutual aid and collective solidarity. This relationship operates as a shifting, dynamic, and ongoing cycle of giving, receiving, and returning. Even to talk about the relationships between groups as such is something of a convenient abstraction because of the networked nature of the entire social

147

milieu. Inter-group individual relations of affinity crisscrossed groups: the Iron Rail, Nowe Miasto, or Community Kitchen, for example.

In this sense Community Kitchen was exactly what its name describes. The former, the relation between Community Kitchen the wider public that it served on Tuesday afternoons was more ambiguous. There was undoubtedly a social distance between the participants, its cooks and servers, and many of those who showed up on Tuesday afternoon for a good meal. However, a certain sense of conviviality was achieved on those Tuesday afternoons. This was likely possible because of Community Kitchen's general commitment to respecting the autonomy of the people it served. Community Kitchen never tried to manage the population of homeless folks that utilized its public services. In fact, as already mentioned, the idea that the homeless were themselves a problem that required administration was anathema to Community Kitchen's practical critique of the commodification of food.

Of course, this stance in no way erased the inequities of social privilege and differential exposure to various forms of structural violence that existed between Community Kitchen's participants, its cooks and servers, and the homeless folk it often served. And yet it was not unusual for the folks served to take on a limited role as participants. Regular patrons would often help us set up our serving tables and lay out the food, and afterwards would organize and neatly stack our reusable plates in a designated dirty dish container. Many of the people who used the service noticeably took on a certain responsibility to share food with others. They would often arrive on the scene and inform us that they had informed others about the schedule of our serving sessions. Some folk would occasionally offer blunt critiques of that days menu items. Regulars would suggest that next time their favorite dishes be served. Overall there existed a strange dynamic of mutual recognition and alienation.

Community Kitchen developed its practical critique of the commodity food system to great local success, but this success has always remained partial because of its entanglement within the wider alienating social forces of hegemonic capitalist society. But this can hardly be considered a failure either. Instead it can be better understood for what it is: an ongoing struggle premised on a different form of value.

***Community Kitchen and the Gift: considered anthropologically***

To discuss the gift is to first and foremost discuss a social relation and not simply a mere object that changes hands from one possessor to another. Just as the commodity can be abstractly separated from any particular use-value so too can the gift be abstractly distinguished from its concrete objectivity and recognized as a persistent tendency of human sociality. The gift forms social relationships. It is my contention that the historic and contemporary praxis of anarchism is deeply entangled in and expressive of the logic of the gift. Anarchist principles such as mutual aid, solidarity, and autonomy all speak to the social logic of the gift. This will be developed more fully in the course of this section and the next section concerning autonomy but for now it is worthwhile to explore the gift in its anthropological context.

To be sure the gift demonstrates a great deal of historical variability. However, the fact that anthropologists have been able to recognize the gift in all of its historical and cultural diversity suggests a persistent logic or principle of human relations. The gift remains a potent social force, even though contemporary Western economies appear to be dominated by capitalist markets that are, to one extent or another, regulated by the state. Drawing out what he terms "moral conclusions" from his seminal work on the gift Mauss wrote:

> It is possible to extend these observations to our own societies. A considerable part of our morality and our lives themselves are still permeated with this same atmosphere of the gift, where obligation and liberty intermingle." Under the heading of "conclusion for economic sociology and political economy

149

[1990 [1925]: 65]

Mauss (1990 [1925]: 71) sought to critique the prevalent utilitarian doctrine of "natural economy" along with it chief protagonist, the endlessly self-maximizing *Homo economicus.* Mauss ultimately sought to demonstrate, through his project of comparative economy, the rich multidimensionality of human economic motives and the diverse systems of human economies. The economies Mauss describes are semiotic and material. Throughout his text Mauss juxtaposes self-interest with what he called "disinterest." Mauss argues that self-interest and disinterest are often in dynamic productive tension. Mauss wrote: "…[t]hese concepts of law and economics that it pleases us to contrast: liberty and obligation; liberality, generosity, and luxury, as against savings, interest, and utility – it would be good to put them into a melting pot once more" (1990 [1925]: 73). Mauss rejects the narrow utilitarian notion of rationality for a multidimensional human reason, or "practical reason" to use Bourdieu's (1998) terminology.

This practical reason underwrites a complex view of politics and economy. As Schrift (1997: 18) notes, "…the question of the gift is a political question, a question of the polis, which addresses fundamental issues of intersubjective interaction." Anarchism's praxis and the logic of the gift align in their practical and conceptual opposition to both the state and capital. The opposition of the gift to capital is threefold: 1) the gift is anti-utilitarian; 2) the gift is anti-accumulative; 3) the gift is anti-equivalence (Godbout and Caille 2000: 128-130). While the first two characteristics relate fairly clearly to anarchist praxis, the third characteristic requires some extended exposition.

Perhaps the easiest way to enter into this complex discussion is to begin with Marx's famous statement from Capital Vol. 1 concerning the relation of equality between capitalist and

150

laborer. Of the capitalist marketplace, the realm of exchange and circulation, Marx wrote with

not a little sarcasm that it is:

> …in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham [utilitarian philosophy]. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, let us say of labour-power, are determined only by their own free will. They contract as free persons, who are equal before the law. Their contract is the final result in which their joint will finds a common expression. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other as a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent.

[1990 [1867]: 280]

Marx's point can be summed up with an old one-liner: it is just as illegal for a billionaire to sleep

on the sidewalk as it is for a homeless person to sleep on the sidewalk! The suggestion is that

formal equality under the law serves to obscure substantial inequality within society. In this

sense the bourgeois notion of equality becomes ideology. To be clear neither Marxists nor

anarchists reject the equal humanness of humanity. However, they recognize that this equal

humanness exists within history (the material expression of human creative activity) and is

always expressed in qualities of difference. Milstein (2010: 52) offers the anarchist concept of

"equality among unequal." This is meant to convey, first, the equal value of every human and,

second, to emphasize the irreducible difference of each individual. As Milstein explains:

> The anarchist ethic of the equality of unequals shatters the dehumanizing notion promulgated under capitalism that everything, including each person, is exchangeable—equally a commodity, and thus without inherent worth—replacing it with the rehumanizing concept of the value of each individual. It gives qualitative meaning to justice. Under representative democracies, justice is blind to the uniqueness of each person and the specificities of their circumstances.
> [2010:52]

In Milstein's account one can begin to discern a complex dialectic of equality-inequality. Instead

of equality and inequality it may be less confusing to use the terms of sameness and difference.

In this way the dialectic can be grasped as alternating moments of social relation. As Santos

151

(2006: 37) explains, "[i]ndeed, we have the right to be equal whenever difference diminishes us; we have the right to be different whenever equality decharacterizes us." The relational praxis of anarchism attempts to facilitate this relational dialectic.

The anti-equivalence of the gift can be understood in two related ways that directly converge with the principles entailed in the anarchist ethic of equality of unequals. In one sense equality is fatal to the gift because, unlike the commodity, the exchange of gifts is never about the exchange of equivalences. In a second sense the value of the gift is always bound up with a quality of uniqueness; the uniqueness of a gift performs almost always as a symbolic representation of a unique relationship, a unique bond between different individuals. Because of the interpersonal nature of the gift it is common to imagine the gift confined to an intimate dyadic relation.

Of course, it is obvious that on the scale of society the gift proliferates far beyond the confines a simple dyadic model. Godbout and Caillé (2000: 137) argue that the gift is an expression of *primary sociality*, which they juxtapose to forms of *secondary sociality* such as the market and the state. They define primary sociality as "…the site of immediate and tangible knowledge of one another, whether it be actual (face to face) or virtual" (137). Again this "tangible knowledge" is not confined to a simple dyad but can take on multiple forms of relations. "From a phenomenological point of view primary sociality provides an arena for intersubjectivity and that the gift is a concrete manifestation" (138). Given their reference to phenomenology it is worthwhile to note that neither author subscribes to phenomenology per se; their stated ontological position is interactional, which is commensurate with critical realist ontology. What we might call 'secondary sociality' belongs to the sphere of 'intermediation' In this second sphere people do not interact as total entities but as supports for partial and, at least at

152

the outset, instrumental functions (138). Finally, Godbout and Caillé explain that, "the main areas of primary sociality are kinship, marriage, neighborliness, partnership, friendship, and camaraderie. Secondary sociality, on the other hand, is found in the theologico-political domain, in war, and commercial exchange" (2000: 138). As I have demonstrated in the foregoing discussion anarchism's political-ethical praxis premised on the significance of "primary sociality" that is also so integral to the gift relation.

The gift has long been of interest to radical intellectuals and activists. A genealogy of the radical gift would likely begin with the work of Georges Bataille (1988 [1967]). Bataille's work is credited as being a major precursor to French post-structuralist thought, influencing Foucault and Baudrillard among others (Hegarty 2000). Perhaps Bataille's (1988 [1967]) most significant book in this regard was his *Accursed Share*, in which he developed his theory of the "general economy." Bataille's concept of the general economy relied heavily on Mauss' depiction of gift economies (Hegarty 2000: 35). Consisting of activities beyond the narrow range of economics, the general economy was conceived as being heterogeneous and in contrast to the more homogenous conception of the economy as conforming to a single logic. The general economy included concepts such as economies of loss, waste, expenditure, and excess (Hegarty 2000: 33). Bataille radical reading of Mauss proved a significant influence on Guy Debord and the Situationist.

Bataille's fascination with the potlatch is one of the most salient examples of his influences on Situationists. "Bataille's political reading of the gift as a gesture of class struggle, as a gesture that would resist the poverty of everyday life (in all its forms), exerted a subterranean influence," Noys (2000: 110) explains and continues by noting that, "Bataille's revolutionary *potlatch* is also at work in the Situationist International…" The fact that the

153

Situationists named their journal "Potlatch" is indicative of the importance they granted to the gift economy. Their interest was not just in nomenclature, as Martin (2012: 125) argues, the Situationist International's "…development of Mauss's theory of the gift as a revolutionary weapon to be directed against 'commodity enslavement,' was, despite its rhetorical militancy, more nuanced than many contemporary developments of Maussian theory within the academy." Strangely, Martin (2000) does not mention Bataille's influence on the Situationists. Call (2002: 96) explains that, "[t]he problem which society confronts, according to Bataille, is not that of how to create or produce wealth…rather it is the problem of how to eliminate excess energy and give wealth away." This was the problem Community Kitchen confronted in their commitment to the radical de-commoditization of food.

Within the capitalist system food, an essential biological necessity for life has been transformed into a commodity and, as such, exists within the juridical framework of private property. As private property, despite its absolute necessity for every human's continued daily existence, food can be withheld from those without the means to purchase it. It is perfectly acceptable, according to the ethics of capitalism, to allow individuals, groups, or even whole societies to starve to death if they lack purchasing power, effective demand.

Unfortunately, this is not just a philosophical thought experiment. Amartya Sen (1981) has demonstrated that most modern famines have occurred not because of an absolute lack of food but because of a lack of demand. Human need, of course, does not necessarily equate with demand. Demand is initiated by and is measured only through money. Food, however, is a special commodity. Its specialness emerges from the fact that food or, more exactly, the potential lack of food, is a core compulsive mechanism to submit to the rule of capital. To challenge the imposed scarcity of food is to challenge the foundations of capitalism.

Of course, many states with strong capitalist economies have enacted food welfare programs. Such initiatives, where they are genuinely popular, do not seem to correspond to the logic of capital. Rather the moral impulse seems to arise from social contests such as labor struggles or more "traditional" ideas of religious charity. Indeed, neoliberal capitalism has actively sought to dismantle social welfare programs across the globe, claiming them to be unaffordable inefficiencies within a capitalist market framework (Harvey 2005).

This situation stands in stark contrast to what anthropologists know of the social use of food in many non-capitalist societies. One could point to regular food sharing within small egalitarian groups (Bell 1995), extravagant inter-clan feasting that accompanied the gift exchange of the potlatch (Mauss 1990 [1925]), or the moral instruction contained within the biblical story of Jesus endlessly dividing the loaves and fishes for the benefit of the assembled multitude right before standing on the mount and delivering one of the most influential moral sermons in history. But beyond sharing food with friends, allies, and followers, the tendency to share food has generally even extended to strangers, not as charity, but something closer to an initial act of human solidarity. This tendency is so generally common across cultures that it has been dubbed "the law of hospitality" (Pitt-Rivers 2012 [1977]). Often such hospitality can be understood as an initial act of solidarity that can then be rejected or accepted. To promote solidarity is to form alliances that transform strangers into friends.

Food sharing is an integral aspect of human sociality; despite the alienation and commodification of food under capitalism the tendency to give remains strong. However, under the political and economic restrictions set by capitalism, the tendency to share food manifests as a political act. Under the topsy-turvy ethics of capitalism, to treat food as anything other than a commodity is a radical gesture. To take direct action by serving basic human needs as opposed to

155

market demand is to issue a direct attack on the compulsion to labor for capitalism. I note the political economic logic of food scarcity in the preceding paragraphs in order to provide an outline of the basic antagonism wrapped up in radical food activism of the kind I participated in as part of a relatively small network of New Orleans radical food activists working under the banner of Community Kitchen.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explored the ways in which the members of the Community Kitchen Collective de-commoditize food through practices that promote values of radical generosity and gifting. Understood as an integrated way of thinking and acting the form of radical generosity, the praxis, of Community Kitchen intersects with and reinforces the solidary and autonomous value dimensions of anarchism's value system.

I provided an ethnographic vignette of an incident that occurred during an afternoon of serving homeless folk around the city. The vignette served as an example of the interpersonal and systemic dynamics that Community Kitchen participants encounter and must navigate as they actualize their project of de-commoditized food access. As the vignette demonstrated Community Kitchen did not exist in a social vacuum but rather formed an aspect of a social ecology centered on food provision. The vignette revealed ambiguities and antimonies in the crosscutting and intersecting relationships existing between Community Kitchen and established institutions despite the ostensible similarity of their missions.

Nick's narrative of Community Kitchen's origins and inspirations operated suggested not explained the social history of the organization but integrated it with his own narrative entailing

his personal commitments and values. Using Nick as an example this section served to show the inextricableness of the personal from the political.

A general overview of Community Kitchens operations followed Nick's narrative. This was drawn from my experience participating with the organization on a weekly basis over the course of several months of fieldwork. I focused on describing the social milieu, the spatial locations, and the populations that benefit from Community Kitchen's operations. Data from my interview with Michelle complimented this overview by connecting with the experience of a regular participant in the Community Kitchen project.

Community Kitchen's practices of serving food directly across the street from City Hall apparently did not sit well with certain city officials. A brief but significant phone conversation between Nick and an unidentified city official on the eve of an approaching hurricane suggested, at least to Nick's ears, that city officials were antagonistically opposed to Community Kitchen direct actionist operations.

This chapter has demonstrated the significance of the value of radical generosity and gift within New Orleans anarchist milieu. Of course, as I demonstrated in previous chapters, the value praxis of gift and generosity is not exclusive to Community Kitchens. Indeed, gift and generosity are key values within anarchism's overarching value system. I chose to focus on this value in this chapter because Community Kitchen offered a particularly salient example of the materialization of these values in relation to both the anarchist milieu and the wider New Orleans community. In the following chapter the materialization of values will be explored in a somewhat different context within New Orleans' anarchist milieu.

Figure 5.1 C. K. volunteers posing by portable table and cooler.

# CHAPTER 6

## NOWE MIASTO: THE NEW CITY WITHIN THE SHELL OF THE OLD

**Introduction**

This chapter concerns the Nowe Miasto housing collective. Meaning the "New City" in Polish, Nowe Miasto is a large three-story warehouse located in the Mid City Neighborhood of New Orleans (figure 6.1). The space began life as an anarcho-punk collective living and art project. It is common for anarchist collective houses to be named. Other collective houses in New Orleans were named Sycamore, Unicorn Beach, and Apparatus. However, Nowe was the grand doyen of New Orleans' anarcho-punk houses. Nowe was the oldest, with a storied history. It was a celebrated hub of the anarcho-punk milieu in the city for over a decade.

This chapter begins with an account of the first house I lived in before finding Nowe Miasto. The living situation was much more conventional. My account in this section is meant to provide a contrast with Nowe Miasto. I characterize this first house as a politically progressive rather than radical or anarchist. Within the social ecology of post-Katrina activism in New Orleans certain groups filled certain niches. Of course, there was overlap but generally liberals and progressives were much more tied into Non-Government Organization (NGO) industry that had sprang up in the wake of hurricane Katrina. My first housemates in New Orleans were tied into the NGO milieu. This section can be read in contrast to the radical milieu that is the focus of the rest of the chapter.

The chapter's second section is an ethnographic account of an evening out at a backyard birthday party held for a well-known local anarchist. This party facilitated my eventual introduction to Nowe Miasto. This section is also illustrative of the anarchist social milieu. I briefly prolife party goers and describe some of the typical conversations that occur at such events.

My engagement with Nowe Miasto began in earnest after receiving an email indicating that the folks at Nowe were searching for a new housemate. This begins the chapter's third section in which I arrange a meeting and site visit to Nowe Miasto. This section also provides insight into the kind of collective values that those at Nowe Miasto sought to foster within the house.

After a few messages back and forth I arranged to drop by Nowe Miasto for a visit and tour of the house as a potential housemate. This is fourth section introduces my housemates and provides a description of the urban context and physical environment of the area of Mid City where Nowe Miasto was located. This section also provides a description of the interior space of Nowe Miasto, narratively blending initial impressions of the space with insights developed later in my stay.

After this initial tour I began attending Monday night dinners at Nowe Miasto on a regular basis. The chapter's fifth section provides an ethnographic account of one of these dinners. This sections showcase the convivial atmosphere and flow of conversation during Monday dinner. In so doing it provides further insight into the people and relationships that defined the site.

Moving from the this more general description the chapter's sixth section focuses on heavily an account of Nowe Miasto's history and purpose according to one of the collective's

found members, Bran. Bran's narrative relates different periods in Nowe Miastos life as a collective space. From its initial founding by a few friends, to its emergence as a significant venue in the regional underground punk rock scene, and to its near demise during hurricane Katrina, Nowe Miasto was an important site of radical cultural reproduction.

Building on Bran's narrative history of Nowe Miasto I discuss the space in theoretical terms as a site of radical cultural intervention and reproduction. I draw on concepts developed by the Guy Debord and the Situationist International to understand this dimension of Nowe Miasto. Because of the influence that the Situationists had on punk rock and anarchism the their conceptions of the processes of cultural intervention and reproduction provide significant insights into what Nowe Miasto was all about.

**A temporary room**

I arrived in New Orleans on June 1, 2012. I managed to find a small room to rent on the first floor of a two story Mid City family residence. Two other renters occupied the first floor. The top floor was occupied by the house's owners and our landlords, a young family with a new baby and a old yellow dog, rescued from the Bosnian war, and desperately afraid of thunder.

The house had been renovated since Katrina and was spacious with the high ceilings typical of old upper-class houses in the Deep South. My fellow housemate, Ricky, had been renting for the longest time and he would deal with monthly bills other than rent, which I paid directly to the "landlord." Ricky worked for a non-governmental organization that focused on defending immigrant worker rights. He was pleasant but often seemed a bit on edge, a bit stressed, but he was committed to his job of defending immigrant laborers. His organization was

161

mainstream but they would resort to direct protest actions if necessary to raise an issue. In fact, the first protest that I attended during fieldwork was one called by his organization.

Several immigrant workers had come forward and accused a local Wal-Mart seafood distributor with abusive and exploitive practices. Excessive hours, wage theft, dangerous working conditions, no bathroom breaks, and threats against employees and their families if they complained all contributed to a condition of daily workplace violence. The protest had been called to bring public attention the worker's plights and to shame Wal-Mart into pressuring its supplier to improve conditions at the factory. The action was successful in at least raising awareness of the issue, making international headlines.

My other housemate, Sandy, was a criminal defense attorney who had worked a number of death penalty cases. When I arrived she was out of town working as part of a legal team on an infamous case involving a deranged man attempting to murder several public officials. I did not actually meet Sandy until about a month after I moved in. Our landlords, Karla and Lex, were also activists of a kind. Karla was also a defense attorney and Lex held a leadership role in a local urban gardening organization.

I rented the room with the understanding that it was only a temporary situation. The room was vacant for the summer but its original occupant would return from summer travels in September. This situation was agreeable. The house was very nice, comfortable, and convenient starting out but I needed to be closer to the city's anarchist milieu. I hoped to find a place in an anarchist collective house. I immediately began mentioning this to anyone that would listen. The breakthrough came with an invitation to a birthday party.

**Vegan burgers and backyard anarchy**

The birthday party for Daniel was held at his house, which he shared with his partner,
Jonnie, and another housemate. I had met Daniel a couple of times previously and we hit it off.
Daniel occupied his time with writing, and he was a talented writer. He had written several
novels and was working on another one when we met. He also wrote and published non-fiction,
usually polemical essays concerned with local goings on. Daniel always dressed in black from
head to foot. A large man with a broad gold-flecked smile, Daniel embodied a contradiction. He
was friendly, talkative, and gracious to friends but all this belied a deeply nihilistic worldview.
Unlike any other person I interviewed during fieldwork Daniel expressed almost utter despair
toward the human condition. On the other hand, this nihilistic bent did not prevent him feeling
passionate outrage at any perceived injustice or abuse perpetrated against the weak by the strong.
Daniel felt for the underdog.

I arrived a bit early for the party but this gave Daniel the opportunity to show me around
his shotgun-style house. I wasn't shocked at all when I noticed what looked like a black coffin
serving as a coffee table. When I asked, he seemed particularly proud of it. The historic culture
of New Orleans has developed unique relationship death and its iconography. Life and death take
on Manichean dimension in the city. Though not originally from New Orleans, Daniel loved and
deeply imbibed the city's culture.

After the tour we ended up in the backyard. A few other early arrivals were chatting
while seated in a rough circle of chairs. The only person I recognized was J. C., a highly
regarded philosopher of anarchism. We exchanged greetings and he went back to the
conversation he was already engaged in. I had met J. a few weeks previously while working at
the Iron Rail. He had dropped by to gift the shop with an armload of copies of The Fifth Estate, a

long-running anarchist journal of politics and culture. J.C. is a fixture of the city's anarchist milieu and was well respected by virtually everyone. Eventually we ended up working together a few projects.

Soon the sounds of dozens of little conversations filled the night air and mingled with the music pumping out of the speakers from an old radio. Eventually, I found myself seated in a rough semi-circle around Lu, who seemed to be holding court while making Deleuzian puns. "You win some and you Deleuze some," *they'd* crack. I drifted into a conversation about New Orleans' status as a strange urban ecological dystopia. I noted, half-joking, that I saw New Orleans as the city of the future; my conversant chuckled.

The party wore on and vegan burgers and hotdogs came on and off the small grill. Folks drank inexpensive wine and PBR to wash down the delicious vegan-friendly rice and bean dishes brought by guests.

While standing in a little circle of conversation with Daniel and a few other folks I decided to take the opportunity to mention my interest in find a new place to stay. Daniel and the others said that they would keep their eyes open. As it turns out this was a fateful decision on my part. Eventually the partiers began to disperse, either to other parties later in the night or to home for sleep. I was in the latter category. I said goodbye and, again, wished Daniel a happy birthday before driving back across town to my room to write up daily notes and then sleep.

**Nowe Miasto: looking for a housemate**

A few days after the party I received an email message from Daniel. It was forwarded from a local anarchist listserv. The folks at Nowe Miasto had announced a search for a new housemate. The message read:

Hi! Nowe Miasto, a Mid-City warehouse with residential and community space is looking for roommates. There are two walled rooms available, one of which is mostly insulated, and plenty of room that has the potential to be turned into your own space. The rent is relatively cheap (please inquire for details) Our first floor is a community space with a print-shop-in-the-works and also houses the Louisiana Books to Prisoners headquarters. We are open to considering anybody but you are highly encouraged to apply if a female, queer, transgender, person of color and/or of an age not typical to "punk house" living. Please get in touch with any questions.

Diversity and inclusion appeared as key themes of the message. It struck me as a kind of political inversion of what many queer, transgender, persons of color, other minorities have come to expect from the rental market. I replied immediately, expressing interest in the spot. I wondered to what degree Nowe Miasto was entangled in the housing market. Would this be a formal or informal arrangement? This question will be explored later but for now let it suffice that I learned that no profit was taken from "rent," which was used pay utility bills and insurance.

Per the message's instructions, I called the phone number provided in the message and asked for Chance. The soft female voice on the other end of the call identified as Chance. After iterating the points made in the original message and asking if I had any questions Chance explained that she would call me back later. She need time to check the reference I had given her during the call. She also needed to speak with the other housemates. Since the decision to allow me to move in would need to be made on a consensus basis, she wanted to have everyone around on the day that I would come by. After a series of calls, we eventually scheduled the meeting for June 29th at 1:00pm.

**Introducing Nowe Miasto**

Nowe was noticeable, but not visually overbearing, against the low-slung skyline of the neighborhood, despite it being two stories taller than many of the surrounding houses. Nowe's

bulky frame fit snuggly into the dead end of Jane Alley, which intersects with Palmyra Street. Single-family homes composed the immediate neighborhood around Nowe. These homes are situated tightly side-by-side, facing narrow, pot-holed streets. Most of Mid City's streets run one-way, alternating directions along the city's ancient grid pattern, a spatial ode to the rationalism of another age of planning in the city.

Mid City is a densely-packed urban environment. Trees grow here and there; drooping tangles of telephone and electrical lines form a patchy industrial canopy, a high wire grid mirroring the streets below. As with much of the city, a French Colonial architectural style dominated the aesthetic landscape of the neighborhood. Mid City's population is rather heterogeneous. The area appeared to have a fairly strong working class composition along with professional such as lawyers, civil servants, and employees of NGOs. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, many Latino workers arrived in the city, contributing greatly to its reconstruction. Many of these workers have since settled with their families in Mid City. This population is a key support for Ideal Mart, a small Latino grocery that operates a block from Nowe Miasto, just across North Broad Street. The neighborhood was submerged under several feet of standing water for about a week in the wake of hurricane Katrina. While Nowe Miasto survived Katrina, it organizational structure was greatly transformed, and it existence was premised on a continuous struggle.

My knocking seemed to echo on the other side of the heavy, yellow-coated wooden door that served as the main entrance to Nowe Miasto. The gray aluminum exterior of the building contrasted with the bright coat of paint on the door. Just to my left a pair of tall and wide double doors stood in their frame. When open, these doors, with faded and flecking red paint, allowed access to the interior for oversized objects. As I knocked, there was no obvious indication that

166

anyone was home. The place was so big I wondered if anyone would hear me knocking even if they were home. A faded but beautifully designed wooden sign hung directly above the heavy double doors and proclaimed the words "Nowe Miasto" along with its address. I was confident that I was in the right place. I knocked again. Soon enough I heard footsteps approaching, descending from the second floor.

Locks clicked and the door opened. A dark haired and thin young man stood in front of me, framed in the entrance. He adjusted his thick glasses and introduced himself as Darin and then we quickly moved inside and toward the stairs to the right of the door. To the opposite of the stairs, I noticed sunlight streaming through into the interior through another set of large double doors. Shadows filled the cavernous space between the two doors and cloaked jumbled stacks objects of all shapes and sizes in dim twilight-like darkness.

I could see a lush green garden landscape in the backyard just beyond the cracked doors. Darin noted that the garden was worked by some of the housemates and produced food to supplement the house. The stairway to the right of the front door terminated at a small landing before taking a sharp turn to the left and then exited into the second floor foyer. Little pieces of art, hand drawn illustrations, photographs ripped from the interiors of alternative magazines, handmade punk bands posters, and the like covered the walls leading up the stairwell and the hallway that terminated in the kitchen.

At the beginning of the second floor hallway an area was reserved for the "free shelf." The shelf and immediate area around it was piled with items of all kinds, cloths, shoes, and electronics, miscellaneous items whose use was indeterminate. A free space within collective house or anarchist shops is a common place. The idea is that all items in this area are freely available to anyone who wants them. There is no formal limit on the amount of items that can be

167

taken or left in a free area but there is usually is a practical limit. Most people simply take what they might need at the moment and leave the rest for others.

Darin and I met Chance in the dinning room. Several windows allowed warm natural light and the occasional breeze to drift through into the kitchen and dinning room area. The kitchen was spacious with shelves crammed with food, pots and pans, and other supplies. Again, pieces of art of various shapes, sizes and composition materials covered the kitchen's walls. A large portrait dominated the wall opposite the entrance to the kitchen. The photo-realistic portrait hung over a cramped supply shelf and depicted a young black woman wearing dark framed eyeglasses, smiling as she enjoyed an ice cream cone. Chance was seated at the large wooden dinning room table to the right of the kitchen in the dinning area. Chance noted that everyone lived on the second floor, with the exception of Ramon. Ramon had carved out a little room on the third floor; the rest of floor was used primarily for storage.

Beyond the kitchen and dinning areas, the second floor opened into another cavernous interior. It reminded me of the hold of some massive pirate ship that had seen better days. Chance explained that private rooms had been constructed along the walls of the interior, leaving an open but cluttered space. An old couch and television had been positioned near the center of the room, forming another common area. Wooden support beams of questionable integrity cut vertically through the ancient wooden plank floor. Here and there I noticed planks missing from the floor leaving holes of various sizes. Chance pointed these out, advised me to be careful but not to worry too much because the floor was sturdy over all. During the whole time I lived at Nowe there was never an incident with the floor despite its rickety appearance. Of course, I always minded not to walk over those areas that appeared potentially weak.

"This is one of the rooms we have open, Chance said, opening a door to one of the private rooms that lined the edges of the floor space. "It's mostly insulated and you could make it into whatever you want," she said. I looked over the mostly empty room. There was a well-worn mattress posited against the left wall.

"Will the bed come with it?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, most likely. I'm not sure if that is Penelope's bed or not. If it is Penelope's, she'll probably want to take it with her."

"Okay, fine with me either way. I've just been looking for a cheap mattress or something. I arrived here with nothing but a couple of bags so I have no furniture," I explained.

"I'm sure you'll be able to find something. Folks are always coming across used furniture here. You should ask some of the folks at the Iron Rail to keep an eye out," Chance replied as she resumed our tour.

Chance stopped and knocked gently on a door that was already slightly cracked open. A young man turned around from a desk he was leaning over and smiled, greeting us. "Dix, this is Pat. He's the guy interested in moving into one of the open rooms," Chance said in introduction.

Dix leaned forward and shook my hand, flashing a bright smile. I was surprised by Dix's appearance. His polo shirt, neatly cropped blond hair, blue eyes, and "all American" good looks reminded me more of the loafer-wearing fraternity members roaming campus back at the University of Georgia, than the anarchists that I had met in the city. Later during my stay at Nowe I'd joke with Dix about how I could imagine him being cast to play Captain America in a movie. We chatted briefly and then Chance led us on to the next room. Upon inspection I decided that I preferred the first room that was shown to me and expressed this to Chance and

Darin. Chance suggested that this would not be a problem since my move in date, September 1<sup>st</sup>, would coincide with Penelope's plan to move out.

We sat around the large oval-shaped wooden table in the dinning area. Darin, Chance and Dix asked questions and explained some of the rules of the house. For instance, it had been agreed that the kitchen was to be a vegan kitchen. Preparation or cooking of animal products, meat, eggs, milk, and so on, was not allowed in the kitchen. However, not everyone practiced veganism. In fact, I would come to discover that the majority of housemates consumed meat or at least eggs and diary products. Of course, this was not always the case. At different times vegans had made up the majority in house. The vegan kitchen rule remained because everyone seemed to agree that it made the kitchen a more inclusive place and easier to sanitize.

I explained that I was a meat-eater but I was not ideologically committed to meat and I could just as well do without it. I understood that it was easier for me to enjoy vegan meals than it would have been for a committed vegan to eat in a kitchen polluted by meat. This attitude seemed to be the general consensus among the house's meat eaters. This is not to suggest that meat was never consumed in the house. There was no objection to bringing take-out into the kitchen, storing it in the refrigerator, or consuming it at the dinning table. For example, it was not unusual for gigantic catfish Po-boys purchased just down the street at Bank's Meat Market to find their way onto the dinning room table. Non-vegan food could be stored in the refrigerator as well. There was a respectful give-and-take between the vegan and non-vegan housemates.

Everyone was encouraged to attend group dinners on Monday nights. Of course, no one was required to attend, but varying amounts of social expectations contributed to regular attendance. It was common for members of other collectives to drop from time to time and share

in Monday dinners. Although, I did not plan to move in for few months, once it was agreed that I would be moving in, I was encouraged to attend Monday dinners. I did so regularly.

Dinner was usually vegan, always vegetarian, and everyone was expected to contribute something to the meal. Other than the requirement to be meatless one could contribute anything one wished. Monday dinner was basically a regularly scheduled potluck. This was an enjoyable aspect of the situation. We would usually end up with some delicious surprise. Dinner was almost always very tasty was usually accompanied by a convivial atmosphere; though this is not to suggests that interpersonal tension or disputes did not carry over in the dinner, they did. But in such a situation both the persons involved usually just skipped group dinner and ate in their rooms or went out for the evening. I found Monday dinner to be real highlight of my week and I looked forward to it coming around each week.

Decisions that affected everyone were made by consensus and it was expected that one would seek everyone's consent before using the common spaces for projects or activities that might monopolize the space. Principle was simple: actions that affected a few or everyone should be negotiated with those affected. For example, the bottom floor would occasionally serve as a musical venue for local punk bands or touring bands might sleep over at Nowe if they had a gig in the city. Everyone always cleared this sort of thing in advance. A large classroom sized chalkboard suspended on a wall to one side of the dinner table was often used to leave messages. A typical message might indicate that a band was coming through town in a month and they would like to bunk at Nowe for a few days. The chalkboard was also used to detail what everyone owed in monthly bills. "Rent" varied depending on the amount of electricity and water we used but, including all bills, each of us usually paid around $170 per month. Generally one

person would usually handle collecting funds and paying bills. The position of bill payer rotated between all the housemates.

Most of my housemates were rather conscientious in respect to the common space. Of course, there were a few occasions where dishes piled up in the sink and no one would immediately take responsibility for dealing with them. However, this was usually limited deviation from the norm. Almost everyone had been living in a collective living situation of one kind or another for years and had internalized certain norms of conduct that decreased internal antagonism by emphasizing personal responsibility to clean up whatever mess one might have made. Of course, one's own room one could be as messy as one liked and no one would have anything to say about it.

My initial interview with Chance, Darin, and Dix was relatively brief and I left the house hopeful that I would be allowed to move in. A few days later I received a call from Chance informing that everyone agreed that I should stay at Nowe Miasto. Chance reminded me about coming to dinner so I could me that other members of the house.

**Monday dinner at Nowe Miasto**

About a week later I arrived at Nowe for the first of many wonderful Monday dinners. I was excited about having the chance to meet the housemates that were unavailable during my first visit. Dinner was scheduled for 8:30 pm. Evening was descending on the city's streets when I arrived. A bright street lamp lighted Jane Alley. I parked my small pickup truck to one side of the alley, got out, and began walking toward Nowe's main door.

Before I could knock I heard a voice coming from the large kitchen window on the second floor. I saw Dix leaning out the window. "Someone will be down in a second to let you

172

in," he said. I acknowledged him and waited by the locked door. Chance opened the door and escorted me up the stairs, down the hallway and into to the kitchen. Several folk busied themselves prepping their contributions to our collective meal. I brought a large loaf of fresh French bread, a six-pack of PBR tallboys, and a vegan-friendly rice dish. I placed the food on the table and offered everyone a beer before placing the rest of the six-pack in the refrigerator. Dix took me up on my offer and snagged a tallboy.

We popped the tabs and performed a little wordless "cheers," tipping our cans in each other direction before turning the beer up to our lips. The kitchen bustled around us. I was introduced to Ramon, tall, dark featured, with expressive eyes. He and his partner Jeanie Marie were prepping a large green salad. Then I noticed Bran, Marguerite and Nichol enter the kitchen. Bran, a medium framed, fit, forty-something year old, with slightly spiked blond hair, was one of the original founders of Nowe Miasto. I eventually interviewed Bran and his interview proved invaluable for understanding the history and present circumstances confronting Nowe Miasto.

Bran and Marguerite no longer lived at Nowe but would drop by for Monday dinners on occasion. They lived in a small house outside of Mid City with Nichol, their infant daughter. Bran was a fairly well known local DJ, performing at parties and various events throughout the year. Marguerite was a respected local activist who grew up in one of the city's housing projects. In her thirties, she now held a Master's degree in sociology and was well known for her skills at organizing. Marguerite always projected a calm and confident strength. Her authentically thick New Orleans accent was endearing. I didn't know it at this first meeting but we would eventually work together organizing the Anarchist People of Color convergence. Ramon, Jeanie Marie, Bran, Marguerite, Nichol, Dix, Chance, and Darin began to coalesce around the oval dining room table as the last few bowls and platters of food were placed on the tabletop.

173

Dinner conversation was lively. I learned that Bran was not only an original founder of

Nowe Miasto, but was also a founding member of the Crescent Wrench Collective, an anarchist

bookstore and info shop that preceded the formation of the Iron Rail. Ramon had spent a few

years in Europe, moving within the anarchist milieus of France and Greece.

"How'd you like the experience in Greece?" I asked.

Ramon thought about it for a second and, smiling, replied, "It's a good day when you

fight the cops and win." He referred to participation in a number of large and militant anarchist

street battles with police, a fairly common occurrence in post-austerity Greece these days. Since

returning to New Orleans, Ramon split his time between a job at a local burrito restaurant and his

career as a DJ.

Jeanie Marie was a poet and was engaged with the city's poetry scene. We talked about

the class and racial divisions within the poetry scene and how different groups adopted different

styles.

"Street poets tend to use a more narrative structure in their poetry," Jeanie Marie

observed. "On the other hand, more academically oriented poets seemed to strive to create

conceptual tensions through word choice without positing narrative conclusions."

Dix mentioned to me that he was in the middle of reading David Graeber's (2011) new

book *Debt: the First 5,000 Years* and asked what I thought of the book.

I replied that I had read it and thoroughly enjoyed it. Dix expressed a few critiques and

concerns but generally agreed that it was a fine book.

One of Dix's complaints was that Graeber tended to rely a good bit on classical

ethnographic data. Dix did not see these early ethnographic texts as particularly reliable due to

the imperialistic, gendered, classed, and racial standpoints of the primarily white males authors.

I agreed that he had an important point but I argued that in many cases it was the best data available, its colonial underpinnings notwithstanding.

Along with these discussions, the air around the dinner table filled with bits and pieces of local gossip, commentary on the state of the city, and, of course, questions about my research. Fortunately, everyone seemed genuinely supportive of my efforts.

Many dinners followed and once I moved into Nowe Miasto I was able to interact with everyone on a daily basis. I noticed that everyone was involved in various art projects. Ramon and Bran were both DJs but Ramon was also a skilled street artist and Nowe's various nooks and crannies were filled with the remains of prototype pieces.

Chance and Darin, along with their drummer (Nick of Community Kitchen), played together in a band named Curved Dog. Dix was something of an exception. By the time I had arrived and began participating in the anarchist milieu Dix had began to withdraw somewhat from a previous period of more active engagement. Nevertheless, Nowe Miasto was an art space through and through. This was so normalized and just assumed that I did not fully comprehend what this all meant until much later as I reflected back on the situation.

**Nowe Miasto: an origin story**

During our interview, Bran, one of the original founders of Nowe, provided significant insight into the values driving the creation of Nowe Miasto as a radical space:

> I've lived in collective housing most of my adult life. I like being around people; I like shared responsibility. I think that the collective is greater than the individual—not over the individual—but, again, we moved into this place. I could never have done this on an individual basis. We moved in here because we wanted to have, to make noise at any hour, a place to do work, a place to make art and have shows, and do all these things. We couldn't have done it with one of us so I mean this is the biggest example of it [the strength of collectivity].

We sat in the bottom floor of Nowe in an unfinished room that would be part of a planned print shop that was a project of several folks involved in the milieu around Nowe Miasto. Bran's narrative of how Nowe came to be and would potentially change in the future is worth quoting at length. Bran's narrative embodies many of the themes, values, entanglements and contradictions that are at the heart of this chapter.

> At the beginning of 1999, we moved in here in like June of 1999, and we just wanted a place that was more like a warehouse space so we do whatever we wanted. I moved in here with Meredith and Icky, two of my closest friends and they still are, though neither one of them live in New Orleans anymore, and we just decided we wanted this space where we could do whatever we wanted. And Meredith did something, which I, we, thought was crazy. She called up a property rental place and she said 'hey we're just looking for a warehouse we can live in.' Which I thought you had to do everything under the radar and do all this … and the guy was like 'I think I have a place for you.' We were like 'this is awesome, for like a million reasons this is so awesome.' We were only on the first floor. It was all finished in. When we first moved in here this was all offices. We converted what were two men's and women's bathrooms into a bathroom with a tub, we installed a tub, there was a little tiny kitchen, we expanded the kitchen. Basically we lived in here, it was just the three of us for a couple of months. Then we had one other person move in and that person kept changing. There were three bedrooms. … we just rented this from a guy for several years. We moved up to the second floor after about two years. [The second floor] …was just storage. This had been a construction warehouse. Yeah we just moved in here and started having [punk] shows. At that point New Orleans was different. I can't even describe to you how different of a place it was then it is now. There weren't tons of people moving here from out of town. There weren't very many punks. There weren't very many anarchists. When we had Crescent Wrench we could barely keep it going [Crescent Wrench was an anarchist bookshop that preceded the Iron Rail]. When I was at Tulane we'd hope that maybe one punk would come to town. These things that just don't seem real anymore. It was just a much different place; and I had identity through punk rock and I wasn't in as many different worlds as I am right now. And, you know, we moved to the second floor; we never knew if we'd have enough people to cover it. The rent went from $700 to $1200 bucks by the time we had the second floor. We were thinking that we might be screwed. 'We're signing this lease. How are we going to make it?' We just did service industry work; all of our money went into the building. Then we were part of the problem [alluding to present issue of gentrification], all these people started moving here. I mean, people came through this, I mean hundreds of people have come through this building. You know, fifty, sixty, people have lived here; but I mean hundreds of people have stayed here over the years and back then this was a place where literally everybody came who was involved in punk

176

rock or anarcho anything like they all came here. There weren't any other places for a couple of years. Then there was another warehouse down the street and more and more people came. So some of this stuff that I talk about that people are doing now I was a part of that and I have to reflect on that but I want to think that I'm working toward broader goals now and try to learn those lessons.

This was the early period, the pre-Katrina period, of the life of Nowe Miasto. At this point during our interview Bran's narrative slowed down as if he was at a loss for words. It seemed to be one of those moments in conversations when one surely has more to say but is not completely sure what more there is to say. I quickly took the opportunity to bring the narrative closer to the present. I asked Bran about Hurricane Katrina and how it affected life at Nowe. As with much of the city Katrina had a profound impact on Nowe Miasto. Given a new direction Bran continued his narrative.

So yeah, in 2005 we had a really good group of people here. Again, we just had the bottom two floors. We didn't have the top floor; that was storage for the owner. We had a really dynamic group of people here. … It was a multiracial as it had ever been; it was, lets see, three black people, one Asian person, and like three white people are something, or 'other' you know what I mean [alluding to potential heterogeneity and ambiguity of racial identification]. And then there was a pretty good mix of male and female, there were different identities of sexuality. It was a really dynamic group of people and that was something we really wanted. We were like 'this is the new version of how we want this place to be.' To be multiracial, to be open to all, these—to everyone but be a really radical space. No everyone was punk rock anymore and people were coming from different places so this was a really powerful moment. We decided, 'let's form a limited equity housing cooperative.' It was a single building project. It was an informal group of people but we decided we'd committed to being part of this thing long-term. We knew we'd have to incorporate and start fundraising and stuff. In the interim I'd inherited a little bit of money. I tried to get a mortgage to buy this building but because it's a commercial building you couldn't get a mortgage a traditional mortgage. It was $150,000 dollars. I had $50,000 and I couldn't buy this building because I couldn't show enough income. Most of my income was off the books and everyone else's money was off the books. I asked a friend of mine who I lived with the year before moving into here; she was part of the bookstore we used to run. She was a real radical person. She had moved out of town but she had family money…she put up the other money as basically a donation, although she still owns it with me right now but once we get it transferred to the land trust its going to be finally taken care of. We bought it. I was on everything because she— she was part of the LLC—we formed the LLC to do it and the intention was that

within six months or less get the collective entity up and running. Everyone would contribute whatever they could—something like $5,000 or $10,000 dollars—there'd have to be upfront costs that everyone would contribute to and we'd try and get a loan or something to buy the building. Unfortunately Katrina hit two months later right after we bought it. We bought it like July 5th or something and Katrina hit August 29 or whatever. We didn't have flood insurance because this neighborhood had not flooded for a hundred years, literally a hundred years and so who thought we needed flood insurance. Unfortunately, that just destroyed everything. The roof came off. Anyone that had anything in here just about lost everything, except for me because I covered everything with plastic before I left because I just didn't want to lose it all. People thought I was crazy. Almost everyone else lost everything. So it just threw the whole thing into disarray. Some of those folks came back post-Katrina but people who lived here had to make decisions about there own life. … everyone had to do their own thing so I was stuck as kind of the landlord of this building, which I didn't really want to be. I couldn't blame everyone I guess but it was a bit disheartening given the sort of—you commit to an idea---or whatever but couldn't blame everyone because it was a catastrophic moment. That's why I believe in sort of putting everything on paper and mutual accountability and things like that for the future, you know, and I'm trying to establish those tenets now.

It is highly significant to note that a gift, a donation, of 100,000 dollars was key to moving the project forward, even though that project was thrown into catastrophic disarray in the wake of hurricane Katrina. And it was many gifts of time and labor issuing from many individuals and groups that brought Nowe back from the brink. All that Nowe Miasto had given to over the years came back to it in a dire hour of need. Bran explained that:

> We actually had a lot of people help, you know, because this building, Nowe Miasto as a concept, was a central place for a lot of people. I mean it had been a place where just about anyone would have passed through if they were—if you were into punk rock you almost certainly passed through here. But if you were into—if you were vegan--we had vegan meals, we had other things here. Just this sort of thing at that moment, anyone who was into weirder radical stuff would have passed through here. We used to have some of our [anti-]prison organizing here, like Angola Three stuff. There were a lot of people who knew this space and so it had a lot of good will. People sent us money from places I didn't even know. Someone had a benefit in Minneapolis and sent us a check, didn't even know who it was. At this point I wish I knew because I didn't do a real good job of thanking everyone. People had benefits all over the place, all over the country and some out of the country. Because New Orleans was in the news and this was a place that anchored a lot of people. So we had a lot of help gutting it. A lot of people gutted it, just 'cause. The people who lived here got rid of their own stuff.  It been

178

mostly done collectively. Unfortunately, I'd say the collective identity—you know it's just—me being the landlord—is just not a role that I wanted to have but I did bottom line things. I notice this when someone buys a house; there were all these collective houses all over the country then someone buys the house, a lot of people move in and it sort of functions like the same anarcho-collective house for awhile but then that person kind of settles down and it sort of changes the dynamic. I don't like that. The goal was here for us to collectively make decision and be collectively responsible but ultimately when I was the only one who had to sign on the bottom line, I made sure the insurance got paid, when we were short on rent I'd scrounge the money up personally. So I think the new dynamic really fostered a different experience of the space to some extent and in some ways I encouraged it because I didn't want this to just be a punk rock hub moving forward. I wanted it to be a bigger thing than I thought it could be and that wasn't always palatable for people who identify as punk rockers and wanted a punk rock space. To me that wasn't the most important goal anymore. Ultimately, I'd like to see this building be what it was supposed to be: top two floors cooperative housing, self governed, collectively run, and be officially a co-op for purposes of like, you know. This building, number one, needs some major renovations so those have to be done and, two, it needs some safety features, fire escape and so on. I don't really care about legality and code except where it affects quality of life. I don't think this building is long-term sustainable this way. Sure, actually tons of people could come and go in here for the next fifty years and maybe it will fall down eventually but I would like to see a sustainable method like what we were talking about in 2005.

As I have explored the anarchist values and commitments that have animated the Nowe Miasto project, I will now take a moment to consider some of the contradictions and entanglements mentioned in Bran's narrative. Of three primary cases, Nowe Miasto, the Iron Rail, and Community Kitchen, it was Nowe that seemed the most challenged by its entanglement in the two realms of value, capital market and gift. While anarchists seek to contract a new world they are often vary much tangled up in the present one. Impulses for solidarity and mutual aid are stymied by the imperatives imposed by impersonal market forces and state bureaucracy.

As much as anarchists reorganize and create new social relations they also remain entangled in alienated relations of state and capital. "…the one thing the immediate, day-to-day experience of people trying to create alternatives really brings home is the degree to which almost everything, in America, is surrounded by endless and intricate government regulation,"

179

(Graeber 2009: 282). Graeber illustrates this point by recounting the dilemmas that arose after someone gave a car to NYC Direct Action Network (DAN), a collective heavily involved in the Global Justice Movement. "We quickly discovered that a 'DAN car' was basically a legal impossibility. In the eyes of the law, a car must have an owner. That owner is normally presumed to be an individual, not a collectivity," Graeber (2009: 282) notes. He goes on to note that, of course, the collective could have incorporated as a non-profit in order to own the car but for various reasons they decided not to. Instead, the members of DAN just decided to informally hold the car collectively, but formally sign the title over to a single member who would then be the point person for the 'DAN Car Working Group.' But as Graeber notes this too held its share of entanglements, chiefly in regards to formal legal "responsibilities" and consequences falling only on the car's formal owner. As legal entanglements developed, the collective increasingly treated the car as if it belonged to its formal owner. Because of this and other problems the group eventually abandoned the collective car project. "What is true of a car or boat is, of course, even more true of a building," Graeber explains. This was certainly the true in the case of Nowe Miasto but before moving to discussing the particular systemic entanglements of Nowe Miasto it is worth noting Graeber's analysis of this and similar situation that confronts most anarchists collective in one way or another:

> Government regulations essentially enforce a certain model of society, in which individual actors or hierarchically organized companies seek profits, and anyone who wishes to organize themselves differently—around any sort of conception of common good—needs to either be part of the state apparatus, or to register with it as a nonprofit corporation. In theory, every aspect of 'civil society' is so regulated. Basically, the only areas that are entirely off-limits to this sort of regulation backed by force are communicative ones: speech, discussion in meetings, exchanges on the internet, etc. As soon as one enters the world of material objects, regulations abound. And the larger, heavier, and more visible the objects, the more those regulations tend to be enforced. The obvious result is to leave people with the feeling that radical politics is unrealistic
>
> [2009: 284]

I quote here at length because this description meshes so well with my own ethnographic involvement with Nowe Miasto. Ironically, just as Nowe Miasto may have been the most challenged by economic and bureaucratic entanglements of the three projects I was involved with, alternatively it, in many ways, represented the most daring radical vision.

**Discussion: punk rock, cultural intervention through a Situationist lens**

After I had left the field and began to reflect on my interviews and field notes I began to better understand meanings and value generated within the creative social universe of Nowe Miasto. The place was imbued with a rich and storied history. It was a major hub for punk music in it early days. It provided shelter for hundreds of artists, musicians, poets, and writers of fiction and non-fiction over its career. Nowe was not simply a space but its history transformed it into meaningful place, a place of value and collective memory. These aspects were ultimately inextricable from the physically reality of the place. The words and images that covered the walls spoke to many of the values that brought Nowe Miasto into existence in the first place.

"Revolutionary code of ethics #2: Share things like your suppers" (figure 6.2).

I noticed this statement lettered onto a small woodcut style illustration. The image, heavy black ink over a faded yellow base, depicts two people seated around a small table and sharing a meal. A shelf loaded with books or perhaps vinyl record albums is noticeable in the background. I noticed the image posted on a wall at Nowe Miasto not long after I moved in.

I discovered another piece which read, "Revolutionary code of ethics #1: don't tell other people's secrets!" I asked a few of my housemates about the origin of these pieces but no one could remember where the pieces came from or who made them. This was hardly surprising

181

because, as I have explained, Nowe was filled with artwork of varying shapes, sizes, and materials. The particular pieces I described were simply part of a collective architectural and spatial discourse that was Nowe Miasto (figure 6.3).

The pieces embody several themes that I have developed. They suggest the value of generosity within the anarchist milieu and express it as a form of revolutionary ethics. The anachronistic woodcut style of the illustration suggests a kind of folk aesthetic sensibility. The shelf in the background loaded with literature or music or both is suggestive of a more general concern with art suffusing anarchist cultural sensibilities.

Punk rock has had a profound and undeniable influence on contemporary anarchist aesthetics. Punk has also been an incredible vehicle for the spread of anarchist political ideas amongst generations of young people from the 1970s onward. Any discussion of anarchism and art must acknowledge the significance of punk rock to anarchism over the last forty years.

In fact, punk rock has so successfully propagandized anarchist ideas that in popular consciousness punk and anarchism are often synonymous. However, though entangled, anarchism is not reducible to punk rock. Taken simply in its North Atlantic political form, anarchism predates punk rock by nearly two centuries. Indeed, the development of politically oriented punk was itself influenced by radical anti-authoritarian political currents. The Situationist International stands out as a significant influence on both punk rock (Berger 2009: 33; Robb 2012) and post-1968 anarchism.

The Situationist International was an international network of radical anti-authoritarian activists. The core group was primarily based in France. Guy Debord was among their most innovative theorists, or strategists. The Situationists were at a confluence of autonomous Marxist and anarchist political currents. The Situationist saw themselves as political revolutionaries but

for them the terrain of struggle was cultural. This new terrain of struggle called for new strategies and tactics of semiotic intervention against the normative hegemonic regimes of everyday life.

### *Cultural Intervention: the strategy and tactics of the Situationist International*

To understand the Situationist International and its influence on the development of punk and anarchism it will be helpful to rely on few of the movement's key concepts as recorded in first issue of the journal *Internationle Situationiste* (Debord 2006 [1958]: 51-53]). These key concepts include *détournement*, *situations*, *dérive*, and *psychogeography*.

D*étournement* is a form of radical praxis. The Situationists defined *détournement* as, "[t]he integration of present or past artistic productions into a superior construction of a milieu. In this sense there can be no Situationist painting or music, but only a Situationist use of those means." (Knabb 2006: 52). Here *détournement* appears as a kind of (mis-)appropriation of existing media and its subversive reconstruction. "In a more elementary sense, *détournement* within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which reveals the wearing out and loss of the importance of those spheres" (Knabb 2006: 52). *Détournement* is a radical cultural intervention that appropriates existing cultural forms, particularly mass commoditized cultural images and music, and subverts them in order to reveal the contradictions and alienation within the social relations they represent and mediate.

This relates directly to another significant concept: the situation. A core aim of the movement was to construct *situations*, an activity that they define as, "[a] moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events" (Knabb 2006: 51-52). The praxes of *dérive* and *psychogeography* round out our survey of Situationist terminologies of praxis. The latter is closely connected to the former:

183

the Siutationists defined *dérive* as, "[a] mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. The term also designates a specific uninterrupted period of dériving," and *psychogeography* is defined as, "[t]he study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behavior of individuals" (Knabb 2006: 51-52). This selection does not in anyway exhaust Situationist terminology but, taken together, *détournement, situation*, *derive*, and *psychogeography* constitute a radical and critical methodology of cultural intervention.

The Situationists interventions were aimed at undermining what they saw a banal alienated consumerist society. "In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation," Guy Debord (2005 [1967]: 1) wrote, stating the first thesis of his classic text *The Society of the Spectacle*. Discussions of the Situationists seem to begin and end with the analysis of *The Society of the Spectacle* but the Situationists were direct actionists and any discussion of the theory of the spectacle must understand its relationship to practice.

With his fourth thesis, Debord (2005 [1967]) states that, "[t]he spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people mediated by images" (1), and Debord summarized the spectacle as "separation perfected" (2005 [1967]: 1). The theory of the spectacle is an application of Marx's theory of alienation. It aims to reveal the antagonistic relationship between the commoditized image, the commodity as representation of life, as opposed to life actually lived. For the Situationists, alienation fractures society and culture in many dimensions with, as Plant (2002) explains, "…the consequence that people are removed and alienated not only from the goods they produce and consume, but also from their own experience, emotions,

184

creativity, and desires" (1). The Situationists developed their tools of cultural intervention

against the pervasive alienation of the spectacle. Their efforts can be viewed as an expansion and

elaboration of the older anarchist notion of "propaganda by the deed." The Situationists sought to

destabilize and subvert bourgeois norms and expectations through a kind of semiotic direct

action.

Here it is worth returning to a consideration of the group's early journal, *Potlatch*. As

mention in chapter five, the titular *Potlatch* referenced the antagonistic gift exchange made

famous by Marcel Mauss (1992 [1925]) in his work on the gift. The Situationist developed a

radical approach to Maussian theory of the gift. Martin (2012) observes that, "…in particular

their development of Mauss's theory of the gift as a revolutionary weapon to be directed against

'commodity enslavement', was, despite its rhetorical militancy, more nuanced than many

contemporary developments of Maussian theory within the academy" (125). Martin (2012)

provides a detailed discussion of the attentions given to the Maussian gift by the Situationists.

The Situationists recognized the practice of the gift as capable of—by way of contrast—

revealing and potentially undermining alienation of capitalist commodity relations. In other

words, "[f]or the Situationists, the gift functioned simultaneously as a message from humanity's

past, a vision of its future once a society of material plenty was freed from the yoke of economic

rationalism and, most crucially, a tool to be used to remove that yoke in the present" (Martin

2012: 130).

Of course, the Situationists did not invent the relationship between the gift and radical

politics. This relation is far too historically diffuse to pin on the Situationists. For instance,

despite their recognized influence on the development of punk rock, it is difficult to establish

with any certainty that the gifting traditions such as free shows and the exchange of free 'zines

within punk rock communities has any direct relation to the Situationist analysis of the gift. Nevertheless these practices highlight a tendency within the anarchist punk milieu, a tendency that the Situations attempted to develop as a radical political critique and intervention into cultural meanings and values.

"Look, I am not a philosopher, I am a strategist," Guy Debord once exclaimed, according to an anecdote related by his friend, renowned philosopher, Giorgio Agamben (2005). Before Debord's correction, Agamben had just finished complimenting him on his capabilities as a political philosopher. Though Debord was a lifelong student of classical military strategy, the form of strategy he and his fellow Situationists adopted moved in a radically new direction. For Debord, the terrain of struggle was that of semiotics, meanings, and values. Under the heading *The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Politics or Art,* Debord articulated the Situationists' strategic vision:

> The situationist movement manifests itself simultaneously as an artistic avant-garde, as an experimental investigation of the free construction of daily life, and finally as a contribution to the theoretical and practical articulation of a new revolutionary contestation. From now on, all fundamental cultural creation as well as any qualitative transformation of society is indissolubly linked to the further development of this unitary approach
>
> <div align="right">[2002 [1963]: 159]</div>

The Paris uprising of May 1968 seemed to support Debord's strategic thesis. The famous revolutionary street art seemed to testify to the Situationists' influence. Revolutionary slogans decorated the walls along Parisian streets, slogans such as "all power to the imagination," which, of course, is a *détournement* of Lenin's famous phrase "all power to the Soviets."

"Run comrade, the old world is behind you," "beauty is in the street," and other pithy slogans indicated the new terrain of radical struggle. Today the approach pioneered by the

Situationists and other similar groups have become common, even fundamental aspects of radical strategy and tactics.

In a sense the Situationists represent the end of a cycle of struggles that began in the 19th century and the beginning of a new cycle of struggles that have been renewed in recent years, but one should not make too much of historic breaks with the past. Taking 1968 as a convenient symbolic point of reference, it is clear that something did change. Radicals in Italy talked of the "proliferation of struggles" beyond the classical capitalist factory and later sociologists of social movements wrote of "the new social movements," of minorities, youth, women, environmentalism, and so on (Melucci 1996).

Nowe Miasto was entangled in the logic of capitalist housing market and state bureaucracy from its birth as an anarcho-punk collective, but it has also been entangled in the logic of the gift. As mentioned above, it was a gift that allowed Nowe to become more autonomous and after Hurricane Katrina. It was the gifted labor and monetary gifts that allowed Nowe to begin the slow process of rebuilding. Over the years, Nowe had given the gift of its shelter and support to artists of all kinds and in its post-Katrina hour of need its gifts were returned to it. The logic of the gift pervaded Nowe in other, perhaps, even deeper ways as well. Lewis Hyde (1983) argued that art itself corresponds to the logic of the gift. Of course, Hyde relies on the notion of the "gifted" artist to make his point but he goes beyond this creative internal aspect of the artist's personality. He extends his analysis of art and gift beyond its maker's individual impulse to create and to the level of social relations. "That art that matters to us – which moves the heart, or revives the soul, or delights the sense, or offers courage for living, however we choose to describe the experience – that work is received by us as a gift is received," Hyde (1983: xiv) observes.

187

But, of course, art and the gift are today often entangled in the logic of the capitalist market as well. And this is a key dilemma, which Hyde reckons with throughout his analysis. "How, if art is essentially a gift, is the artist to survive in a society dominated by the market," Hyde (1983) asks (278). He posits three survival strategies: 1) taken second jobs; 2) find a patron; or 3) use the proceeds from the artwork to support oneself. Of the three strategies Nowe Miasto represents a radical elaboration of the first. Nowe Miasto and the anarchist milieu in which it existed allowed everyone involved to reduce the time they spent in the formal economy "making a living" and working for a wage, and enabled them to devote that extra time to the pursuit of their creative interests. Everyone at Nowe held a waged job of one kind or another but Nowe certainly offered greater freedom than a conventional rental situation.

**Conclusions**

This chapter proceeded through several narrative steps. Beginning with an account of the first house I lived in during my stay in the city. My ethnographic narrative then progressed from my initial introduction to Nowe Miasto to an account of a typical Monday evening dinner at Nowe. Along the way I introduced and profiled my housemates. Through detailed interview data with on of Nowe Miasto's original founders I provided an account of the house's history. Nowe was I also pointed out the entanglements with state and market that Nowe Miasto's collective had to navigate. Drawing on the thought of Guy Debord and the work of the Situationist International I then developed a theoretical discussion that considered Nowe Miasto as a site of radical cultural intervention and reproduction.

This was, however, not without its antinomies. The relationship between anarchist housing spaces and the state varies from one housing collective to another. Though the term

"squat" has a variety of meanings but it often refers to highly informal housing that, in regards to the legal system, amounts to illegal occupations of privately property, often abandoned buildings. However, squats and collective spaces range along a spectrum. Each collective must to decide what level of engagement with the state and capital it will have.

Even though Nowe Miasto's founders were committed anarchists and punks they decided to adopt a more formal legal stance toward their occupation of Nowe Miasto. Squats and collective spaces that begin and remain completely underground live a precarious existence and the threat of discovery and forcible eviction always exists. It is not unusual for long-term projects to opt for formal engagement with the state and private property in order to reduce potential threats from those entities. However, entanglements with the state and capital often create their own sets of problems and threats that can undermine a housing collective just as much as police raids. Nowe walked a fine balance. It had not found a perfect solution.

In this chapter I showed the ways in which Nowe Miasto manifested a radical commitment to artistic freedom and creativity, operating as an enduring and practical space of cultural intervention. I explored the logic of this sort of intervention by drawing on the insights provided by analyses of strategic cultural praxis of the Situationist International in relation to anarcho-punk culture.

Figure 6.1 Exterior of Nowe Miasto

Figure 6.2 Nowe Miasto artwork: ink print on paper.

Figure 6.3 Nowe Miasto artwork: spray paint on aluminum sheet.

# CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSIONS: OF ANTHROPOLOGY, ANARCHISM, AND VALUE(S)

Questions of value and value's relation to anarchist political practice have been central to this ethnography. Theorizing this relation in terms of an anarchist value system, New Orleans' anarchist milieu has comprised the empirical focus of this ethnography. My primary research questions asked three related questions of value and its relation to anarchist praxis. It is worthwhile here to review my primary research questions:

> Q1: How do activists operating in the urban setting of New Orleans *produce and articulate alternative systems of value and governance* within the broader contexts of New Orleans and US society?
>
> Q2: How are physical spaces, social networks/affinity networks, and values associated with the production of alternative urban space in New Orleans?
>
> Q3: How does the existence of alternative space and alternative institutions sustain individual and community in the context of New Orleans?

Questions of value have been central to anthropology (Mauss 1990 [1925]; Malinowski 2002 [1922]) since the disciplines earliest days. Value has also been a central concern of political economy (Marx 1990 [1869]) and ethical and moral philosophy (Meyer 2008: 1). To slightly paraphrase Graeber (2013: 225), I define value as the way the significance of our own creative activities becomes real to us by being realized in some socially recognized form that is simultaneously material and symbolic. Throughout this ethnography I have also employed the McMurty's (1998: 7) commensurate concept of value system, which "…connects together goods that are affirmed and bads that are repudiated as an integrated way of thinking and acting in the

193

world." The questions above get at the ways in which this integrated way of thinking and acting operates with New Orleans anarchist milieu.

To organize, structure, and guide my research efforts I developed a methodological synthesis of the ethnographic extended case method (Burawoy 1998) and critical realism (Bhaskar 2008; 2009 [1986]). Significant to this methodology is the idea of reflexivity, dialogue, and dialectics. The methodology is ground in an ontology of relationalism: an understanding of the social world that takes the reality of social relationships as a starting point for empirical investigation and theoretical abstraction. My methodology requires reflexivity and, through the intervention of empirical data, aims toward the reconstruction of existing theory.

Because a core feature of ethnography is the exegeses of socio-cultural meaning and process (Herbert 2000) theory construction and reconstruction focused on key concepts and social categories within anarchism that denote significant features of its value system as this guided and made meaningful practices. These categories included solidarity, mutual aid, autonomy, gift among other lesser categories.

Empirically I focused on four field sites within the city's anarchist milieu. I treated these sites as interrelated case studies. They included accounts of an anarchist people of color (APOC) convergence, the Iron Rail Lending Library and Bookshop, Community Kitchen, a food justice collective, and Nowe Miasto, a collective living space. However, preceding these chapters I developed a selective ethnohistocial account of New Orleans' radical history.

The second chapter's focus on the radical history of New Orleans contributed to my overall research aims by contextualizing and historically deepening the contents of the ethnographic present. By honing in on historical events and processes that were salient within the present ethnographic milieu this chapter revealed historic significations already existing within

the anarchist milieu. I used the lens of radical history to reveal values and disvalues in the ethnographic present. This chapter two also signal certain historic tensions that persist in the space of the city's anarchist milieu. As I showed throughout this ethnography, but particularly in chapter's two and three, race remains a crucial alienating fault line within New Orleans' anarchist milieu.

The third chapter concerned the Anarchist People of Color (APOC) convergence, the third held since 2003. The first was organized in Detroit and the second convergence took place in Philadelphia. This third convergence in New Orleans was titled: *The APOCalypse: Survival Strategies for the New Millennium*. Contemporary anarchism is committed to an anti-racist or anti- white supremacist ethico-political struggle and social project. This is not to suggest, however, that anarchists, individually or collectively, have managed to disentangle themselves from a white supremacist habitus cultivated throughout the North Atlantic socio-cultural system.

The contemporary anarchist movement in North America is primarily white and generally anti-racist. A great deal of energy is often expended within the movement to analyze and critic racist politics and internalized racism. Because of its both personal and systemic dimensions the concept of white privilege generates a significant amount analysis, critique and interpersonal dialogue.

The social and political category of *anarchist people of color* (APOC) is potentially problematic. In terms of movement identity it might obscure as much as it reveals. Anarchist people of color are not homogenous but rather highly diverse. This raised the issue of identity politics. And in this literature identity politics is often dismissed as less "real" than mainline institutional party politics or more radical considerations of class struggle. However, this

tendency to dismiss identity politics as "cultural" and ephemeral is untenable if one takes the generative power of social relationships seriously.

The social relationships expressed in terms of social identity are "real" generative mechanisms that produce concrete social reality; it is the relationship between social being and social knowledge. Identity is not simply "in someone's head." Nor is identity only a matter of group consciousness disembodied from historical conditions or social structure. Instead identity must be understood as a dialectic of structure and agency, a transformative open praxis, a process, a project of resistance and mutual creation. "In other words, practices, material constructions and systems of meanings are reciprocally confirming" (Sayer 1992: 33).

In chapter three I focused my discussion on the concept of solidarity and its relationship to identity. I reconstructed the concept of solidarity as a form of intersectional strategy. Classically solidarity had been thought to arise from conditions of commonality. I argued that in addition to commonality solidarity also depends on the strategic navigation of difference. I drew upon the theoretical approach developed by radical feminism of color to theorize solidarity as an intersectional strategy. The theory of intersectionality in its non-strategic form indicates the differential experience of multiple structures of oppression as they intersect in subject's lives. In its strategic form intersectionality views the differentials of subject's identity and lived experiences as potential grounds for politically constructing solidary coalitions. The strategic form of intersectionality is built through interpersonal and inter-movement dialogue and planning. I argued that APOC Convergence and its emphasis on strategic dialogue among diverse identities was a practical enactment of this strategic intersectionality.

Chapter four focused on the Iron Rail Lending Library and Bookshop as a site of autonomy. This autonomy took on a couple of different concrete forms. Drawing on interview

data and my own observational and participatory experience I focused on the circulation of goods and services within New Orleans' anarchist milieu, within which the Iron Rail comprised a nexus of crosscutting relationships. I argued that local anarchists were practically enacting forms of exchange that are not based on the logic of accumulation but are rather based on values of generosity and mutual aid. This ties directly into the project of autonomy within the city anarchist milieu. If the previous section demonstrated the negative critique of capitalism, then this section is meant to showcase general initiative within the milieu to construct a practical critique based in the values of generosity and autonomy.

The chapter considered the anarchist project of autonomy as a form of prefigurative politics, a politics wherein means and ends commensurate. This is significant because its addresses Section five provides an ethnographic account of the weekly organizing meeting of the Iron Rail Book Collective. Enacting directly democratic processes of consensus-based decision-making is a materialization of the value of autonomy. Autonomy appears as a core structuring value within New Orleans anarchist milieu. All anarchist collectives in New Orleans operated on some form of consensus process so understanding the relationship between autonomy and consensus is key to role of value within the milieu.

My discussion of the Iron Rail focused on the relationship between the Iron Rail Collective's practices and the wider notion of autonomy as expressed in anarchist discourse in contrast to the alienating social relations entailed in capitalism. In this chapter I demonstrated that autonomy constitutes a core value within anarchism's value system and is dialectically entangled in the logic of the gift. I demonstrated the ways in which anarchism's praxis of autonomy shares features with ancient eudaimonic conception of the good life. From this I showed how European anarchism and liberalism emerged from the social conditions of the

enlightenment and subsequently diverged authoritarian and anti-authoritarian lines. I critically

analyzed Kant's philosophical notion of autonomy and demonstrated how it functioned as both a

myth of social origins and as a justificatory ideology arising from the conditions of the emerging

bourgeois social order of Kant's day.

The chapter demonstrated the ways in which anarchism expounds a counter-discourse or

counter-praxis of autonomy that represent as alternative take on Western modernity. This is

rooted in an anarchist value system that prizes autonomy as both theory and practice, as praxis. I

showed how this value of autonomy was fundamental to Iron Rail Collective's practice of

consensus decision-making and using extended quotes from interview participants demonstrated

the value of autonomy held by individual collective members. I considered how the logic of the

gift is entangled in the anarchist practice of autonomy as they are both realized in forms of

primary sociality. I showed that the anarchist value of autonomy means valuing an

intersubjective conception of freedom that is enacted in consensus process. This prefigures the

kinds of autonomous social relations anarchist struggle to proliferate across the social field.

Chapter five considered the activities of Community Kitchen, a small food justice

collective. I detailed the weekly practice of distributing free food in difference sites around the

city. These actions were understood by participants not just in terms of feeding the hungry but as

a practical critique of a system that denies food as a basic human right, the most basic right to

live. I described the relationship Community Kitchen has with both the radical and non-radical

community in New Orleans. Community Kitchen has played an important infrastructural role

within New Orleans' radical milieu. It is common practice for Community Kitchen to provide

food services at radical events and gathers and how this furthers the autonomy and solidarity

within the radical milieu and can be understood as an enactment of the "spirit of giving," as one key interview participant noted.

This chapter opened with an ethnographic vignette of an incident that occurred during an afternoon of serving homeless folk around the city. This vignette illustrates some of the interpersonal and systemic dynamics that Community Kitchen participants encounter and must navigate as they actualize their project of de-commoditized food access.

Drawing on interview data this chapter developed an account of Community Kitchen's origins. This narrative of origins provided insight into the values and political commitments that guided the struggles of participants and organizers for greater food access for the population in the city of New Orleans. The chapter also developed an account and general overview of Community Kitchens operations drawn from my direct participation working with the group. I provided an ethnographic description of the social milieu existing around one of Community Kitchen's primary public serving areas, Duncan Plaza.

The chapter developed a theoretical discussion of Community Kitchen that considered the relationship between the collective's project of food de-commodification and anthropological considerations of the gift as a form of radical political praxis. While Community Kitchen is certainly entangled in the hegemonic capitalist economy, Community Kitchen does enact a form of solidary generosity as it perceived food as a right for everyone and takes steps, though small, to bring about the conditions for this right to be realized.

Chapter six focused on the Nowe Miasto housing collective and its project collective housing. This project constituted a radical and subversive artistic space of creative autonomy. I use the work of the Situationist International and the writings of Guy Debord to theorize the relationship between the artistic space of Nowe Miasto and the anarchist value of creativity and

autonomous aesthetic creation. I showed how this creative value was at the heart of the project from its start and how Nowe quickly became an underground hub for punk rock performance. I also describe how the living space within Nowe was in itself a project of artistic creation of place. I demonstrated how Nowe Miasto's very existence as a space of artistic autonomy functioned as a form a détournement, or as an appropriation and subversion of capitalist aesthetics and I also emphasized the ways in which Nowe Miasto was deeply entangled in and, yet, antagonistic to, capitalist relations of property and work.

Generally speaking, the relationship between anarchist housing spaces and the state varies from one housing collective to another. Though the term "squat" has a variety of meanings but it often refers to highly informal housing that, in regards to the legal system, amounts to illegal occupations of privately property, often abandoned buildings. However, squats and collective spaces range along a spectrum. Each collective must to decide what level of engagement with the state and capital it will have.

Even though its founders were committed anarchists and punks they decided to adopt a more formal legal stance toward the their occupation of Nowe Miasto. Squats and collective spaces that begin and remain completely underground live a precarious existence and the threat of discovery and forcible eviction always exists. It is not unusual for long-term projects to opt for formal engagement with the state and private property in order to reduce potential threats from those entities. As I will show, such entanglements often create their own sets of problems and threats that can undermine a housing collective just as much as police raids.

This chapter showed the ways in which Nowe Miasto manifested a radical commitment to artistic freedom and creativity, operating as an enduring and practical space of cultural intervention. I explore the logic of this sort of intervention by drawing on the insights provided

200

by analyses of strategic cultural praxis of the Situationist International in relation to anarcho-punk culture.

Anarchism has constituted the political "other" within Western modernity that seeks to "change the world without taking power" (Holloway 2010) I have shown some of the diverse ways in which anarchist and anarchism as a political philosophy have attempted to developed an emancipatory practice and how this practice is guided by a value system that stands opposed to the value system of the state and capital. I have demonstrated how this value is entangled in the logic of the gift and how autonomy, solidarity, and mutual aid are values that take on the concrete form of strategic practices in the daily life of New Orleans' anarchist milieu. I have innovatively developed this approach to ethnographic theory by reconstructing and combining complimentary methodological approaches of the extended case method's reflexive science in relation to the onto-epistemological concerns of critical realism.

Today anarchism is shaping society in ways not seen since the late $19^{th}$ and early $20^{th}$ century. The massive global movement against capitalist globalization and for global justice that erupted throughout the 1990s and early 2000s was strongly influenced by anarchism and now anarchism has returned to the global stage. In the wake of the crisis of finance capital that began to erupt in 2006 global uprisings against the imposition of austerity policy have demonstrated a strong anarchist bent. This is nowhere more visible than in the expressed commitment to forming popular assembles based in direct democratic participation. The General Assemblies of the Occupy Wall Street movement were just a local example of a widespread phenomenon of resurgent popular egalitarian democracy. By exploring and theorizing anarchism as a value system operative at the level of daily life of a small anarchist network in New Orleans,

Louisiana, this ethnography has brought to light value practices and struggles that are shaping the 21$^{st}$ century.

Value is a strange conceptual category. It contains at least three primary meanings: value in the traditional economic sense (i.e. the value of a rental property, for example), moral and ethical values, and value as meaningful relational contrast in the case of classical linguist analysis (Graeber 2005: 439). The borders between these meaning are not precise; they are entangled. Each of the primary questions above relate to each other with value as a connecting thread. In this ethnography I have been concerned with describing and theorizing key forms of value praxis within a local segment of the contemporary anarchist movement. Over the course of seven months of intensive fieldwork within New Orleans' anarchist milieu I was able to develop answers to my questions but the reflexive ethnographic process that I employed extended and deepened the concerns of the original questions. From my research autonomy, solidarity, gift, and alienation emerge as key conceptual categories of the anarchist value system that guide and structure the production of social space and anarchist institutions within the city of New Orleans.

Anarchism is a value system that affirms autonomy and repudiates alienation; this value system is expressed in anarchism's project of revolt against all forms of unjustifiable hierarchy at both a macro- and micro-social scale. Autonomy, solidarity, and mutual aid and forms of gifting are "value practices, …those actions and processes, as well as correspondent webs of relations, that are both predicated on a given value system and in turn (re)produce it" (De Angelis 2007: 24). The value system of anarchism stands opposed to the hierarchic value relations of the state and capitalism resulting in evaluative clashes or value struggles. Class struggle, struggle against white supremacy, feminist struggles against sexism, and the struggles over the environment and ecology are all value struggles because they are all struggles over what is and ought to be valued

202

in life. "Indeed, we could say that different value practices actually constitute the boundaries of systems of relations and that social conflict is the clash that occurs at the intersection between these boundaries" (De Angelis 2007: 30). These boundaries of value constitute social spaces that can be conceptualized as dialectically enmeshed territories of autonomy and alienation.

One of the great "values" of anarchism to anthropological study is that its offers insights into processes of socio-cultural transformation. By delving into the daily praxis of an anarchist milieu this ethnography has indicated some of the micro-processes of social change. I characterized this daily praxis as a value system, a relational system that dialectically combines thought and action. Throughout this ethnography I explicated several value categories encountered in the course of fieldwork, autonomy, solidarity and so on. I developed these value categories as indicative of certain social relations obtained within New Orleans' anarchist milieu and integrated through anarchism's overarching value system. It was through the practical enactment of these value categories that the social relations of the anarchist milieu were produced and reproduced. Of course, this reproduction does not happen in a social or historical vacuum. It is entangled in the hegemonic political economics processes of the wider society. This entanglement is antagonistic and dynamic. It is in this antagonistic entanglement that the opposition of value systems becomes most salient. Anarchists have been at the forefront of global struggles against the hegemony of neoliberalism. Anarchism will continue to shape and transform society in the coming years.

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**APPENDIX**

**METHODOLOGY, ETHNOGRAPHY & ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGY**

**Introduction**

I argue for the appropriateness of the extended case method for my dissertation field research. I note ethnography's history as a theory of description, often an unstated theory of description. Ethnography as a methodological ensemble of techniques for data collection is necessarily theory-laden. Recognizing this, I am motived to explicate the epistemological grounds undergirding my ethnographic methodology—a necessary first step in developing a reflexive ethnographic account of the situations encountered in the field. By doing so I develop the evaluative criteria for my methodological choices. My methodological raison d'être is grounded in the philosophy of science known as critical realism.

A critical realist approach to ethnography proscribes both scientistic objectivism and postmodern relativism; scientific realism prescribes reflexivity, a dialectical conception of social relations, and explanatory critique. Critical realism is a relatively broad category of philosophy. I focus almost exclusively on critical realism's concern with social science and the nature of the social. I call upon a variety of feminist and Marxist authors and sources as key interlocutors. First, I explore the history of ethnographic theory and theories of ethnography. Second, I examine scientific realism's epistemological claims and their importance to ethnographic methodology. Third, I move into a discussion of the extended case method proper. Fourth, I outline the primary data collection techniques used during the course of my ethnographic

215

fieldwork, participant observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, field note taking, and archival research. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a summary of the key points made throughout.

**Ethnographic theory and theories of ethnography**

Ethnographic methodology has been continually reinvented to meet the needs and purposes of each new generation of ethnographic researchers. This reinvention has not been limited to the simple addition or subtraction of particular data collection techniques; each ethnographic revision has entailed a new theory of ethnography, a new or altered epistemology. At any particular historical moment this epistemology has tended to be implicitly assumed rather than explicitly stated, "[n]ever mind the concepts, look at the techniques might be the slogan," as Andrew Sayer (1992: 2) observes. Yet, ethnography has involved theories of its own practice as much as it has involved techniques of gathering data (Nader 2011). Despite the presence of a certain naïve objectivism, or naïve empiricism, in the anthropological tradition, ethnography has always been more than the simple empirical observation of facts, their collection, and their written description. Laura Nader argues, "[e]thnography, whatever it is, has never been *mere* description. It is also theoretical in its mode of description. Indeed, *ethnography is a theory of description,*" Nader explains emphatically (2011: 211). What exactly this theory, epistemology, specifies has varied from one ethnographic school of thought to another. The important point Nader makes is that ethnography has always been theory-laden. Ethnographic observations are always already conceptually mediated (Sayer 1992: 51).

A core ensemble of techniques has tended to persist, the ethnographic interview, participant observation, field notes, a genre of written exposition, known doubly as ethnography.

It is worth noting that just as ethnography, as an ensemble of techniques, is not conceptually innocent, neither are its individual techniques. This more-or-less consistent technical core and its continual theoretical, epistemological, reconfiguration have given the ethnographic project something of a rough-and-ready experimental disposition, whether wholly acknowledged or not.

Nader's analysis of the historical condition of ethnography suggests ethnographic practice as something akin to Feyerabend's (2010) notion of methodological anarchism. Nader, like Feyerabend more generally, views the dynamic experimental force of ethnography as a positive aspect of its project of inquiry. Despite the concrete heterogeneity of ethnographic projects two underlying epistemological dispositions reveal themselves at the disciplinary level: an explicit or tacit positivistic objectivism and, in contrast, an implicit or stated reflexivity. The former disposition encouraged a detachment from the political field in which the ethnographic field site is embedded.

Scientific detachment was claimed as a way to shore up ethnography's objectivity and political neutrality. A particular understanding of "science" provided the grounds for acceptable ethnographic practice. "It is still easy to denigrate or to mark the boundaries of acceptable ethnography, even though it has been clear for a good long time now that science is not and cannot be politically neutral," as Nader (2011: 217) argues. Historically it seems that ethnography has lived a strange double life. Though a strong disciplinary emphasis on a rather narrow prescription for objective, politically neutral, science has been prevalent and often dominant, in practice ethnographic research has been varied and often rather informally experimental and politically engaged. Throughout the next subsection I layout my epistemological claims and commitments. The point of this is to make the case that ethnography represents a scientific methodology in its own right and provides a more appropriate

217

investigatory model of the social than approaches inspired by either positivistic scientism or postmodernism.

**Onto-Epistemology: scientific realism and dialectics**

What must the world, or at least *the social*, be like in order for ethnography to be possible? A slightly reformulated question might ask why is reflexive ethnography appropriate for the investigation of the social situations encountered in the course of my fieldwork? These questions are ontological and epistemological; the categories do tend to bleed into each other. After all, what we can know of the world, epistemology, depends on what the world is like, ontology. The unique capabilities of reflexive ethnography strongly recommend its methodology as a tool for the investigation of social reality. These capabilities will be outlined and specified in the next section. Here I will explore the ontological and epistemological grounds underwriting this methodological approach. In what follows I develop a critical realist account of the social in order to answer the question of the appropriateness of realist reflexive ethnography to the task of social research.

Historically, the reflexive turn in ethnography has been associated with and grounded in postmodern onto-epistemology, which ironically left it with few grounds—and little foundation—at all. The epistemology of fragmentation, anti-foundationalism, and, ultimately, anti-politics (Mascia-Lees et al 1989), is not the reflexive stance that I take in this ethnography. This is not to suggest that the epistemological questions posed by so-called postmodern theorists were unnecessary. In many ways they represented an important critique of an erstwhile dominant paradigm of scientistic positivism. However, while necessary critique in many respects, the seemingly endless inward spiral of postmodern reflexivity is insufficient. Postmodernism might

be characterized as a kind of "superidealism" (Collier 1994: 87), i.e. representation is only representation of itself (Davies 2002: 14).

In contrast, I develop a materialist, dialectical and reflexive methodology. Specifically I employ the methodological framework of the extended case method (Burawoy 1998) but I deepen it by developing its tacit or implicit ontological and epistemological claims. This is an approach that accepts the onto-epistemic condition that the world exists independently of our knowledge of it and yet because knowledge of the world is always theory-laden a materialist dialectical reflexivity, "…fully accepts its [ethnography's] inherent reflexivity while still maintaining that its products are explanations of an external social reality…" (Davies 2002: 17). Or, as Sayer (1992: 5) puts it, "[s]ocial phenomena such as actions, texts and institutions are concept-dependent. We therefore have not only to explain their production and material effects but to understand, read or interpret what they mean." This suggests the importance of ethnography's core concern with and attention to socio-cultural processes and meanings encountered in the field (Herbert 2000). Processes and meanings are so practically intertwined that we can speak of *meaningful processes*, a dialectic of meaning and action.

The Heraclitian maxim "nothing endures but change" indicates an enduring premise of dialectical onto-epistemology (Haxton 2001). Heraclitus is generally viewed as the founder of the so-called Western tradition of dialectics. Dialectical thought is, however, not confined to the West. One can find dialectical thought readily apparent in Hindu, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophical traditions. Along with the premise that change is a primary condition of the cosmos dialectics understands phenomena as constituted through relationships of mutual influence. *Relational change* is the cornerstone premise of dialectical onto-epistemology. Karl Marx developed his materialist dialectical approach through an inversion of Hegel's idealist one.

219

Contrary to popular opinion, and a great deal of academic misreading, Marx did not replace

Hegel's philosophy with a form of mechanical materialism. Marx was explicit in his rejection of

mechanical materialism:

> The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach
> included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the
> form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity,
> practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the
> *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism – which, of course, does
> not know real, sensuous activity as such.
>
> <div align="right">[1978: 144]</div>

Marx places human creative activity—practice and subjectivity—at the forefront of his

materialist and dialectical mode of investigation. This dialectical approach marks out socio-

cultural reality as an *open* totality of ever changing and mutually constitutive relationships. This

is the dialectical approach that I utilize and develop in my research. Bourdieu (1977) recognized

Marx's formulation as foundational to his own reflexive methodology and dialectical conception

of practice, or praxis. Roy Bhaskar's (2008: 4) dialectical ontology argues that reality is,

"…structured, differentiated, and changing." The onto-epistemological view of reality as

structured, stratified, and dynamically emergent is a key postulate of critical realism. In terms of

stratification and structure we can talk of differentiated levels of reality each with their own

properties, powers and potentials, interdependent, but also uniquely irreducible to previous

levels, *emergent*. For instance, human society is only possible due to the existence of certain

physical, chemical, and biological processes but the powers and potentials of individuals and

those of society cannot be reduced to those of lower level processes. Though interdependent with

lower onto-levels, the social is structured and operates according to its own emergent principles.

This understanding of dialectics is a key premise of Bhaskar's (2008) critical realist

approach to the philosophy of science. As with Bourdieu (1977) Bhaskar's dialectical theory

overcomes the antinomies entailed in a one-sided adherence to the suppositions of methodological individualism and its opposite pole, deterministic structuralism. Bhaskar calls his theory of "transformative praxis" the "Transformational Model of Social Activity" (2008: 142). Social actors operate within and constitute the social. The implications Bhaskar's concept of the social for ethnographic research are such that:

> (i) all social life is embedded in a network of…*social relations*, and, more contentiously, (ii) that social relations constitute the paradigmatic subject-matter of social science and (iii) that social identities are constituted relationally…
>
> [2008: 144]

Bhaskar's "transformative praxis" can be understood as operating in the overlapping center of these three relational aspects of social life. As Collier (1994) points out relational dialectics transcend the dualism of individual atomism and deterministic structuralism. These two propositions tend to comprise two exclusive epistemological poles. Methodological individualism tends toward an exclusion of structure and deterministic structuralism tends toward an exclusion of agency below the level of group or collectivity. This is not to suggest that these two epistemologies are completely false: rather, in Marxist terminology, they are *one-side*. Explaining the problematic nature of this one-sidedness, Collier notes that, on the one hand, actions are posited without conditions and, on the other hand, conditions are posited without actions (1994: 145). A scientific realist approach such as that developed in Bhaskar's Transformational Model of Social Activity synthetizes and sublates the two one-sided epistemologies, complicating crude linear models of individual-society relations. The individual reproduces the structures of society (often unconsciously) and is capable of transforming them (often consciously); society is simultaneously the material condition for human activity and the unfolding result of that activity (Collier 1994: 145-146).

221

Bhasker's second and third arguments that, "…social relations constitute the paradigmatic subject-matter of social science…" and that "…social identities are constituted relationally…" is also developed independently in Bourdieu's reflexive approach to social theory. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 15) uses the term *methodological relationism* to describe this approach. Befitting the dialectical commitments of both Bhaskar and Bourdieu, theirs is a conceptual optic that views social phenomena, even human subjectivity, as bundles of relationships. It is an onto-epistemological premise that I embrace in my research as well. This relational methodology, of course, entails its own problems, just as it transcends previous ones. If every social phenomenon is understood as a bundle of relations, then an obvious problem of boundary distinction arises. If everything bleeds into everything else, like a dripping watercolor landscape, then how can an ethnographic researcher say anything about *any thing*?

Bertell Ollman (2003) suggests a solution to the problem of relational boundaries in his reconstruction of Marx's method of abstraction. Three modes of analytical abstractions appear useful: abstraction by a) extension; b) level of generality; and c) vantage point (Ollman 2003: 175-176). Abstraction by extension deals with space and time, the duration, of the relations under investigation. Abstraction by level of generality is concerned with segmentation from the most particular to the most general features of the relations under investigation. Finally, the abstraction of vantage point considers what perspective of the relations under investigation should be privilege. What all of these techniques of abstractions do is to conceptually parse a fluid social reality. I also want to note that, for reasons that I will make explicit later in this section, this last form of abstraction stands very close to the feminist conception of standpoint theory. Abstractions of the kinds stated above play a central role in my research process, as

222

opposed to standard generalization. Case studies do not lend themselves to generalizable results, at least in regard to the idea of generalization as stating law-like regularities.

The extended case method answers this apparent problem with its focus on the reconstruction of theory through the findings of case research and I will discuss this in detail later in this section but here I want to explore the methods of abstraction, methods that allow for the reconstruction of theory prescribed by the extended case method. My account of abstractions follows closely that of Sayer (1992) and, as already noted, Ollman (2003). Abstractions can be *substantial*, specifying relations of interaction and connection. *Formal* abstractions, on the other hand, designate relations of similarity or dissimilarity, a standard pathway to producing generalizations. Substantial abstractions are a key technique of structural analysis, structures defined as sets of internally related objects (Sayer 1992: 92). The notion of internal relations is important for further discussion of the techniques of abstraction and for onto-epistemological accounts of stratification and emergence.

Internal relations can be understood as relations between objects that presuppose each other and are thus mutual defined by their relation. Internal relations mark objects (relations) as interdependent and mutual constitutive. Of course, this mutual constitution does not have to exist symmetrically or harmoniously. Asymmetry and contradiction, or antagonism, are common aspects of internally related structural processes. Internal relations can be juxtaposed to external relations, interaction between objects that exist independently of each other and are thus not mutually constitutive. Sayer (1992: 89) uses the terms *necessary* and *contingent* more-or-less interchangeably with the terms *internal* and *external*, respectively. Again, a relationship of mutual constitution or, alternatively, independent existence is indicated by the use of these terms.

The onto-epistemology of internal/necessary and external/contingent informs realist notions of causation, stratification, and emergence.

Critical realism conceives causation in terms of powers and potentials and not necessarily in terms of a temporal sequence of discrete events (i.e. cause and effect). Bhaskar (2008: 98) uses the term *mechanism* to refer to causative powers and potentials. Marx preferred the term *tendency*. Going forward I follow Marx's use of the term *tendency* rather than Bhaskar's *mechanism*. I prefer tendency because it has more of a fluid and organic connotation and less of a mechanical one. This view recognizes causative powers as existing in potential whether or not they are actually employed. As Sayer points out, "…a causal claim is not about a regularity between separate things or events but about what an object is like and what it can do and only derivatively what it will do in any particular situation" (1992: 105). Causality is conceived as a form of necessary action arising from an object's particular constitutive internal relations. Causation is also a matter of contingency as well as internal necessity. In a relational, dialectical, sense causation will often depend on contingent conditions, or contexts. The relevance of all of this to my research is that it provides onto-epistemological grounds for the scientific virtue of the ethnographic case study. The techniques of substantial abstraction plays a larger role, and more appropriate role than the search for formal generalization and causation can be addressed appropriately through the analysis (abstraction) of necessary and contingent relations. This leads to another key concept of scientific realism: emergence.

Emergence can be understood as the modification of objects powers and potentials by virtue of interrelation with other object's powers and potentials. This is because necessary, or internal, structural relations are recognized as mutually constitutive. When one object party to the relation changes this change modifies the existence of the rest of the structural relations as

224

well. New structural configurations of internal relations generate modifications of existing

powers and potentials produce emergence. As Sayer explains:

> Emergence can be explained in terms of the distinction between internal
> and external relations. Where objects are externally or contingently related
> they do not affect one another in their essentials and so do not modify their
> causal powers, although they may interfere with the effect of the exercise
> of these power. Mere aggregates…consist of externally-related individuals
> and hence lack emergent powers. …[i]n the case of internally-related
> objects, or structures such as that associated with our landlord-tenant
> relation, emergent powers are created because this type of combination of
> individuals modifies their powers in fundamental ways. Even though
> social structures exist only where people reproduce them, they have
> powers irreducible to those of individuals (you can't pay rent to yourself).
>
> [1992: 119]

This conception of internal relations and the dynamic of emergence brings into focus a key

concern of reflexive ethnography: objectivity. The reflexive consideration of objectivity has been

more-or-less tacit or implicit in my discussion thus far. Recognizing the theory-laden nature of

social relations, including that of the social relations entailed in the position of the ethnographic

researcher, raises important questions of objectivity. Reflexive researchers point out that even the

most "scientific" and conventionally "objective" social research practices, such as survey

research, can be shown to be theory-laden and value oriented (Herbert 2000; Davies 2002).

However, my concern here is to explicate a theory of objectivity that is most appropriate to my

ethnographic research project. Feminists theorists have lead the way toward a reconstruction of

the notion of objectivity in the philosophy of science. Positivism, on the one hand, and

postmodern relativism, on the other hand, challenged feminist theorists to innovate.


**Objectivity: strong and weak**

The reflexive approach to ethnography recognizes the presence of values at every level of

socio-cultural inquiry and this raises questions of objectivity. Again, the epistemology of

reflexive ethnography should not be confused with so-called postmodern relativism. Recognizing, however, the value-laden reality of social inquiry does complicate traditional scientistic and positivist notions of objectivity. Scientistic positivism prescribes an *aperspectivism*, a view from nowhere. Haraway (1988: 584) famously described it as, "the god trick." However, Haraway does not oppose relativism to objectivity. In fact, Haraway points out a deep affinity between objecitivsm and relativism. "Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspectives; both make it impossible to see well" (Haraway 1988: 584). For instance, scientistic positivism proscribes considerations of *context* as epistemologically useful.

Sandra Harding (1993) has forcefully challenged the standard equation of objectivity and value neutrality. She argues that value neutral science cannot exist and, at best, there is only a dangerous pretense of objectivity. This pretense is dangerous because it cloaks dominant value-laden cultural assumptions in neutralizing language of objectivism. Far from advocating postmodern relativism, Harding argues for a stronger version of objectivity more appropriate to the reality of the social, including the recognition of science as a social enterprise. She calls this approach "strong objectivity" and explains that it "…requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as objects of knowledge. Thus, strong objectivity requires what we can think of as 'strong reflexivity'" (1993: 69). Harding program of "strong objectivity" is tightly linked with the methodology of standpoint theory.

Standpoint theory begins with recognition of social inequity and how individual and collective practices, situations, within hierarchical societies both facilitate and limit knowledge (Harding 1995: 341). Administrative-managerial practices, including the institution of social science, are forms of rule that set priorities on certain kinds of knowledge and limit others. James

226

Scott's (1998) lengthy exploration of the synoptic administrative gaze of the state makes a similar point. On the other hand, the practices and knowledge of marginal groups do not share the same priorities as elites and thus their understanding of social reality takes a different standpoint. Standpoint theory shares a relational conception of society with other reflexive methodologies: it may start from a particular social standpoint but it does not end there. From, for example, the standpoint of working class African Americans analysis of the micro-politics of race as lived in America can proceed to a critical analysis of institutionalized white power. In this sense standpoint theory shares much in common with the extended case method as elaborated above. Here is where the standpoint epistemologies of strong objectivity contribute to the reflexive approach I have elaborated thus far.

Standpoint theory rejects naïve empiricism: it does not take the claims of whatever particular human standpoint at face value. The experience of marginal groups are important guides for asking critical questions but the answers must be connected to wider social realities. As Harding writes, "[h]owever, institutional power imbalances give starting off from the lives of those who least benefit from such imbalances a critical edge for generating theoretically and empirically more accurate and comprehensive accounts" (1995: 344). What are these macro-forces that are detectable through reflexive methodologies? In his various ethnographic works Burawoy has pinpointed capitalism, as a system of accumulation, as a crucial macro-force. Feminist standpoint theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2000) have elaborated four domains of power that constitute a matrix of oppression: 1) the structural domain; 2) the disciplinary domain; 3) the hegemonic domain; 4) the interpersonal domain (2000: 277-288). Harding writes, "this 'matrix theory'…enables us to think how each of us has a determinate social location in the matrix of social relations that is constituted by gender, class, race, sexuality and

227

whatever, other macro forces shape our particular part of the social order…" (1995: 344).

Standpoint theory aligns very well with the reflexive approach outlined by Burawoy (1998). The

matrix framework deepens and specifies Burawoy's conception of macro-social forces.


**Methodology: reflexivity and dialogue**

My data collection methodology grows out of the dialectical epistemology I elaborate

above, following Burawoy's (1998) model of reflexive science. I understand the model as a form

of praxis that combines theory and practice in a unitary approach to knowledge production. The

reflexive approach begins with negativity, criticism. Seeking to emulate positive models of

science ethnographers have often found themselves in a contradictory bind: the ethnography they

undertake and techniques they employ in the course of data collection tend to contradict key

tenets of positive models of science. This tension between technique and methodological

prescription is a productive tension because they point the way to more appropriate ethnographic

methods. The reflexive model develops out of this tension. Specifically four standard positivistic

prescriptions evince this tension and their negation points the way toward the reflexive

methodology. *Reactivity* should be avoided; *reliability* should be enhanced; *replicability* is

prioritized; and *representativeness* is the raison d'être. These all attempt to achieve or maintain

the status of a detached objective observer; this is a procedural distancing of the researcher from

the context of the ethnography. As Burawoy observes, "[w]here positivistic science proposes to

insulate subject from object, reflexive science elevates *dialogue* as its defining principle and

*intersubjectivity* between participant and observer as its premise" (1998: 14).Throughout the

course of my field research I took an antithetical approach to positivistic prescription wherein

engagement within the context of fieldwork rather than isolation from it took priority: context,

intersubjectivity, and dialogue were accepted and consciously developed. This was not simply a rejection of positivism but rather to allow for a richer process of data collection.

Context is a threat to all four of the prescriptions described above but it undermines them in methodological application in different ways as "context effects." The avoidance of reactivity is undermined by a) interview effects; b) respondent effects undermine reliability; c) field effects undermine replication; d) and situation effects threaten representativeness. These context effects are present in even paradigmatic examples of positivistic social research such as survey research (Burawoy 1998: 12). From a positivist perspective one can seek to reduce these effects by greater procedural isolation from the field site and subjects of study. A reflexive approach views the threats posed by context effects as virtues rather than vices; reflexivity turns positivism on it head and using its limitation as critical starting points for methodological design.

The unique power of ethnographic methodology is its capability for engagement with and analysis of meanings and socio-cultural processes (Herbert 2000). Meaning and social processes are, almost by definition, embedded in and produce social contexts. The reflexive approach accepts contexts as a starting point for ethnographic investigation. Context is not noise distorting reality but rather it is the reality that must be assessed (Burawoy 1998: 13). The limits of the positive program indicate a starting point for reflexive ethnography. The critique of the reactivity proscription advocates an acceptance of ethnographic a) *intervention* in the life-worlds of participants. The critique of respondent effects suggests attending to b) *process* within participant's life-worlds; and participant's situational knowledge is a key to exploring life-world processes. Situational knowledge can be conceptualized in two interrelated modes: discursive— or narrative—knowledge and non-discursive knowledge—or what Bourdieu (1977) calls practical consciousness. The critique of field effects suggests a concept of c) *structuration*

wherein the social situations encountered within the ethnographic context are understood as interconnected and, asymmetrically, conditioned by wider social forces. Finally, the reflexive methodology relies on the d) *reconstruction* of existing theory based on anomalies encountered in the field.

Whereas *context effects* disarticulate the relation between ideal model of positive science and its methodological application *power effects* play a similar role in reflexive science. Intervention, process, structuration, and reconstruction also have their own antinomies: *domination*, *silencing*, *objectification*, and *normalization* (1998: 22). *Domination*: fieldwork as a prolong power struggle between outsider and resisting insider. *Silencing*: by abstracting social situations into social processes some voices are excluded as other are highlighted, often along dominant ideological lines. Here *objectification* refers to the tendency toward viewing higher level social forces as all determining; these forces are objectified, or fetishized, as natural, stabile, and self-regulating. Objectification, or abstraction, is necessary but must not be taken for a static reality. *Normalization*: reconstruction of theory is potentially a coercive process of creating categories that may focus on power to the point of accepting it as normal and excluding contestation that does not fit within categorical boundaries (1998: 22-24).

**Sampling**

When considering sampling it is important to understand that the extended case method does not seek statistical representativeness. As Burawoy explains, "[i]nstead of inferring generality directly from data, we can move from one generality to another, to more inclusive generality" (1998: 16). Just as one black swan can falsify the claim that all swans are white so too can a unique case call into question existing theoretical generalization and this questioning can lead to

the extension, or "reconstruction" of existing theory. In other words, the extended case approach

achieves analytic generalization, rather than generalizations of populations (Kates 2006: 177). It

methodological particularities notwithstanding, the extended case method shares its approach to

analytic generalizations with most other forms of case based research. Yin explains, "[s]urvey

research relies on statistical generalization, whereas case studies (as with experiments) rely on

analytic generalization. In analytical generalization, the investigator is striving to generalize a

particular set of results to some broader theory…" (2009: 43).

### *Chain-referral sampling and convenience sampling*

Before entering the field there was no practical way to establish a sampling frame.

Unable to establish a list of all members of the anarchist community in New Orleans led me to

treat the population as a hidden population. I used index respondents to establish initial contacts.

Selection criteria was twofold: 1) a potential participant had to self-identify as either an anarchist

or an anti-authoritarian 2) potential participants had to be recognized by other members of the

anarchist or anti-authoritarian community.

### Data collection techniques

### *Participant Observation*

Ethnography is both an assemblage of data collection techniques and, through written

exposition, the result of those techniques. In this section I outline and explain the particular data

collection techniques I employed during the course of fieldwork and these include participant

observation, extensive field notes, informal interviews and discussions, semi-structured

interviews, and archival analysis with movement produced documents. Ethnographic

assemblages can be organized in many different ways, which are consistent with the research question being asked, and the guiding epistemology of the ethnographer.

I approached participant observation not as studying subjects but rather as an experiential learning process. I did not find "informants" in the field. I found teachers, participants and friends. Participant observation was not a passive learning process. To the contrary, it demanded a high degree of active engagement on my part. I approached participant observation as a *strategy of emplacement*, becoming part of the *place* of the field. By *emplacement* I mean that I not only actively developed and attended to relationships in the field but I increasingly took on a significant role in the activity surrounding the three networked field sites, slowly integrating into the life-worlds of my new friends and teachers.

Through participant observation I found myself in bewildering new cultural contexts, complex and shifting social relationships. Like most ethnographers the field is not created anew upon entering it. Instead I joined events already in progress, friendships, alliances, rivalries, and histories lingering and playing out in the ethnographic present. In order to bring some coherence to the dynamic welter of social situations I encountered in the field, I applied the three primary techniques of abstraction outlined by Ollman (1993; 2003): a) extension, b) level of generality, and c) vantage point. And, of course, these three techniques of abstraction contributed to and operate *within* the reflexively given methodological frameworks described above as *intervention*, *process*, *structuration*, and *reconstruction*. Each of these frames directed the application of the three abstractions in particular ways as they emerge from the empirics of the social situations I encountered. In other words, the use of techniques of abstraction provided a way to structure observation and make sense of participation.

***Fieldnotes***

Fieldnotes are the concrete form, the initial impression, and the first draft of situational abstractions within the contexts of the field. Recognized reflexively fieldnotes are always partial and incomplete because the experience in participant observation that leads to their production is always partial and incomplete. I wrote up notes at night in my room. I made no effort to make sure I got everything because that would be impossible. Instead I tried to preserve impressions of situations I encountered during the day and record and relate significant statements made by folk during informal and formal interviews. Some notes consist of single sentences and other go on for pages. Some notes comprise a string of observations and themes stretching over months and returned to often. Other notes are dead ends, never developing beyond the initial impression. In the course daily collection of notes I often relied on my smartphone's notepad application. This recommended itself because I always had my phone handy and I didn't have to remember to carry around additional notebooks and pens. I found using my smartphone to take extemporaneous notes far less socially awkward than pulling out a notepad to record participant's utterances or particular situations I encountered.

***Informal interviews***

Informal interviews almost always took the form of dialogue; rarely did my informal questioning remain unidirectional. I was often the focus of questions; at times challenging questions, questions that required me to reflect on my own position within the field site and the nature and aims of my research. Sometimes I initiated discussion with the specific intention of clarifying or addressing a particular question or concern that I had formulated. However, informal dialogue was often serendipitous; someone would make an offhand statement, piquing my curiosity, and lead me to ask questions and begin a dialogue that would then lead to further

questioning. At other times I joined in on discussions already in progress that then led me to formulate further questions. Beyond immediacies of data collection, informal interviews helped build and maintain rapport. I jotted down brief notes to remind me to follow up on questions or document the discussion in my nightly field notes but I never audio recorded any informal discussion; the presence of a recorder would have disrupted the flow of discussion, making discussants unnecessarily self-conscious and this would have decreased efficacy of building rapport. Informal interviews tended to be highly unstructured and often followed the flow—the ups and downs, the pauses and breaks, the interruptions, the contradictions and ambiguities—of convivial conversations. Following Fetterman (2010: 41) the distinction I drew between these informal dialogic interviews and regular conversation is that they involved a sustained effort on my part to uncover the meanings and values that informed participants actions and created particular contexts. This informal dialogue was crucial to almost every aspect of the research process; these little discussions formed the connective tissue within the framework of my overall methodology.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews. I conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with a duration of roughly an hour each. An interview script guided all semi-structured interviews; the interview script consisted of 8 sections with a total of 71 questions. Some questions proved redundant and were cut from the guide after a few interviews. In addition to each interview a brief questionnaire was offered to participants to complete immediately before or after the interview. The questionnaire collected basic demographic data from interview participants, employment status, age, income, preferred gender pronoun and so on. The questionnaire consisted of 7 headings concerns with preferred gender pronoun, age, education, employment, housing, income, and

social racial identity. I used a questionnaire in addition to semi-structured interviews because it provided a quick way to collect data on participants that would have seemed extraneous and perhaps distracting as interview questions. 37 out of 40 participants chose to take part in the questionnaire; however, not all participants chose to respond to every item. My first two semi-structured interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder that proved defective and I replaced it in all subsequent semi-structured interviews with my iPhone 3GS fitted with an external microphone and running iRig Recorder, a downloadable audio recording application. Before each semi-structured interview I provided participants with an informed consent document that had been approved by UGA's Institutional Review Board. All participants read and signed the document before beginning the semi-structured interview.

### *Archival research and movement literature*

The historiographical conception of an archive and archival research is far too limiting for ethnographic purposes. Public and private archives can be indispensible and, indeed, in the course of my fieldwork I made productive use of Tulane University's Louisiana Research Collection but I did not confine my "archival" research to official archives. Following Wolcott (1999: 47) I extend the concept of archive to informational materials produced within the context of the field or materials produced elsewhere but intermingled with the context of the field site. Archival or informational materials include works of art, music, images on T-shirts, movement produced reports, documents, and literature such as books, articles, and 'zines. The Above Ground 'Zine Library maintained by the Iron Rail Collective provided an abundant source of locally produced, national, and international movement literature. I also collected documents generated during the course of particular local projects that I was involved in. In short I treated

the material culture I encountered during the course of fieldwork as a kind of archive. Archival data is important to give the research greater depth in time and range in space.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, I argued for the appropriateness of reflexive ethnography to the investigation of the social situations encountered in my field research. I noted ethnography's history as a theory of description, an often-unstated theory of description. Ethnography as a methodological ensemble of techniques for data collection is necessarily theory-laden. Recognizing this motived me to explicate the epistemological grounds undergirding my ethnographic methodology, a necessary first step in developing a reflexive ethnographic account of the situations encountered in the field. By doing so I developed the evaluative criteria for my methodological choices. I employed a broadly scientific realist epistemology and methods. A scientific realist approach to ethnography proscribes both scientistic objectivism and postmodern relativism; scientific realism prescribes reflexivity, a dialectical conception of social relations, and critique. I integrated my realist concern for reflexivity with feminist standpoint theory and a commensurate conception of "strong objectivity." After laying out the epistemological grounds for the appropriateness of ethnographic methodology, I proceeded to explicate the structure and process of the extended case method that I employed in the course of my field research. From here I outlined and explain the specific techniques, sampling, participant observation, informal interviews, semi-structured interviews, field note taking, and archival research.