

Organising anarchy spatial strategy prefiguration and the politics of everyday life

Ince, Anthony James Elliot

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ORGANISING ANARCHY

SPATIAL STRATEGY, PREFIGURATION, AND THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

ANTHONY JAMES ELLIOT INCE

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ABSTRACT

This research is an analysis of efforts to develop a politics of everyday life through embedding anarchist and left-libertarian ideas and practices into community and workplace organisation. It investigates everyday life as a key terrain of political engagement, interrogating the everyday spatial strategies of two emerging forms of radical politics.

The community dimension of the research focuses on two London-based social centre collectives, understood as community-based, anarchist-run political spaces. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an international trade union that organises along radical left-libertarian principles, comprises the workplace element. The empirical research was conducted primarily through an activist-ethnographic methodology.

Based in a politically-engaged framework, the research opens up debates surrounding the role of place-based class politics in a globalised world, and how such efforts can contribute to our understanding of social relations, place, networks, and political mobilisation and transformation. The research thus contributes to and provides new perspectives on understanding and enacting everyday spatial strategies.

Utilising Marxist and anarchist thought, the research develops a distinctive theoretical framework that draws inspiration from both perspectives. Through an emphasis on how groups seek to implement particular radical principles, the research also explores the complex interactions between theory and practice in radical politics.

I argue that it is in everyday spaces and practices where we find the most powerful sources for political transformation. Grassroots politics are most

effective when enacted through everyday place-based relations. Prefigurative spatial strategies enacted by the groups studied not only strive to create relations fit for a post-capitalist society, but also seek to mobilise and articulate their politics in ways that are tailored to the specific context of struggle. Thus, groups such as social centres and the IWW can tell us a lot about how utopian ideas can be directly relevant to immediate everyday material needs and experiences.

O.I

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## **ANARCHY, GEOGRAPHY, STRATEGY**

*It is Sunday June 1<sup>st</sup> 2003. Myself and thousands of others descend on the centre of Geneva at dawn to erect roadblocks across the city. Across the border with France, in Lausanne, even greater numbers are amassing and doing the same. Today the G8 meeting of the eight most powerful world leaders starts, a few miles east of Geneva in the French town of Évian-les-Bains. We are there to shut the region down; to prevent business as usual; to protest their illegitimate claims to control the world, its people and resources for their own benefit.*

*A few dozen people blocking a small bridge to the east of us are attacked by riot police with batons and tear gas. The gas wafts along the river and over our own blockade. They hold their ground until a hundred or so Greeks arrive, replete with cobblestones and slingshots. The police retreat, for now. The atmosphere is intense and exhilarating.*

*A man on a scooter approaches our roadblock and a passionate altercation starts in French when he tries, and fails, to push through the mass of people and debris. Later, I am told that he was complaining we had no political platform, no alternatives, and that we were vacuous and self-indulgent. He said that we would never win because we stayed in our activist bubble and, instead of dealing with problems on our own doorstep, we travel around the world trying to save other countries on others' behalf.*

*I laugh at hearing what he was saying, perhaps because it is such an uncomfortably cogent and telling description of reality.*

## LOCATING THE POLITICAL

Following a series of spectacular upheavals around the turn of the millennium, with global-scale mobilisations of mass movements around the world, physically confronting police and the exploitative neoliberal capitalism that they defend, recent years have seen a period of careful introspection among anarchist and other radical activists concerning the fundamental question of how to enact a truly emancipatory politics. These movements threatened to set the world ablaze; to transform life as we know it, but now, a mere handful of years on, little seems to have been achieved. It seems all hope for radical social transformation is ebbing away. On the contrary, this research considers emerging forms of left-libertarian politics that, in this era of apparent decline, are developing new – or newly rejuvenated – ways of ‘doing’ politics.

My recollection, outlined above, of an argument at a major international demonstration widely hailed by activists to be a ‘success’ (whatever that means), is indicative of countless experiences by other activists engaging in similar actions. It calls into question the location of meaningful political activity, and asks us to explore a range of possible spaces for the development of emancipatory political praxis. In the contemporary world, what is meaningful radical political action and where is it located? If it is not to be found in large-scale demonstrations, riots and other spectacles, or in the circus of so-called ‘representative’ government, then what other sites of struggle should be prioritised, and what does it mean for the way we understand and enact politics?

In this research, I explore some answers to these questions through the in-depth analysis of two examples of an emerging form of political praxis closely aligned with the UK anarchist movement. These examples represent attempts to re-locate anarchist politics in a modest but noticeable shift away from spectacular, periodic actions and towards mundane, quotidian, local practices. Whereas anarchism has often been typified by a glorification of

spontaneity and spectacle, this new generation of activists emphasises careful and often long-term grassroots organisation as the key element of revolutionary strategy. Working to develop an emancipatory politics of everyday life, these groups can offer a significant angle on the geographies of radical praxis, and the challenges and possibilities of making radical interventions in the everyday.

The research is an analysis of efforts to develop a politics of everyday life through embedding left-libertarian principles and practices into workplace and community organisation. I examine the everyday spatial strategies and practices of radical grassroots organisations in the UK and explore what they can tell us about the geographies of political praxis. In doing so, I also explore the interactions between theory and practice as well as the ways in which the experiences and conditions of everyday life mediate terrains of struggle, in a variety of contexts. These contexts vary between scales, spaces and places, and the unusual spatial strategies deployed by the groups studied illuminate alternative spatial and organisational imaginaries and dynamics that can inform a number of ongoing academic and activist debates.

While anarchists have sometimes been guilty of fetishising certain forms of political action, they can also be highly adaptive and imaginative in the way they articulate and practice their politics. The modes of organisation and mobilisation discussed in this thesis are some of the more prominent examples of such adaptation in the UK over the past five years. The distinctive and creative strategies adopted can tell us a lot about how we might re-imagine transformative spaces and practices. Crucially, the study of the ways in which radical and utopian political philosophies such as anarchism are implemented in practice provides major opportunities for theorising and studying the complex relations between this world and possible future ones.

Although anarchist forms of thought and practice are perceived to be relatively marginal in present society, I argue that they are significant to the

way we understand political intervention and practice. Many initiatives being lived and practiced are directly derived from pioneering anarchist approaches to organising and relating. Popular organisational forms such as co-operatives, collaborative knowledge production formats like wikis and open-source software, and practices of mutual aid embodied in 'freecycling' and file-sharing are all directly anarchist in origin or inspiration (e.g. Harvey, 2004). Initiatives such as trade unions and tenants' associations also have strong anarchist roots, as do movements such as the Zapatistas in Mexico (cf. Graeber, 2002). As such, anarchism promotes forms of organisation, collaboration and living that are already widely practiced around the globe. Anarchism is far from a tiny, marginal political sect; rather, it is a way of acting that is pervasive and popular, and has important stories to tell and ideas to discuss.

However, anarchism is not without its problems. The groups studied are representative of an emergent form of anarchist politics that has grown out of the decline of the radical upsurge of the late 1990s and early 2000s in the UK. These groups have developed out of, and take inspiration from, this era, while also re-discovering forms of everyday action and organisation that originate in the inter-war 'heyday' of anarchism. This development is therefore located in the tension between two distinct eras of anarchist traditions, both bringing with them opportunities and challenges.

Tactics of broad-based, everyday politics, most popularly practiced among anarchists in the inter-war period, are again emerging as effective modes of building anarchism in the UK. In doing so, activists seek to move beyond the hippie and punk subcultures which, while being responsible for reviving anarchism after the Second World War, remain isolated from the vast majority of people. Their significance lies in their critical reassessment of existing revolutionary strategy, and their return to a form of action that is premised on the rather mundane and messy politics located in the spaces and practices of everyday life. Moreover, they sit in the interstices of ideology, nestled between anarchism and libertarian forms of Marxism such as autonomism. The research thus also partly explores the confluences and

dissonances between these different revolutionary traditions, as played out through theory, and in actual political organising.

Taking inspiration from practitioners of militant (e.g. Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007) and participatory (e.g. Kindon *et al.*, 2007) research methods, the empirical research was conducted through a politically-engaged activist framework. As I discuss in chapter three, the methods used are primarily ethnographic – supported by interviews, and archival and visual analysis – and are themselves part of ongoing militant and solidaristic research practice. Thus the politics of this research extend beyond the subject alone, and the particular methods used contribute to the development of an increasingly nuanced approach to politically-engaged academia more generally.

The first case study is the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), an international revolutionary syndicalist trade union. Its practices of grassroots democracy and militant direct action, along with its anti-capitalist principles, have made it an increasingly prominent actor in recent years among those on the libertarian left. In its heyday, approximately between 1909 and 1924, the IWW boasted more than 100,000 members largely in North America and dominated several key extractive industries in the USA and parts of Canada (Thompson and Bekken, 2006). After a long period of decline, the IWW has rejuvenated itself in North America and has expanded to the UK, Australia, and German-speaking areas of Europe, and is growing once more. At the time of writing, the IWW has around 2000 members worldwide, approximately a quarter of whom are resident in the UK. The research focuses primarily on the emergence of the UK section of the IWW, which has grown around 400% during the course of the main research period alone, approximately between autumn 2007 and winter 2008/9. As a small, new union, the IWW is striving to develop its own distinctive style of unionism, while also seeking ways to navigate the contemporary union landscape without compromising its radical principles. Studying this process of learning-by-doing can draw out the ways in which groups seek to respond and adapt to often deeply hostile environments. Importantly, the IWW's



emphasis on class conflict – the antagonistic struggle between workers and their employers – provides an insight into the spaces and struggles in industrial relations beyond the dominant ‘partnership’ model of unionism. This thesis makes a notable contribution to the study of unorthodox forms of labour movement organisation, particularly concerning worker-led and worker-run forms of workplace militancy.

Recent years have also seen increasing numbers of social centres springing up around the UK. These spaces, primarily anarchist-run and often focussed on organising in certain communities or neighbourhoods, are organised along anti-capitalist and participatory communitarian principles. The politics they enact is based on a similar model pioneered by *Autonomia* in Italy, in which dissident Marxists emphasised the centrality of political praxis in spaces beyond the workplace as sites for the development of emancipatory relations and practices (Katsiaficas, 2006). There are between 15 and 30 social centres in UK at any one time, usually based in large cities, and these centres may take the form of squatted, rented or co-operatively owned buildings. The political practices enacted within them are diverse, and tailored to the skills, needs and interests of the collectives that run them and the communities in which they are situated. This research focuses on two squatted social centres in Hackney, East London. It explores the politics and projects that the two centres sought to develop during their short lives, with a focus on how their everyday understandings of the specificities of place are related to their everyday organisational strategies. With a growth in the study of community and grassroots politics among geographers – discussed in chapter two – this research provides a distinctive angle on the ways in which community politics can be enacted in ways that do not rely upon the state or mediating institutions such as the Third Sector to provide sources for empowerment.

Relative to broader social movements and political organisations, these case studies are relatively small, and some may say insignificant. Indeed, their presence is also less significant than the examples of popular anarchistic initiatives discussed above. However, their distinctive

approaches are worth investigating for a number of reasons. First, they operate as windows on a *potential* politics. Their efforts can illuminate our understanding of how bigger or more powerful anarchistic groups might operate in a contemporary context. Second, since their politics are not exclusive to anarchism, they demonstrate the ways in which anarchist principles operate within systems that do not define themselves as singularly anarchist. Third, the IWW and social centres contrast two different spaces and traditions of anarchist practice, allowing the reader to explore the way geography and history structure the way politics (in general) is articulated. Fourth, the groups studied allow us to explore the tensions, dilemmas and negotiations involved in enacting an emerging utopian politics within an often hostile political environment. Finally, they make far broader contributions than anarchist milieux alone. Social centres and the IWW can teach us about a wide range of issues concerning everyday life, spatial strategy and political mobilisation more generally. As such, an anarchist intervention in the empirical study of political organisations – no matter how insignificant the research subjects – can teach us important and distinctive lessons about the way we relate, act and organise.

Both the IWW and social centres draw from a range of approaches, philosophies and perspectives, as will be discussed in later chapters. As such, it is worth noting the similarities between anarchism and the more libertarian end of the Marxist spectrum. Both fully cohered around the time of the First International, when the distinction between the two developed as much as a result of personal rivalry between Marx and Bakunin as genuine political differences. Although terms such as alienation, surplus value and commodity fetishism are widely perceived as originating in the thought of Marx, pre-Marx anarchists<sup>1</sup> such as Proudhon and Saint-Simon were articulating very similar concepts long before Marx developed his ideas (Kinna and Prichard, 2009; cf. Skinner, 1969). In turn, Marx systematically

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<sup>1</sup> I use this term very carefully since, although it was Proudhon who first took up the title 'anarchism' for his political philosophy, his and others' thought originates far earlier than the term itself. Saint-Simon, for example, has been variously dubbed an anarchist, utopian socialist and libertarian socialist. Defining a philosophical school of thought by its successors is somewhat dubious, but this is a side-issue to the current topic at hand.

built upon these concepts in far greater depth than the anarchists did, and the anarchists took on board many of his observations. Thus we can see anarchism and Marxism, at least in their early years, as mutually constitutive and feeding off one another.

One area in which contemporary anarchism has become increasingly influenced by elements of Marxism is in a shift towards class-struggle politics. The 1990s saw anarchists turn away from their roots in class politics in favour of a range of anarchisms – often influenced strongly by environmental and holistic approaches to anarchism such as social ecology (Bookchin, 2005 [1982]) – that emphasised anarchism as rooted primarily in a sense of human stewardship and responsibility for one another, the Earth, and its inhabitants. Similarly, many anarchists understood, and still understand, class-struggle forms of anarchism to connote an approach that is too similar to what is perceived as outmoded and dogmatic Marxism (Bowen and Purkis, 2004), placing greater emphasis on peasant, environmental, queer and other struggles that superficially do not so neatly fit into what they perceive to be a traditional Marxist class analysis.

Although many anarchists who identify with class-struggle or anarchist-communist perspectives recognise the fundamental importance of values such as care, responsibility, and respect for one another and our environment as key elements of the prefigurative politics that differentiates anarchism from Marxism, they also understand such values to develop primarily through various principles of working class solidarity and struggle (e.g. Flood, 1995; Shantz, 2009; cf. Kelly, 2009). The resurgence of anarchisms that emphasise economic class relations as important to an effective analysis of, and response to, capitalist society has come about in the UK and much of the Minority World – not surprisingly – around the same time as the global justice ‘movement of movements’ has slowed down in those areas. It can be understood as indicative of a movement re-examining its position and tactics, and rediscovering a mode of analysis that need not be dogmatic or rigidly focussed on the Marxist canon. As we shall see in the

following chapters, anarchist class politics, although similar to Marxism, is distinct and offers subtly differing interpretations.

In this research I recognise and explore this interaction between anarchism and Marxism and, although I emphasise anarchism as the primary topic of study, I seek to bring anarchist and libertarian Marxist thought closer together. Throughout, I draw on Marxist ideas and thinkers alongside those of anarchists to develop a strong, multifaceted theoretical and conceptual framework. This thesis recognises the common trajectories and histories of anarchism and Marxism, and seeks to build connections between them despite the history of oppressions undertaken in the name of the latter. Indeed, the IWW in particular has been recognised as a successor to the ‘Chicago Idea’ of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, which involved a powerful fusion of anarchism and Marxism (see Pinta, 2009).

As mentioned above, the groups that make up the case studies in this project are not ‘pure’ anarchist models. They draw primarily from anarchist thought and exhibit distinctly anarchistic properties, but they do not subscribe to a specific, singular anarchist philosophy, and draw from a range of activist and theoretical traditions. As a result, I coin the term ‘anarchist/ic’ to describe groups or movements that exhibit particularly anarchistic modes of organisation and operation – notably grassroots and direct-democratic organisation, practices of mutual aid that prefigure the world they wish to see, decentralisation, and an eschewal of capitalism, authority and state<sup>2</sup> – but do not specifically call themselves anarchist. In some respects, this refusal of discrete, bounded ideological identity is precisely what makes them such interesting objects of study.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting, at this point, the role of the state in anarchist thought. The abolition of the state is often considered to be a central element of anarchist goals, and this is true. However, its significance lies chiefly as the epitome of an authoritarian institution. The state, is therefore only the biggest and most important example of broader hierarchical forms of decision-making and relating. The fundamental principle is not anti-statism *per se*, but anti-authoritarianism. Later chapters will exhibit a relative lack of discussion on the role of the state, but this is merely reflective of the findings of the fieldwork – particularly in relation to the two case studies – and does not mean to imply that anarchists are not interested in the state in general.

Contemporary UK anarchism is also far from singular *in practice*. A range of anarchisms exist and, through the ethnographic fieldwork, it is clear that they stem from different traditions and political philosophies. Primitivist, or anti-civilisation, anarchism has a small but ongoing following; class-struggle forms of anarchism, as I have noted, are strongly on the increase; anarchisms influenced by poststructuralist thought have made gains in recent years; there has been some growth in ‘insurrectionist’ forms of anarchism; ‘lifestyle’ anarchism, emphasising a dropout culture, continues to have influence in some circles; anarcho-punk, and anarchist skinhead subcultures have had a resurgence in some areas; religious forms of anarchism continue to exist; highly organised ‘platformist’ anarchism has emerged as a growing new current; and there are no doubt many more varieties that incorporate different elements of these genres. Thus, when we speak of anarchism, while most forms coalesce around a set of basic principles, we cannot understand it as entirely coherent or singular. This research focuses largely on the more class-based strains of communist anarchism, and it could be argued that this now comprises the most influential element of contemporary anarchism in the UK.

This introductory chapter introduces the key questions, debates and concepts that are addressed by this thesis. I outline and discuss the three central questions of the research in detail, exploring the various themes within each of the broad questions and emphasising their significance to academic debates in geography and beyond.

## **ANARCHIST/IC GEOGRAPHIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE, STRATEGY AND PREFIGURATION**

This research is primarily an investigation into the geographies of embedding anarchistic ideas and practices into the spaces of everyday life. In particular, it investigates the distinctive contributions that can be made by the study and enactment of anarchist and libertarian Marxist forms of

thought and practice. Through the lens of two case studies of emerging anarchist/ic political forms, I explore – often critically – the ways in which the IWW and social centres are seeking to enact a radical politics of everyday life. Within this broad framework of everyday life, I investigate a range of factors in the development of such efforts – such as the role of networks, social relations, territory and place – using a long-term ethnography of the groups involved. This empirical analysis is supported and complimented by extensive discussion of anarchist and Marxist social and political theory, alongside a range of geographical, anthropological, sociological and other literatures. The research thus draws from, and speaks to, a number of different disciplines and schools of thought.

I now turn to the specific questions addressed in this research. They are all, to an extent, interrelated and as the thesis develops this will become increasingly clear. Three key questions lie at the centre of the research, each with its own particular relevance to the geographical study of radical grassroots politics.

### **Everyday political spaces and practices**

Everyday life is the topic of the first key research question. It concerns enactments of radical political strategy that focus on everyday life, its conditions, its experiences and its nature. How do the IWW and social centres seek to engage with workplaces and communities as strategic sites of everyday political intervention? What is it about the everyday that makes it so appealing as a terrain for political praxis, and what are the complexities and conundrums that come with political organising in the spaces of everyday life? In what ways and to what extent does everyday political praxis involve adaptation to differing spatio-temporal contexts?

In choosing the IWW and social centres as case studies, I have identified key groups in the UK that specifically focus on everyday spaces and practices of struggle in the workplace and community. Everyday life has gained increasing attention from geographers in recent years, with growing

emphasis on the immanent, affective practices of everyday life (Nash, 2000) and its importance to political thought and action (e.g. Kipfer, 2002). This research situates the *workplace* and the *community* as major spaces of both everyday life and radical political possibility. It must be stressed that these are not the *only* everyday spaces that hold radical possibility, and it is also important to note the struggles that have taken place over the home as a site of everyday politics for feminists, for example (e.g. Dalla Costa and James, 1975; hooks, 2000; Friedan, 2001 [1963]). However, the workplace and community are spaces that are well established as sites of collective everyday struggle and organisation.

‘Workplace’ and ‘community’ are terms that can be understood in a number of ways. Not only do they exist as material spaces, but also their nature and meaning is hotly contested and politically-charged. In particular, the contestation of what is an ‘authentic’ use or definition of community is an interesting and contentious topic in its own right (see, for e.g. Dwyer, 2003; Adams *et al*, 2004; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2007; Ince, forthcoming). As I develop my arguments through the thesis, it becomes clear that community’s significance lies chiefly in its mobilisation in political discourse, rather than a concern with its precise definition as such. For the purposes of this research, community is defined primarily with reference to the ways in which it is utilised in the political discourses of the social centres. For the time being, it can be understood as a heterogeneous association of people living in a particular neighbourhood or area in which there is a common acceptance that this area has a broadly defined identity as distinct from neighbouring areas. This does not foreclose the idea of community to transnational or mobile forms, but in the case of this research it is place-based community that constitutes the key focus.

Thinking about the workplace from the perspective of everyday life distinguishes this thesis from established research in industrial relations or labour geography. The workplace, through the lens of everyday life, is a site of grassroots political practice in which working people develop political subjectivities and agencies in relation to their employment. Industrial

relations scholarship typically has a markedly different emphasis, concentrating on how institutional actors – notably unions and policy-makers – negotiate and mediate conflicts between workers and employers. At stake in this difference is the role of the workplace as a site of political practice. A focus on everyday life highlights the immanent and routine practices and experience of workers themselves, and how their everyday experiences, practices and subjectivities constitute and are constituted by their political position as wage labour.

Various thinkers have understood workplaces and communities as sites in which actually-existing communistic and co-operative practices regularly take place (e.g. de Certeau; 1984; Ferrell, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2006), and this is one key reason for anarchists and other left-libertarians to take a keen interest in everyday life in these spaces. It has been argued that, alongside the authoritarian and capitalistic relations that permeate workplace and community spaces, these spaces are also imbued with a range of non-capitalist and co-operative practices that at least implicitly critique the efficacy and legitimacy of capitalist, competitive principles. Everyday life can thus show us that not only can we imagine ways of interacting that do not rely on capitalistic relations, but that these ways of acting are *already taking place*. Antonio Negri (cited in Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007) has even gone so far as to say that, in a sense, we are already living in communism, because capitalism's survival is based almost entirely on our co-operative practices. Although Negri's assertion is somewhat of an overstatement, many everyday practices do indeed exhibit many traits such as solidarity, love and mutual aid that do not conform to the market logic of capitalism. It can therefore be understood as a key site in which actually-existing communistic practices are in abundance. This research seeks to explore the possibilities and challenges of these kinds of everyday practices. The everyday's plural, co-operative and diverse nature is therefore highly attractive to anarchists. Indeed, Peter Kropotkin (ND [1887]) famously praised organisations such as the *Royal National Lifeboat Institution* as examples of everyday proto-anarchistic voluntary association for the common good. I also situate this thesis within a broader tradition on



the radical left – epitomised in events such as the Paris Commune and the uprisings of 1968 – of understanding everyday life as an enduring site of conflict and something to be transformed.

In this thesis I emphasise the importance of everyday life to radical transformative politics, and seek to investigate the geographies of everyday political organising in two ways. On the one hand, I explore the everyday practices of activists, examining the extent to which they are constructing a genuinely emancipatory politics of everyday life through the often mundane and micro-scale practices of political organising. On the other hand, I explore in greater depth the significance of everyday life to the broader project of revolutionary politics. The partly comparative nature of this project – comparing community and workplace activism – helps to explore how such forms of transformative political praxis are enacted differently in different everyday spaces and contexts. This research thus has significance as contributing to understanding the connections between everyday life, its geographies, and the political possibilities contained therein.

### **Radical spatial strategies**

Building on the broader topic of everyday life, the second research question asks: what spatial strategies are enacted by the IWW and social centres? How do radical projects relate to their political environment, and how does this affect their impacts in the spaces and places where they organise? Related to this is the fundamental question of whether it is even possible for groups to develop an effective radical politics in such a politically inhospitable context? An anarchist/ic group may institute a range of sophisticated radical practices into its internal workings, but its effectiveness is dependent upon interactions with external actors, many of whom may be hostile. At stake here is the possibility, or impossibility, of truly emancipatory political action; in essence, to what extent does anarchist/ic politics *work* in practice, and how do groups organise to this end? I interrogate this question through a close analysis of the organisational practices of the groups studied and their impacts. Ultimately, I seek to draw out important lessons

for activists, while also providing distinctive insight into this pivotal question in the study of radical political groups, projects and movements.

Since the turn of the millennium, social movements and contentious politics have become increasingly popular topics within geography in particular, and the academy in general (e.g. Miller, 2004; Oslender, 2004; Leitner *et al.*, 2008). Arguably, much of this interest has arisen directly or indirectly from the excitement caused by the upsurge of popular political mobilisations against neoliberalism that erupted alongside the growth of anti-capitalism in the late 1990s. Groups' and movements' strategies have particular spatial characteristics, and geographers have made significant contributions to the analysis of how such spatial strategies affect not only the efficacy of movements but also their identities, agency and structures. This thesis, in particular, explores how the groups studied adapt to their local contexts of organising, and examines how such concrete, strategic questions relate to their utopian conceptions of alternative non-capitalist worlds.

This research considers the nature of particular forms of political struggle, and why they matter. The groups studied seek to intervene in, take hold of, or re-shape particular spaces and places, and I study their efforts to embed themselves and their politics into existing matrices of power, culture and society. It is an issue that also opens up bigger questions surrounding the relations between scales and how groups seek to adapt strategically to particular places in order to mobilise in the most effective way they can. While social centres are very much place-based, and only network loosely with other organisations outside of these places, the IWW is an international entity, with several formal scales of organisation within its structure. As such, the two appear to deploy highly contrasting spatial strategies, and the research seeks to interrogate their similarities and differences, and to explore what they can tell us about the role of spatial strategy in the articulation and enactment of political action.

With the rise of global networks of activists and movements in the last decade, there has been an increasing emphasis among geographers on the

nature and significance of the network to political organisation (Cumbers *et al.*, 2008a). Networks have at times been hailed as radical, liberatory forms, while at others, they have been criticised heavily. Importantly for this research, they have been central to understanding how place-based ‘militant particularisms’ can communicate and co-organise with others in other places, and potentially become generalised at broader scales (Featherstone, 2005). Social centres and the IWW both enact networking practices as part of their strategies, as well as establishing more ‘formal’ organisational structures. These two modes of organising bring with them particular spatial and political dynamics, and this research explores both as tools for political organising in and between places, and discusses the relations between them.

In examining spatial strategies undertaken on an everyday basis by social centres and the IWW, I also address the role of geographical factors in political organisation and mobilisation other than networks. In particular, place is a key concept for understanding the ways in which groups mobilise around specific issues. In much of the literature on anti/alter-globalisation movements, there is a somewhat bipolar approach to how global capitalism can be adequately combated – either through global networks and convergences (e.g. Routledge, 2003) or by localisation and place-based strategies (e.g. De Filippis, 2001). In this thesis I interrogate the way that place is mobilised as a terrain for political agitation, and how it is negotiated alongside organisational structures and practices in place and across space. This can be understood as part of a more general exploration of how different organisational forms and geographical contexts interact in and through practice (cf. Leitner *et al.*, 2008).

This thesis pays particular attention to the way in which mundane, micro-scale everyday practices constitute or influence bigger strategies and institutional forms within political groups. The case studies are highly distinctive, however, and their particular organisational practices offer both academics and activists opportunities to take inspiration from, and critically assess, the forms of radical praxis enacted by them. The study of the IWW

and social centres can provide deep empirical material concerning how radical political groups organise and operate in hostile environments.

### **Prefiguring future worlds in the present**

A consideration of prefigurative politics is the third research question. It is a distinctive element of anarchist political practice, and can be manifested in a number of ways, from organisational strategy to decision-making practices. It is an effort to 'be the change you wish to see' by instituting particular forms of organising, acting and relating in everyday life that is closely related to the anarchist rejection of authoritarian or vanguardist socialist methods and perspectives (e.g. Malatesta 1995 [1891]; Day, 2005; Gordon, 2007b). Understanding the geographies of prefigurative praxis is thus a fundamental element of the broader issue of understanding the geographies of anarchist/ic praxis. Prefiguration is a concern that drives the groups studied, and raises a number of questions concerning the way politics and political action are understood, imagined, assessed and enacted and, as a result, deeply affects the way we must view everyday political space. Over the course of this thesis, I unravel the everyday practices of prefiguration and explore the complex issues surrounding such a form of praxis. While the groups seek to enact practical and effective strategies in order to produce concrete outcomes, they also shape their organisational practices in order to *prefigure* envisioned future noncapitalist worlds.

In this thesis, I ask: how do groups seek to prefigure future worlds, and what effects do the spatial practices of prefiguration have on the geographies of political praxis? Does it necessitate particular organisational approaches, or can it be enacted through a range of strategies? How do groups and individuals attempt to prefigure future worlds in the present, and through what spatial mechanisms is prefiguration manifested? Are prefigurative politics even effective or worthwhile at all? Engaging with these questions constitutes a major task for this research, since prefiguration lies at the centre of what demarcates anarchism from most other radical and left approaches.

Although the anarchist commitment to prefigurative politics was most graphically vindicated in places such as the Soviet Union – where the vanguardist Party politics of the Bolsheviks gave way not to a ‘withering away’ of the state, but to the strengthening of it and to the brutalisation of dissenters – anarchists had emphasised the importance of prefigurative politics long before. As Bakunin (1990 [1873]: 178) argued,

[b]y popular government they [authoritarian Marxists] mean government of the people by a small number of representatives elected by the people... [In other words,] government of the vast majority of the people by a privileged minority. But this minority, the Marxists say, will consist of workers. Yes, perhaps, of *former* workers, who, as soon as they become rulers or representatives of the people will cease to be workers and will begin to look upon the whole workers' world from the heights of the state. They will no longer represent the people but themselves and their own pretensions to govern the people.

Rather than believing that it is possible to use authoritarian, vanguardist or statist means to achieve a popular, democratic revolution, anarchists have developed ways of embedding their political principles into the way they organise and interact. Prefiguration, however, implies much more than a simple tactic, involving a fundamental re-imagination of revolution itself. Revolution is transformed from a singular, rupturing event, into a *process*, since ‘the revolutionary act’ takes place in the everyday lives of people in the here and now. The revolution takes place over a potentially long period of time, with people developing the skills and nurturing the relations necessary for post-capitalist living through everyday practice. It is therefore a highly distinctive and challenging issue to explore. The processual, unending and contextually-sensitive nature of anarchist prefiguration is a key factor that differentiates it from other forms of prefigurative politics, such as religious prefiguration of the Kingdom of God. It is something that, unlike

eschatological forms of religious moral codes, has no end, and is not structured through a detailed and unchanging canon. The question of *what* to prefigure and *how* to prefigure it has stimulated a century of debate among anarchists, with much disagreement. The contemporary debate – largely between those who emphasise the importance of individual lifestyle (Nadia C, ND), and those who prefer to focus on collective forms of organisation (Bookchin, 1995) – is significant, and will be discussed in later chapters.

As the thesis unfolds, it becomes clear that prefigurative politics are often enacted through practices of *autonomy*, people's capacity to self-organise (Colson, 2001). It is a socio-spatial strategy that – as we shall see – provides a practical framework through which prefiguration can be articulated and practiced. Autonomy has become a key concept in anarchist politics, and is understood in this thesis as complimentary to, *yet separate from*, prefigurative politics. Although autonomous practice facilitates prefigurative politics, anarchist politics is made particularly distinctive through prefiguration, whereas autonomy as a practice or concept has been claimed by a range of political perspectives.

The significance of prefigurative politics to this thesis lies not only in its centrality to anarchist/ic practice but also in the way geographers understand and analyse initiatives that seek to enact social change. It emphasises politics as always *becoming* and suggests that political theorisation must reflect this processual character of life. Furthermore, it underpins a need to envision political practice as an inherently adaptive endeavour, implying that spatio-temporal conditions make a profound impact on similar political efforts applied at different places and scales. This research uncovers how a prefigurative framework structures the geographies of political practice for the groups studied – and vice versa – and raises awkward questions about the possibilities and challenges faced by those seeking to enact prefigurative politics.

## **RENEWED POLITICAL FORMS / RENEWED GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT**

As I have outlined, this thesis explores the everyday organisational geographies of two prominent case studies of anarchist/ic organisation in the UK. Through the three primary research questions outlined above, I generate empirical knowledge on these emerging political forms, while also utilising radical theories to develop new approaches to a number of existing questions in geography. In doing so, I want to reconnect geography with its anarchist roots and open up new avenues for future research from this perspective, alongside lesser-established libertarian Marxisms. This research thus seeks to make both empirical and theoretical contributions.

The thesis consists of a further six chapters. The next chapter situates the research within broader debates, theories and issues in geography and a number of other academic disciplines. In it, I make a strong case for the relevance of this research and to how it contributes to, expands or challenges various central themes in political geography in particular. I also discuss in greater detail the theoretical and conceptual framework on which the thesis is based. I then turn to discuss the methodological factors in the research in chapter three, and the various considerations required to undertake an effective research project on, and with, the groups studied. After introducing the IWW and the two social centre collectives in greater depth, I move on to discuss the politics of research and develop what I term a 'solidarity research' methodology.

The following three chapters constitute the bulk of the empirical research and develop the analysis and arguments of the thesis overall. In chapter four I explore the everyday, prefigurative spatial strategies of the IWW in the UK, interrogating a number of campaigns and projects at different scales and in different industries and contexts, in relation to the research questions. I then undertake a similar analysis of the two London-based social centres in which I participated during the fieldwork in chapter five. These two chapters lead into the following chapter which considers the IWW

and social centres alongside one another. Chapter six investigates the similarities and differences between the two case studies, comparatively investigating their contributions to the broader research questions that cut across the two groups. The final, concluding chapter seeks to bring the various arguments of the thesis together, synthesise them where appropriate, and consider their significance within broader debates and concerns.

The distinguishing features of the research subjects lie in their unusual yet increasingly popular application of radical – even utopian – principles to concrete, material questions of survival and wellbeing (cf. Heynen, 2006). A comparative discussion of their spatial strategies – of international workers' federation, and local community-members' collective – also provides insight into the differing ways in which similar principles can be implemented in contrasting forms and contexts. Through examining their practices it is possible to unpack the complex geographies of the relations between the present and the future; practice and theory; present society and utopia. In particular, detailed analyses of everyday spatial strategies and the central concept of prefiguration help us to uncover the significance of everyday life to the project of social transformation. Indeed, this research is not intended solely for a particular reader, and I argue that its findings are relevant to a range of political approaches beyond anarchism alone. The negotiations, tensions and debates that are generated out of everyday prefigurative politics also unveil a range of implications of relevance to academics and activists alike.



# II

## LOCATING ANARCHISM: EVERYDAY SPATIAL STRATEGIES AND PRESENT FUTURES

*The world unfolds through practice. (Morton, 2005: 664)*

*Capital is not a natural force; it is a set of activities performed by people every day; it is a form of daily life; its continued existence and expansion presuppose only one condition: the disposition of people to... reproduce the capitalist form of daily life. (Perlman, 1992 [1969])*

### BRINGING ANARCHISM BACK HOME

Recent geographical thought has often paralleled, knowingly or otherwise, the libertarian left. The quotes from Morton – a poststructuralist geographer – and Perlman – an anarchist-inspired libertarian Marxist – bear an uncanny resemblance. They are both suggestive of a world that is constantly becoming; one that is never entirely stable, ‘natural’ or predictable. It is a world that is always-already potentially on the brink of something else and that develops directly through our daily practices. As we shall see, there is a long history of anarchist and left-libertarian thought in the broader field of geography (Blunt and Wills, 2000; Ince, 2009). From the classical geography of Kropotkin and Reclus to the architecture of Giancarlo de Carlo and Lucien Kroll, through to contemporary practices of ‘reclaiming space’, the libertarian left has long considered that changing the world requires a deep engagement with its spatial characteristics in theory and practice. This research aims to bring anarchism back home.

This thesis examines attempts at developing an understanding of anarchist/ic politics of everyday life through workplace and community organisation. It therefore resonates with the growing emphasis within geography and anarchism on the significance of everyday practices and relations. This chapter explores a range of literatures that can help frame and inform the research, and to which the research can, at times critically, contribute. Although much of the chapter concerns academic debates, it becomes clear that many of the ideas being discussed have at least a tacit relevance to the way many forms of 'contentious politics' (Leitner *et al.*, 2008) can, should, or do operate. As such, the research situates itself within both academic and activist concerns.

The chapter is divided into four broad sections. The first section acts as an extended introduction to the chapter, introducing anarchism and considers the relationships between it and geography, emphasising the significance of anarchism as a school of thought and action and situating the research in the decline of the well-known and relatively well-researched anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements. I then move on to briefly trace the oft-forgotten history of anarchist geography and cognate disciplines, before considering how anarchist and anarchist-influenced perspectives are contributing to contemporary debates. I note that the social sciences lag behind the shifting terrains of anarchist praxis, and argue that research ought to take these emerging strategies seriously. A key element of these strategies, I argue, is an increased emphasis on everyday life as a central terrain of political action.

Recognising this emphasis on the everyday, I then turn to discuss the first research question, concerning the politics and geographies of everyday life, noting how the established work of Henri Lefebvre and the Situationist International interweave and overlap with one another as well as making connections to anarchist and autonomist Marxist thought. As part of this discussion I build a theoretical framework informed by these various schools of thought that can provide an important new angle on the everyday, proposing an understanding of everyday revolutionary praxis that is

immanent, embodied and processual, but also retains firm organisational and political foundations and direction.

The following section considers the second research question; namely, how studying the geography of radical spatial strategy might help us elucidate its significance. I explore the geographies of social movement organisation and contentious politics more generally, developing an approach to the study of spatial strategy that is multifaceted and respects the multiple spatialities that constitute political terrains of struggle. Through a review of the contemporary literature, I also note how place acts as a locus through which a number of other spatialities – such as networks, territory and scale – are manifested and shaped.

A worthy addition to debates surrounding both spatial strategy and everyday life is prefiguration – the topic of the third research question – and this is the topic of the final substantive section of the chapter. Prefigurative approaches, I argue, develop an alternative political imagination that can serve to challenge established norms of movement and organisation by transforming the relations through which politics is enacted. The autonomist and anarchist idea of *autonomy*, in particular, helps to elucidate the relations between everyday life and emancipatory praxis as an everyday practice that enables prefigurative politics to flourish. This practice is crucial to understanding anarchist political praxis, as it is the central vehicle through which anarchists enact prefigurative politics. Indeed, as I argue, although it is not a central subject of the research in general, it serves an important purpose in uniting the three key research questions. I conclude the chapter with a short section that brings the key thoughts and arguments of the chapter together that produce a sophisticated and robust theoretical framework through which to make sense of the empirical material.

## **ANARCHISM: GEOGRAPHY'S SECRET LOVE AFFAIR**

### **(Re-)Emergent Anarchisms**

Why should geographers bother to engage with anarchism? This is an important question, and this section establishes anarchism's place within geography as both a subject and a method of enquiry. Anarchism provides a distinctive political imagination, cross-cutting liberal and Marxist values. Although the anarchist movement is small, it has important contributions to make in shaping political discourses and practices, neither enclosing itself by electoral politics nor retreating into individualism. It has also long been part of the geographical canon and, as a major political philosophy with real-world impacts and potentially profound challenges to established geographical thought, it is deserving of a thorough and serious engagement from geographers.

An obvious starting point is the frenzy of activity from a wide variety of actors – social movements, unions, the media, politicians, environmentalists, NGOs, and more – during the years approximately between 1999 and 2004. Driven by groups and movements chiefly from the majority world, such as the Zapatistas in Mexico, it connected and mobilised a diverse 'movement of movements' around broad, sometimes contradictory, sets of principles and goals. In North America and Europe, this movement of movements – which became variously entitled "anti-capitalist", "anti-globalisation", "grassroots globalisation", "alter-globalisation" and "anti-corporate" – received widespread media coverage<sup>3</sup> and shook the world with spectacular and often anarchist-driven convergences, conflicts and creative direct action tactics to call the leaders of global capital to account. While the media painted the sizeable anarchist contingent within these movements as an extremist fringe, and many NGOs and Party-oriented socialists played down anarchist involvement, those within the

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<sup>3</sup> The geography of protest and media coverage was always a problem, with European or Anglophone activities tending to overshadow far larger and often more inspiring mobilisations elsewhere in the world, particularly Latin America and southern Africa.

movements knew that it was the anarchists who were in many respects at the head of this wave of protest. Even before the protests gained global exposure, anarchists had been experimenting with creative and often highly effective forms of political action, such as Reclaim the Streets parties and Stop the City<sup>4</sup> actions in the UK, for some years previously.

Despite the size and wide coverage of this wave of protests, including interesting insights in geographical work (e.g. Escobar, 2000; De Filippis, 2001; Glassman, 2002; Featherstone, 2003; Routledge, 2004a), many of the movements have begun to peter out in recent years, especially in the UK, and many activists have begun considering other forms of political action. The study of decline and re-evaluation is something rarely discussed in geographical literatures, but can help us explore the dynamics of political action. A number of reasons led to the decline of the movement and many of the groups that comprised it, including activist fatigue (Anon, 2002), poor articulation of principles (Morse, 2004), greater repression (Caffentzis, 2001), and new policing techniques (Fernandez, 2008), but a key element in the movement's downfall was the stagnation and ritualisation of these large-scale convergences, stunts and actions (Mueller, 2008). Increasingly, in many activists' eyes, while the protests caught the attention of much of the world's population and challenged the hegemony of global capitalist rhetoric, the activities were too distanced from people's lives, unable to connect with anyone beyond the activist subcultures in which participants embedded themselves. With hindsight, the movement was bound to falter, sooner or later (Mueller, 2008). Recalling one particular example, Bisticas-Cocoves (2003: 16) notes,

Direct action had been reduced to symbolic protest, a kind of *indirect* action... We make reservations for a jail cell, and people

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<sup>4</sup> Although Reclaim the Streets parties are well known, the Stop the City gatherings in the 1980s were also important. While the events were advertised as relatively simple street rallies, an underlying idea was to literally stop – to jam up and sabotage – the physical machinery of financial institutions. Partly inspired by insurrectionist anarchist thought (Bonanno, 1988), anarchists mobilised large numbers of others to engage in tactics such as gluing the locks of investment banks and cutting electricity and telephone cables in financial districts.

are still dying of AIDS. Our disobedience is very, very civil; it is part of the spectacle, part of a normal day's work.

This thesis, informed by almost a decade of activism among anarchists and left-libertarians, seeks to investigate how the decline of these movements has given rise to the emergence of new forms of struggle. In many respects, these 'new' forms are in fact far from new, inspired by a long tradition of everyday anarchist organising. Everyday grassroots organising in the workplace and community was the mainstay of the anarchist movement in its heyday during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Rocker, 2004 [1938]; Guerin, 1970). By the end of the First World War, anarchism was well established in many countries and hailed what was arguably the 'golden era' of working class anarchism in Europe. Major briefly successful anarchist revolutions – first in the Ukraine in 1917 against both the Red and White Armies (Arshinov, 2006), and then in Spain in 1936 through the anarcho-syndicalist CNT union (Peirats, 1998) – brought anarchism to increasing numbers of people. However, following bloody military defeat at the hands of right-wing and left-wing opponents alike, by the outbreak of the Second World War, anarchism was in deep decline.

Partly in response to the onset of Thatcherism and cultural shifts such as punk and the skinhead revival, the late 1970s and 1980s saw moves to reunite anarchism with class politics in the UK (Franks, 2006). In the 1980s, groups such as *Class War* and the *Anarchist Communist Federation* gained a modicum of influence among young, urban working class populations in response to growing economic divides and an increasing rejection of established trade union and electoral politics. Anarchist involvement in anti-Poll Tax campaigning and militant anti-fascist activity returned anarchists to the sorts of broad political organising that they had undertaken most extensively during the inter-war period. Thus, the shift in political praxis today can be understood as less of an emergence than a *re-emergence*.

Interest in the libertarian left among contemporary geographers and social scientists has focussed largely on organisational form and practice (e.g.

Wainwright *et al.*, 2000; McCreery, 2001; Müller, 2004; Juris, 2005). Alternatively, work in geography that engages directly and deeply with the political philosophy underlying such anarchist and left-libertarian practices is less common. Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) make one particularly notable effort to do so by exploring notions of ‘autonomous geographies’ in relation to anarchist and autonomist<sup>5</sup> Marxist thought, and this chapter investigates their work in greater detail below, alongside a number of other works on the subject. By engaging directly with the political principles of the groups, it is possible to pinpoint interactions between theory and practice and generate research that respects the relationships between the two. As many geographers tell us, seemingly ‘immaterial’ norms and values are in fact closely tied to the practice and development of identities, subjectivities and agency (e.g. Lee, 1996; Hartwick, 2000; Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Goodman, 2004).

Just as anarchists are now critically reflecting on the merits and failings of the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement and their role within it, geographers are similarly in a position to do so. Much of the remainder of this chapter is dedicated to critically exploring the geographical literatures as a means of building a theoretical and conceptual framework for this research into everyday left-libertarian politics and spatial strategy.

### **Entwined pasts of anarchism and geography**

As a practical programme for re-organising the way we live, anarchism is necessarily spatial. It is therefore not surprising that, despite widespread amnesia of the fact, geography has for a long time been associated with anarchism. As I have argued elsewhere (Ince, 2009), anarchism is a

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<sup>5</sup> In using the term ‘autonomist’ or ‘autonomism’, it is important to note that this is a simplification of the broad tradition that autonomism encompasses. Defining such a tradition, which encompasses Marxist theory and a wide variety of (sub)cultural forms, has led different people to give it wildly differing breadths of scope. In this research I take the word to mean political writings stemming directly from the tradition of Italian *Operaismo* and *Autonomia* and, to a lesser extent, German *Autonomen*. A good intellectual history of autonomist thought and practice can be found in Katsiaficas (2006).

legitimate perspective that has a great deal to say about central issues and debates in contemporary geography.

During the emergence of geography as a distinct discipline – around the turn of the twentieth century – two key anarchist thinkers, Elisée Reclus and Peter Kropotkin, were also two of the most prolific and respected geographers of their time. Linking, for the first time, geographical research and a revolutionary programme, the two produced some of the most challenging research of their era, critiquing the statist, capitalist and imperialist orthodoxy. Their emergence at this time is not surprising, since in the aftermath of the anarchist split from the First International in 1872, anarchism first developed as a relatively coherent school of thought. Followers of the thought of ‘classical’ anarchists such as Bakunin, Proudhon, Kropotkin and Landauer became a large minority among the radical left in Europe and the Americas (Marshall, 1993).

Reclus’ work critiquing the dialectic of nature and culture has had a profound impact on holistic and non-instrumental understandings of the environment, informing both activists (e.g. Anon., 2008a; International Vegetarian Union, 2008) and scholars (e.g. Clout, 2006). His nineteen-volume *La Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* established new ways of viewing the world and its ecosystems as not conforming to the Westphalian state system (Clark and Martin, 2004) and, arguably, paved the way for contemporary studies of inter-state and regional resource management strategies that grapple with similar issues. These insights, although relatively obvious now, were the first serious attempt by an academic to systematically critique territorial state systems of governance as complex and potentially damaging to the environment and humanity alike.

While Reclus is most famous among Francophone geographers, his friend and colleague, Peter Kropotkin, received far greater coverage in the Anglophone world. His political presence was most clearly felt in the emerging geographical study of economic and industrial organisation. Bemoaning “our miserably organised society”, Kropotkin (1968 [1913]: 371)



embarked on a highly detailed critical geography of industrial capitalism in Britain in *Fields, Factories and Workshops*. He argued that the spatial organisation of industry that capitalism encourages – of encouraging certain regions (and therefore also workers) to specialise in specific industries – is deeply counterintuitive, encouraging widespread wastage and unnecessary complexity:

Agriculture calls manufactures into existence, and manufactures support agriculture. Both are inseparable, [yet] political economy has hitherto insisted chiefly on *division*. (1968 [1913]: 21-22)

This spatial fixity and division of workers in the same roles also produces a deeply alienating and joyless life for workers:

Precisely in proportion as the work required from the individual in modern production becomes simpler and easier to be learned, ... [it becomes] also more monotonous and wearisome. (*ibid.*: 20-21)

Thus the everyday, microgeographical practices of industrial production under capitalism, for Kropotkin, create the conditions for alienation precisely due to the spatial organisation of productive labour. As an alternative, Kropotkin proposes a reorganisation of society, in which industry is organised according to the distributional needs of different regions and settlements, so that individuals might work in a range of manual and intellectual roles.

In Kropotkin's reformulation of industrial organisation, and in Reclus' de-instrumentalisation of nature, we see some of the earliest and most thought-provoking political scholarship in geography. Directly inspired by them, many members of the early planning movement took up this understanding of space as a deeply political phenomenon and attempted to transpose it into the urban landscape through planning reform. As Hall (1988: 3; cf. Ward, 1996) explains,

[many of the] early visions of the planning movement stemmed from the anarchist movement... That is true of Howard, of Geddes and of the Regional Planning Association of America, as well as of many derivatives on mainland Europe... The vision of these anarchist pioneers was... an alternative society, neither capitalist nor bureaucratic-socialistic: a society based on voluntary co-operation among men and women, working and living in small, self-governing commonwealths.

Although their attempts at straddling the chasm between theory and practice were ultimately appropriated into colonialist and technocratic spatial imaginaries and tactics (e.g. Perera, 2008), the planners' anarchist-inspired assertion of the political impact of space paved the way for future endeavours of a similar nature in planning and architecture. The libertarian socialist architect Giancarlo de Carlo (McKean, 2004); the anarchist-inspired conceptual architecture of Lebbeus Woods (1997); Marion von Osten, Murray Bookchin and Colin Ward's anarchist urbanisms (von Osten, 2009; Bookchin, 1986; Ward, 1983; 1989); Brian Heagney's 'Anarchitecture' (2008); the "GRaB" (Green, Red and Black) vernacular of David Sheen (ND); John Edelman (Gray, 1994) and Lucien Kroll's (Milgrom, 2002) anarchist-inspired architectural projects; John Turner's anarchistic development planning strategies (1991); and more – the ideas and practices of anarchism lie at the centre of a not-insignificant number of spatial practitioners.

Whereas anarchism has remained relatively marginal to the work of most academic geographers in recent decades, it has still made some notable contributions. The 1970s saw a growth in interest in anarchism, with a number of pieces in *Antipode* focussing largely on re-examining the classical works of Kropotkin and Reclus, or revisiting anarchism's history (Peet, 1975; Breitbart, 1975; Galois, 1976, *Antipode*, 1978; cf. Stoddart, 1975). These scholars' analyses attempted to transpose the classical anarchist canon into contemporaneous geographical debates concerning

nature, urbanism and the ongoing appeal of activist scholarship in geography.

It is interesting to note how these past engagements with anarchist *thought* contrast significantly with contemporary engagements with anarchism that centre on *practice*. While the former – situated as they were at a relatively low point in organised anarchist activity – presented anarchism as an historical and theoretical school of thought as an alternative leftism to the brutal authoritarianism of the USSR, the latter – riding on the wave of anarchist-influenced anti-capitalist, artistic and environmentalist activism (McKay, 1998) – have often chosen not to explore the theoretical underpinnings of anarchist praxis in depth. However, a small but growing number of geographers identifying with anarchism have begun to produce interesting work that considers both sides of the theory-practice divide in depth.

### **A rebirth of anarchist geography?**

Anarchist and anarchist-influenced geographers such as Chatterton (2000), Brown (2007), Huston (1997) and Heynen (2008) have made a noticeable impact in their respective fields, while other anarchist scholars have engaged with geographical thought to better analyse their own subject (Ferrell, 2001; Amster, 2008). As we shall see, work by Brown, Chatterton and others on autonomous geographies can inform this research (cf. Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Chatterton (2000) utilises anarchism and *Autonomia* as a means to understand contemporary questions of urban life such as gentrification, arguing that capital, and the state regulatory processes and structures that support it, are inherently stifling for urban creativity and sociality. The city is perceived as a site of struggle between these opposing forces that liberal agendas such as “Creative Cities” policies seek to mask.

Although not primarily a geographer, Jeff Ferrell has made interesting contributions to the study of urbanism and political space through the lens of

cultural criminology (2001; 2006). Depending largely on ethnographic methods, his writing explores the cultural politics and spaces of crime and criminality. His work resonates with established research on 'DIY' lifestyles and politics in critical geography (e.g. Gibson, 1999; Halfacree, 1999; 2004; North, 2005), while underpinning empirical material with a close reading of anarchist thought. Heynen, also focussing on the urban as a site of struggle, examines urban political ecology and, most recently, the politics of hunger among groups such as the Black Panthers. His grounding of research praxis in the everyday, material conditions of life resonates strongly with the priorities of this research, and the (re-)emergent anarchisms studied within these pages:

The roots of material human life are mundane, but without human life there is no radical human geography. Thus, radical geography must be about the lives of the people; us and them. (Heynen, 2006: 928)

Scholars such as Heynen and Chatterton have also often applied anarchistic, participatory modes of research practice to their field of study. Thus anarchism is becoming both the *subject* and *method* of enquiry. This research follows such a methodological tradition, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Alongside these relatively established scholars, a new generation of anarchist and, to a lesser extent, autonomist geographers have begun to push the boundaries of accepted knowledge in radical geography. Clough (2009) has critiqued the discourse and ontology of 'resistance', while Rouhani (2009) echoes Brown's (2007) research on radical queer spaces through a detailed analysis of such spaces in a small, conservative US city. In the field of development geographies, Springer (forthcoming, 2010) has also applied poststructuralist anarchist critiques to violent processes of neoliberalisation and primitive accumulation in South-East Asia.

A common trend in these emerging anarchist geographies is a reassessment of the nature of political agency and power. Agency, and the power to make political change, is understood as developing directly out of political subjectivity, rather than, say, resource mobilisation. In theorising insurrectionary space, Wakefield (2009) has made a clear challenge to critical geography's overwhelming focus on reform-oriented social movements as sources of change and hope. Using the 2008 student occupation of the New School in New York as an example, she theorises the development of (political) subjectivity as necessarily located in sites of conflict and struggle. In turn, antagonistic spaces of subjectification can be understood as spaces of *de*-subjectification insofar as conflict can nurture transgressive subjectivities that are rendered, as Wakefield puts it, "ungovernable" by capital or authority. These scholars thus contest or critically develop many of the established ideas about struggle in political geography, from Regulation Theory (e.g. Uitermark, 2002) to Foucauldian governmentality (see Huxley, 2007). Drawing on the Autonomist idea that capitalism is driven and shaped by people's "constituent" grassroots agencies, rather than its own creativity as such, Clough (2009: no pagination) argues that most existing frameworks in political geography fail to recognise that

it is struggle that provides the dynamism of capitalist development... [T]he project of constituted [dominant] power is to constantly absorb constituent movements, actions and spaces into the grid of the known; to co-opt and learn from the creative rebellions that are everywhere.

According to Clough, an overhaul of political geography is required to take into consideration the way in which this constituent 'general intellect' (see Eden, 2006) produced through everyday practice is articulated, mobilised and recuperated into capitalist and statist frameworks and discourses. This assertion seems to call for a geography of political mobilisation that is premised on the radical politics of self-governance, self-organisation and self-help. In turn, this new generation of radical geographers are arguably

turning their back on the established (neo-)Gramscian tendencies of critical geography, preferring to emphasise the transformative power of political action whose terms of engagement do not rely on hegemony and counter-hegemony to explain the dynamics of struggle (cf. Day, 2005).

This thesis situates itself in this current wave of autonomist and anarchist geographers, and the historical tradition of communist forms of anarchism<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, I contribute to the growing number of works that have been developing perspectives that refuse the forced (if sometimes overstated) binary of Marxism and poststructuralism. Since anarchism has common roots with Marxism in the First International, there is much crossover between the two<sup>7</sup>. However, their immanent, processual understanding of revolution also finds anarchists on some common ground with poststructuralist scholars (e.g. May, 1994). Thus the anarchist ontology is in tension within itself, embodying elements of both Marxism and poststructuralism. Anarchist and autonomist scholars are seeking to forge a perspective that emphasises the immanent, embodied and performed nature of political subjectivity, while also advocating clear, antagonistic revolutionary programmes.

Although this anarchist tradition is not a research question as such, throughout the empirical research of this thesis, I interrogate many of these emerging perspectives and ideas, developing them in some cases and critiquing them in others. Later in this chapter, and throughout future chapters, I develop some of the concepts and ideas introduced in this section in more detail, with a view to refining them and developing a solid

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<sup>6</sup> I emphasise the *communist* forms of anarchism since there are other political perspectives that label themselves as anarchist, most notably free market 'anarcho-capitalism'. Indeed, while it is outside the remit of this research to discuss the issue further, I reject any claims to legitimate use of the term 'anarchism' by free-market libertarians such as Ayn Rand and Robert Nozick (see, for e.g. Sabatini, 1994-95). Such is anarchism's emphasis on freedom and diversity, a wide variety of people now uses the word or its iconography for a range of purposes, rightly or otherwise.

<sup>7</sup> A conference has taken place precisely on these historical and theoretical connections. *Is Black and Red Dead?* Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice, University of Nottingham, September 7, 2009.

conceptual groundwork for future research from similar libertarian left perspectives.

## **REVOLUTIONS PER MINUTE: THE POLITICS AND SPACES OF EVERYDAY LIFE**

This research seeks to explore the everyday geographies of anarchist/ic groups in the UK, and the role played by everyday life in their ideas and praxis. In this section, I explore the first research question of this thesis, arguing that everyday life is central to both this thesis and left-libertarian politics more generally. It has also become an increasingly central element of a range of geographical disciplines. With the rising interest in immanent geographies of practice and identity, located in bodies of research concerned with non-representational theory, affect and performativity, there has been a shift towards the everyday as a geographical focal point. Likewise, ongoing feminist engagements in geography concerning everyday experiences, practices and discourses of gender and space similarly emphasise the immanent, lived experience of people as fundamental to understanding the geographies and politics of gender and society (e.g. Domosh, 1998; Kwan, 1999; Rose, 1999; Dyck, 2005).

Although they differ in important respects, these contemporary geographical schools of thought have some relevance to anarchism. The emphasis on immanence and materiality that both feminism and non-representational approaches involve connects with the anarchist commitment to a transformative programme that is located in the everyday, direct experiences of people. Anarchists tend to refuse the idea of fixed and universal theorisation, preferring to shape the way they make sense of the world according to where (and when) they happen to be. For example, when anarchist anthropologist David Graeber (2004a: 5-6) was asked by a Marxist “are the peasants a potentially revolutionary class?”, he responded that “anarchists consider this something for the peasants to decide”. The

peasants to which Graeber refers have their own agency that is structured and shaped according to their everyday experiences and conditions, independent of the theorisation of 'outsiders'. This emphasis on the situated nature of knowledge foregrounds everyday life as a key political terrain, especially for transformative politics. An everyday politics of this kind is thus immanent and partly rooted in subjective experience. This research, in part, seeks to explore the immanent, material practices of everyday life and their significance to the way politics is and can be enacted.

Everyday life can therefore also be comprehended as a geographical phenomenon that underpins radical political praxis and strategy. The way we understand everyday life, however, affects the role it plays in political practice. Henri Lefebvre and the Situationist International (SI) stand out as key theorists of the politics of everyday life from a (libertarian-leaning) Marxist perspective and constitute the basis of the theoretical framework on the everyday crafted in this chapter. Their emphasis on the role of space and the everyday in the constitution of the political has led a number of geographers to use their ideas in both historical and contemporary studies, as well as theoretical works. As we will see, combined with anarchist and autonomist thought, these theorists provide an approach to researching everyday life that recognises the importance of everyday material and embodied practices while also making space for explicitly and unashamedly revolutionary, transformative political programmes.

### **Theorising the everyday: Lefebvre, the Situationists and beyond**

Despite a personal history of turbulence between Lefebvre and the Situationists, there is much commonality in their approaches to the everyday. Their thought, I argue, corresponds to a number of central anarchist and autonomist Marxist approaches which, together, can build a powerful theoretical framework for understanding the spaces, politics and practices of everyday life.



In *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (2000 [1971]), a lesser-cited book than his three-part *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre's analysis begins with a clear rejection of abstract philosophy. If philosophy is to exist, he argues, it must serve a purpose in the world, and in order to interpret the world properly we must interpret our experience of the world. Rather than rely on more economic Marxisms derived from *Das Kapital*, Lefebvre turns to Marx the humanist as a primary inspiration for his analysis of everyday life.

Despite his rejection of economic understandings of capital, Lefebvre argues that an analysis of everyday life must nevertheless stem directly from an analysis of the everyday functions of capital, since it is what structures our daily activities. Capitalism has a certain 'rhythm', emanating from the mechanisation and routinisation of production and consumption. In turn, life is "lived according to the rhythm of capital" (Highmore, 2002: 113). The commodity form, accentuated through its rapid proliferation in late modernity, allows capital to seep into all corners of life, and to mediate our activities and relationships. Lefebvre's description of everyday life can thus almost be equally read as a description of capital:

It surrounds us, it besieges us, on all sides and from all directions. We are inside it and outside it. No so-called 'elevated' activity can be reduced to it, nor can it be separated from it. Its activities are born, they grow, and emerge. (Lefebvre, 2002 [1961]: 41)

Since it is so intimately attached to capital, and since capital is an all-engulfing social, economic and material relationship, Lefebvre sees the everyday as essentially constituting *a totality of relationships*, which envelops all people and virtually all practices, events and emotions. Everyday life runs through mundane activities, neither actually existing in any clear, discernible form, nor being entirely an abstract concept devoid of any tangible qualities.

Everyday life, therefore, is a stratum of social existence that has a *residual* quality (2002 [1961]), incorporating all actions and interactions that are not

in some way 'specialised'. However, specialisation can arguably be seen in a range of everyday activities, such as working practices and everyday knowledges developed over time in a certain place. It can be argued that once all specialised activities are removed, very little remains, if anything. This appears to disprove Lefebvre's ideas. Guy Debord of the Situationist International seeks to defend Lefebvre from this attack:

The majority of sociologists... recognise specialised activities everywhere and everyday life nowhere. Everyday life is always elsewhere. Among others. [...] This condescending manner of investigating the common people in search of an exotic primitivism of everyday life... never ceases to astonish. (N.D. [1961]: no pagination)

Within this text rests one possible response to the critique of everyday life as the realm of non-specialised activity; namely, that sociological study of the specialised practices in everyday life blinds us to the commonalities of everyday practices and experiences for the vast majority. Debord suggests that there is a "radical inability" among scholars to recognise these commonalities, which lie in the common experiences of, primarily, alienation under capitalism. Furthermore, he argues that "disinterested observation" of everyday life will never fully grasp the common traits that permeate a wide range of practices and experiences that superficially appear to be specialised. Although two workers may not perform the same tasks, their common everyday experience of a range of forces endemic in their position relative to capital (and, anarchists would argue, the state and authority) overrides many of their specialisms. While this argument is somewhat structured by its historical moment – within a late Fordist, late colonial era – and may not fit neatly with contemporary knowledge economies, for example, it does warn against an academic overemphasis on *difference*, rather than *commonality* in discussions of everyday life.

Lefebvre argued that all people and all spaces, irrespective of any other social variable, encounter the everyday and are inescapably intertwined

within it. Likewise, the historical and geographical trajectory of economic continuity and change is embedded in the nature and experience of the everyday. Through a close interrogation of the everyday, Lefebvre suggests, we can grasp the very basis of capitalist society through understanding how different classes experience the everyday very differently<sup>8</sup>. Although the everyday experience reifies class differences through differential practices and experiences – of material dis/comfort, geographical and social im/mobility, position within relations of production, and so on – it also remains the site of *alienation* through capitalist relations, refusing to surrender any power over, or the opportunity to take real pleasure in, these material experiences. It therefore encapsulates both direct, embodied experiences and the less obviously tangible social and psychological conditions of capitalism. Bearing in mind these simultaneously embodied and distanced qualities of capital, Lefebvre (2002 [1961]: 65) argues that everyday life is “neither the inauthentic per se, nor the authentically and positively ‘real’”.

Raoul Vaneigem, a leading Situationist theorist of everyday life, was arguably less concerned than Lefebvre and Debord about theorising the everyday as a concept than he was with analysing how everyday life functions in capitalism. He posits five key aspects of the capitalist everyday that serve to sap the transformative power of the working class: humiliation, isolation, suffering, work, and decompression<sup>9</sup>. When combined, these form a potent meshwork of socio-economic conditions that militate against ‘authentic’ life and radical praxis. Anarchists understand these to be generated and reinforced partly through the state form of governance in particular, as a mass psycho-social consciousness that is reproduced – or performed, as geographers might say – over years of everyday state- and capital-mediated relations. Murray Bookchin (1986: 34) explains:

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<sup>8</sup> Although Lefebvre wrote primarily about how the everyday is structured differently through differences of economic class, the same could be said about other divisions such as gender, sexuality and disability. Understanding everyday life as a residuum rooted in common non-specialised activities is an especially useful tool in this regard.

<sup>9</sup> Here, decompression refers to the dilution of struggle by the strategic granting of piecemeal reforms. As Vaneigem puts it, it is “the control of antagonisms by Power” (Vaneigem, 2003 [1967]: 61).

History, conceived as the account of conflicting social interests, begins where the external means for expropriating material surpluses (notably, war and pillage) are internalised as systematic modes of exploitation..., transforming social life from within.

Everyday social life, for Bookchin and a number of other anarchists, is a microcosm of the geopolitical manoeuvres, conflicts and resource wars that take place between states. Crucially, for anarchists, *relations* form the bedrock of the continuation or rejection of this capitalist and statist social form of life, and these relations can be reproduced or transformed through our everyday interactions (Heckert, 2004; Gordon, 2007a; Ferrell, 2009; Shantz, 2009). “Internalisation,” in the sense Bookchin uses the term, can be seen as paralleling prominent literatures in the social sciences concerning performativity (e.g. Butler, 1993). Rather than a form of ‘false consciousness’ that presupposes a vanguardist approach to political action, the anarchist approach to internalisation – as located within *social* relations – lies in the everyday reproduction or transformation of certain practices and identities over time. Thus when anarchists speak of revolution, they speak of a *social* revolution, as well as a *political* one, and this is a direct reference to the centrality of everyday relations (e.g. Bookchin, 1995).

Like Lefebvre and other humanist Marxists that follow Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1975 [1844]), Vaneigem places a great deal of emphasis on relations and, in particular, the role of alienation. Whereas traditional Marxist theory notes that we are alienated from our labour and its products, Vaneigem extends this, arguing that we are also alienated from our communities, friends, and even our desires. He paints a picture of an emotionally and socially dysfunctional individual who, through the power of alienation and commodity fetishism, both mediated through the consumer spectacle, is virtually unable to identify with others or come to terms with his

or her own self<sup>10</sup>. Guy Debord, also of the SI, argued that the spectacle, an image-saturated total space which bombards people with subtle capitalist and consumerist propaganda, is in fact a “*social relationship* between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1995 [1967]: 7, my emphasis).

Here, the anarchists and Marxists converge in agreement that the everyday is fundamentally based upon relations. This assertion is crucial to the politics of everyday life, and is a recurring theme in later chapters. The disalienation of these relations and the dissolution of capitalism go hand-in-hand. Debord often affirmed this commitment to the everyday as a site of social transformation, particularly emphasising, like Lefebvre, that everyday life is a key means of understanding and learning about the way capitalism operates and how it can be changed:

Everyday life is the measure of all things: of the fulfilment or rather nonfulfilment of human relations; of the use of lived time; of artistic experimentation; of revolutionary politics. (N.D. [1961]: no pagination)

But neither Lefebvre, nor Debord, nor the anarchists appear confident about exactly *how* such revolutionary relations manifest themselves. Are they instituted through social networks, families, or colleagues? Do they manifest themselves as friendships, loving relationships or simply instrumental connections for mutual benefit? In later chapters, I explore the role, nature and dynamics of relations in the IWW and social centres, seeking to develop an understanding of how these rather vague and amorphous phenomena operate in the everyday spaces of political organisation.

Although it is a contested term, in this thesis I draw heavily on Lefebvre’s critiques of everyday life, conceptualising everyday life as a *residual* phenomenon that is experienced, performed and shaped by everyone. At the same time, it is imbued with tensions and ambiguities, located between

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<sup>10</sup> This resonates with similar Marxist theories of the era, such as Jean-Paul Sartre’s idea of *mauvaise foi*, or ‘bad faith’ (Sartre 2000 [1943]).

the troublesome concepts of ‘authentic’ life and ‘inauthentic’ spectacle; and operating between and through both common conditions and wildly different subjective experiences. In this sense – of structuring and mediating commonality and difference through people’s practices and experiences – it is something that Debord refers to as a “measure of all things”. Everyday life is thus conceived as a residual meshwork of relations produced through the complex configurations of social life. As this thesis unfolds, it becomes clear that everyday life is a powerful terrain for political practice. It is a distinctive and important idea to work with, especially with radical forms of politics, since it embodies and makes space for analysis of the dynamic tension between lived experiences and alternative worlds. Later, I discuss the role of the everyday as a key factor in developing prefigurative politics, and it is clear that the ambiguous and contested nature of everyday life is precisely what gives it its potent political capacity.

### **Everyday life, social relations and self-management**

Part of the answer to the question of how relations operate lies in the geographical division of everyday activities, and the way political agency is understood. In this sub-section, I graft anarchist and autonomist Marxist thought onto the theories of Lefebvre and the SI in order to develop an understanding of the centrality of relations to everyday radical politics. In particular, by developing these ideas, I seek to delve into the ways in which such approaches have been perceived as pointing towards similar but differing tactics and strategies.

Since the everyday is the fundamental basis of our experience of, and practices within, society, then a broader crisis of French capitalism and colonialism that Debord saw taking place in the 1960s – a crisis that came to a head around the events in May 1968 – was fundamentally connected to a crisis of everyday life. Debord and Lefebvre also foregrounded the strategic importance of non-work activities such as leisure pursuits – commonly considered to be “wasted” or “free” time – as part of broader processes of capitalist accumulation. For them, these spaces and times

outside of the workplace were in many respects as integral to the functioning of capitalism as work itself. This resonates strongly with the autonomist idea of the 'social factory', albeit with some notable differences.

Autonomist Marxism understands all spaces of everyday life as 'productive' in some way; economically, socially, materially or culturally. Whereas many classical Marxists perceive the role of non-work time to be primarily *consumptive* – in which workers buy back or otherwise consume the products of their labour – theorists of the social factory suggest that it is just as much about *production*. The productive activities during wasted time are not always related to capital accumulation; rather, they often constitute the reproduction of social structures for the continued survival or extension of capital, such as the production of children as future workers or the production of knowledges and cultural significations to be appropriated for commodification. In turn, and contrary to others Marxist schools of thought, these theorists argued that

[t]echnical forces and social democracy [should not be considered as] enabling lines of political mobility, but as creating a complex productive socius which left no room for an autonomous self-defined 'people' or even subject of politics. (Thoburn, 2003a: 70)

Thus the autonomist perspective comes with a powerful dual dynamic: since production is always and everywhere, on the one hand we are inescapably bound up within capitalism in our everyday lives, yet on the other, the possibilities and spaces for struggle are proliferated. The destruction of the social factory necessitates a total and permanent social war at all times and in all places.

Lefebvre framed this issue differently, describing the way in which non-work spaces and times are "colonised" by capital as it develops. This colonial metaphor emphasises not only that the tendencies of primitive accumulation remain within even 'advanced' capitalist economies, but also how accumulation is in process and is always becoming. This constant process

of becoming means that space in general is socially produced (Lefebvre, 1991 [1974]) and everyday life is likewise:

Man [*sic.*] creates the human world and, through the act of production, produces himself. He does not simply produce things, implements or goods, he also produces history and situations. (Lefebvre, 2002 [1961]: 95)

Here, Lefebvre is making a powerful constructivist assertion of human agency in the everyday struggle against capitalism. In a similar vein, Fredy Perlman, a contemporary of the SI and Lefebvre who has since become a leading theorist of anti-civilisation anarchism (see Perlman, 1983), argued that the reproduction of capitalist relations takes place simply through our willingness and complicity in doing so (Perlman, 1992 [1969]). Thus Lefebvre and Perlman's constructivist Marxism necessarily leads them to the everyday: at the most basic level, all that is needed is for people to refuse to do, or do differently, that which they have been told and socially conditioned to do. It requires a permanent, collective revolutionary strategy of everyday life. Lefebvre took an interest in how so-called wasted time – especially play – showed that it is possible to undertake activity within capitalism “which is not subjected to the division of labour and social hierarchies” (Lefebvre, 2002 [1961]: 203; cf. Stevens, 2004). This showed Lefebvre that there are gaps in capital's colonisation of space that can be exploited in the everyday. The fall of capitalism – to him, as with Perlman – is only ever one step ahead of history.

The autonomist project, too, sought to overturn left orthodoxy with a total, permanent revolutionary strategy to occupy all spaces and relations within the social factory. However, their conception of the social factory rejected the notion that capitalism contained any ‘gaps’ whatsoever; rather, gaps must be proactively created by those in struggle. By advocating autonomous everyday politics, autonomism seeks to subvert the established orthodoxy (both Marxist and capitalist), and strategically retains the key tenets of Marxism for application in new ways according to the changing



dynamics of capitalism and social struggle. Cleaver (1979: 11), a key proponent of autonomist Marxism in the Anglophone world, made precisely this point:

[Autonomism] self-consciously and unilaterally structures its approach to determine the meaning and relevance of every concept [of Marxism] to the immediate development of working-class struggle.

Autonomism's significance is therefore as a *reinterpretation* of already-existing Marxist ideas. As such, the later, arguably more well-known, post-autonomist thought of the likes of Virno, Bifo and Negri can be seen as an extension of this tradition to reinterpret Marx(ism) for the specific spatio-temporal conditions contemporary to its reading. Some post-autonomist work has broken into geography – most notably Hardt and Negri's volumes such as *Empire* (2000) – but the breadth and depth of autonomist thought runs far beyond this<sup>11</sup>. (Post-)autonomists have made strides in theorising cognitive labour (Do, 2008), women's reproductive labour (Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Del Re, 2002) and 'precarity' (Berardi, 2005; Neilson and Rossiter, 2005), and have developed their own approach to organisation studies (Mandarini, 2008) and critical management studies (Harney, 2006). Their primary contribution lies in their theorisation of the uses of everyday knowledges under capitalism, exploring how our everyday interactions, ideas and cultural significations – the "general intellect" (see Eden, 2006) – are appropriated into capital through various social mechanics alongside surveillance, 'creative' industries and exploitative relationships of command. The general intellect can help us explore the way in which the uses and dynamics of knowledge contribute to struggles over more tangible spatial and material terrains. Its importance lies in the conceptualisation of knowledge as stemming not from capital's innovation to reinvent itself but in the everyday knowledge, creativity and imagination of people everywhere. As we will see, struggles over the uses of this mass intellectuality take

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<sup>11</sup> This is not to suggest that *no* geographers have considered autonomist thought beyond Hardt and Negri, but that it is rare and sometimes superficial. Some recent works that buck this trend include Wilbert (2000), Mudu (2004), Ross (2008), and Cumbers *et al.* (2010).

place in both IWW and social centre activism, often in ways that are not superficially obvious.

The emphasis in autonomist work on the changing everyday conditions of capitalism also speaks to anarchist thought on the everyday. This work resonates with the anarchist critique of authority (e.g. Ferrell, 2001; Bakunin, 2003 [1871]) as an everyday relationship of power that changes over time and necessarily reproduces and reinforces other (class, gender, ability, and so on) inequalities. Authority, as a social relation between people, is something that is (re)produced through everyday practice and, for the anarchists, can therefore only be destroyed through everyday practice. In response, anarchism's 'present-tense' (Gordon, 2007b) prefigurative strategy of revolutionising everyday life itself rests on the belief that revolution is processual and takes place through changing social relations, rather than taking control of, or reforming, existing institutions.

Anarchist influence on geographical understandings of social transformation has been articulated recently in Chatterton's (2006) idea of "uncommon ground", in which encounters of difference can be used to forge interpersonal connections and relations on an everyday basis. The mutual acceptance of (cultural, social, gender, and so on) difference or "uncommonness", he argues, is a key factor in forging positive grassroots relations based precisely on common goals and desires between constituent parts of a diverse population. This is a call for a praxis based on the ongoing forging of everyday relations, and connects with literatures in geography that likewise emphasise the role of relations in the constitution of social and economic processes (e.g. Murdoch, 1997; Pain, 2000; Boggs and Rantisi, 2003; Gertler, 2003). Chatterton's approach foregrounds everyday life as the primary legitimate terrain of political action. Again, like Lefebvre's and Debord's arguments, the transformation of social relations is central to the anarchist perspective. Anarchists have sometimes overemphasised the importance of momentous, singular ruptures and rebellions (e.g. Bey, 2003 [1985]; Fire to the Prisons, 2009). However, since the late twentieth century, anarchists have tended to reject the 'singular'

view of revolution as a sudden paradigm shift represented in a *coup d'état*, general strike or other such singularities (e.g. Gordon, 2007b; Price, 2009). Although large ruptures can be of use, the revolution chiefly takes place through a multitude of tiny ruptures in one's everyday (inter)actions and political organisation.

Some elements of anarchist thought have also identified capital-driven technological advancement as an increasingly central and alienating facet of everyday life. Appeals to what might be termed 'neo-Luddite' approaches to the role of technology in everyday life can be traced as far back as Kropotkin's critique of specialisation, systematisation and de-skilling in industrial capitalism (Kropotkin, 1968 [1913]), and to the libertarian socialism of William Morris. For many anarchists, technological development is primarily driven by the twin forces of capital accumulation and inter-state conflicts such as war. As such, while only a small minority of anarchists have rejected the idea of advanced technology wholesale (e.g. Zerzan, 2008), many remain critical of the role of technology in mediating everyday relations under capitalism and perpetuating territorial conflicts between states (Bookchin, 2004; Anarcho, 2006; Gordon, 2009).

'Classical' anarchists – including Bakunin, Reclus and Kropotkin – praised the watchmakers' federation of the Swiss Jura region, recognising their co-operative and communitarian technologically basic yet effective artisanal approach to everyday productive practices (e.g. Kropotkin, 1899). Their approach was considered to be a model of high-skill and low-technology communistic practices that could be spread across other productive industries. However, contemporary anarchists have developed a more nuanced approach to this question of technology and everyday life, recognising the danger of both fetishisation of craft and glorification of technological advancement. Indeed, Bookchin (2004) suggests that processes of capital accumulation in fact *impede* truly innovative and beneficial technological development precisely because it is solely geared towards the development of either commodifiable products or munitions,

ignoring social need for the most part. Removal of the profit motive may allow production to be re-oriented towards the common good.

Thus, for the anarchists, the development of certain forms of technology in the present society further embeds both statist and capitalist dynamics and relations directly into everyday life, serving to *mediate* human relations. The anarchist ‘Do it Yourself’ ethic, which in this research permeates social centres most clearly, can be understood as partly an effort to create, imagine and organise without this form of mediation between the collective and its means of production (Ferrell, 2001; Gordon, 2009). This critique of the everyday role of technology strikes a chord with the Situationists who, likewise, perceived elements of technological innovation – particularly its uses – to reinforce alienation and commodity fetishism (Vaneigem, 2003 [1967]). For the anarchists and Situationists, technology is not a significant issue in itself; rather, in discussion of technology lies the centrality and critique of *production* in capitalist life; of creating and consuming products as a fundamental element of the reproduction of capitalism. This is followed by the overriding urge to reappropriate forms of production based on capital-oriented technological innovation. As Lefebvre (quoted in Merrifield, 2006: 10, my emphasis) argues,

[m]en do not fight and die for tons of steel, for tanks and atomic bombs. *They aspire to be happy, not to produce.*

Some contemporary autonomists have criticised earlier autonomist work for fetishising the centrality of production. With such an emphasis on production as essentially the sole activity of everyday life, Katsiaficas (2006: 221) argues that thinkers such as Tronti and Negri actually de-humanise people to an extent by implying that “human beings can be emptied of qualities that differentiate us from machines”. For him, the reduction of people to automata that the idea of the social factory implies

[i]s precisely the reduction of human beings that is made by the existing system... [I]f revolutionary movements in the future were

to adopt [these] categories, they would be rendered incapable of going beyond the established system... Without a reworking of the psyche and reinvigoration of the spirit, can there even be talk of revolution? (Katsiaficas, 2006: 221)

This raises important ontological and practical questions about our position within the capitalist everyday. If Katsiaficas' criticism is correct, then the autonomist project – resting primarily on a belief in the everyday agency of the working class – is all but impossible, since we are so socialised into mechanistic, productive activities that this agency is devoid of any real potency. If we are essentially automata, how can we ever hope to destroy the same social factory that autonomists tell us we produce through our imaginative and creative agency?

In relation to the other thinkers discussed in this section, the autonomist concept of the social factory also seems to preclude the sense of 'colonisation' of everyday space proposed by Debord and Lefebvre. Their difference, for the purposes of this research, lies primarily in their differing spatial imaginaries of everyday life, and therefore how to transform it. Lefebvre fundamentally understood capitalism to 'miss' certain spaces and moments, leaving a fabric of capital punctuated by brief spatio-temporal gaps free from capitalistic relations that could then be claimed, exaggerated and solidified for the proliferation of noncapitalist everyday relations. Debord and the SI, likewise, sought to identify traces of noncapitalist relations and activities in the interstices of capitalist spaces, alongside a project of subversively dismantling the fragile spatialities of the capitalist everyday through practices such as *détournement* and *dérive*. The autonomist approach, however, rests on everyday life imagined as a totalising social factory, without 'gaps' or punctuations to exploit, in which all everyday activity in some way (re)produces capital. The key strategy of social transformation cannot rest on seeking out already-existing spaces or practices that are not yet imbued with capitalist productive dynamics since, for the autonomists, they simply do not exist. Instead, revolutionary agency lies in the self-activity of the working class, broadly defined, to actively prise

spaces and relations free from capital by practising *autogestion*, or 'self-management'.

The autonomist notion of *autogestion* has commonalities with Lefebvre's discussions of *autogestion* in *Comments on a New State Form* (2001 [1979]). For the autonomists, self-management is a central pivot of autonomous politics, and is applicable to the full range of spaces, practices and structures in the social factory. Their perspective emphasised *autogestion* as an expression of workers' autonomous agency, shaping the everyday practices of workplaces and communities without reference to the institutionalised politics of trade unions and Parties that they rejected (e.g. Tronti, 1966).

Lefebvre's brand of *autogestion* stems from a critique of what he saw as an inadequate response from Marxists to the role of the state in containing and dissipating radical possibilities. For him, workers' self-management was a central means of enacting everyday communistic practices without the intervention of state legislation or direction. In this sense, Lefebvre's view is closely related to the anarchist tradition that similarly promotes self-management as part of a rejection of authority and seeks self-organised modes of living and producing such as co-operatives (Proudhon, 2004 [1840]) and independent anarcho-syndicalist unions (Ostergaard, 1997; Rucker, 2004 [1938]). *Autogestion*, admits Lefebvre, "never presents itself with the clarity and the obviousness of a technical and purely rational operation" (Lefebvre, 2001 [1979]: 779). This is because it is always vulnerable to recuperation by capital and the state. Like his and the anarchists' understanding of everyday life, *autogestion* is becoming, processual and never static. As such, it is an everyday practice, in constant struggle with structures, practices and relations of authority that seek to incorporate it into themselves:

Each time a social group (generally the productive workers) refuses to accept passively its conditions of existence, of life or of survival, each time a social group forces itself not only to

understand but to master its own conditions of existence, *autogestion* is occurring. (Lefebvre, 2001 [1979]: 779)

Here, we can identify another differentiation between Lefebvre and Autonomia. The latter propose *autogestion* as a “strategy of refusal” (Tronti, 1966) that seeks to cut off capital from the ‘general intellect’ that produces all objects and ideas through the everyday activities and interactions of people. Lefebvre, however, is much closer to the anarchist perspective by proposing *autogestion* as self-managing the “conditions of existence” in their entirety, incorporating a critique of the state alongside a critique of capital. It is an explicitly antiauthoritarian endeavour, as well as an anticapitalist one. It is not surprising that Lefebvre’s anti-statism partly stems from his – and others’ – turbulent relationship with the French Communist Party’s efforts to appropriate the language of *autogestion* as a means of securing votes and members (Brenner, 2001). In this sense, from an anarchist perspective, Lefebvre’s approach is more multifaceted and anti-authoritarian than the autonomists in crucial respects. Everyday self-management is a theme that resurfaces at various points in the empirical chapters, with both social centres and the IWW proposing and seeking to enact *autogestion* in their organising efforts.

While the perspectives discussed in this section agree that everyday spaces and relations are crucial to developing emancipatory politics, their divergence on the nature of everyday capitalist life crucially suggests a divergence also in *strategies* to transform it. Their superficially rather negligible differences are in fact pertinent to this research. These differences centre on the practical question of “where does radical politics reside, and how is it to be enacted?” and thus lie at a key pivot of the research in general. As such, it is possible to understand these differences as an opportunity to interrogate how such ideas reflect, or fail to reflect, the material realities of everyday radical politics. While the autonomist ideas of self-activity, the social factory and the general intellect are useful tools, the Lefebvrian approach has been shown to align more closely to the anarchist and Situationist perspectives. For all these Marxist and anarchist theorists,

*production* is central, notably, in terms of the development and reproduction of alienated *relations* in the everyday. As we shall see, relations and connections constitute central themes in the empirical fieldwork, and the concepts deployed by these thinkers are interrogated in practice.

The differences between theorists of everyday life tend to stem from differing readings of Marx, differing political conditions and debates in their places of origin, and differing levels of analysis concerning the functioning of authoritarian structures. As a thesis primarily concerned with the practices of anarchism, the Lefebvorean perspective is especially attractive in this respect, and this thesis regularly deploys Lefebvre's approach to self-management and the residual nature of everyday life in order to explore the empirical material. Despite differences, however, the thinkers overall present a powerful critique of a capitalist everyday that is seen simultaneously to reify class relations and provide an opportunity to destroy them directly through the way we live, (inter)act and organise. Everyday life is a plane of social reality in which even the most honest of emotions becomes a commodity. It is, however, where there is also the most – or perhaps the *only* – hope for radical transformation.

## **SPATIAL STRATEGY AND THE PLACE OF CONTENTIOUS POLITICS**

We have seen how theorists have sought to analyse and theorise the politics of everyday life within a capitalist, statist society. Their ideas lead to particular strategies based in the shifting terrains of everyday engagement that may be able to simultaneously combat, and create alternatives to, capitalist life. Analysis of strategy itself is therefore important if we are to understand the everyday geographies of groups such as the IWW and social centres seeking to enact a politics of everyday life. I now turn to consider how geographers have attempted to understand the spatiality of political strategy and organisation, and how such investigations into the geographies of political organisation can inform this research.



With an ongoing interest in social movements in a range of disciplines, there has also been a proliferation of research concerning the geographies of political organisation, movement and mobilisation. Leitner *et al* (2008) identify five interlinked geographical factors in understanding what they call “contentious politics”. To them, contentious politics is preferred over ‘social movements’ because it encapsulates all forms of organised social and political struggle. The five geographical categories are scale, place, networks, socio-spatial positionality and mobility. Each, they argue, has a central place in analysing the functioning, dynamics and trajectory of contentious politics.

While this is a useful set of rubrics, its range is far beyond any single research project. This section engages with the spatialities most commonly discussed with reference to the practice of everyday politics – primarily, place and networks – and examines how geographers have used them to understand the organisational geographies of political groups, movements and contentious politics more generally. This discussion draws out key issues, concepts and debates that will be used and interrogated in the empirical material.

### **Placing politics**

The concept of place is a central element of the political geographies of everyday life. Most everyday activities – indeed, most lives – are rooted in and between particular places. Homes, workplaces and neighbourhoods constitute places in which most people undertake their everyday activities and, as a result, places such as these represent central sites of struggle over the entwined material needs and transformative desires of individuals and groups. As noted in previous discussions of autonomy, it is precisely in the often place-based, everyday activities of people where radical theorists have identified the greatest potential for social transformation.

With some geographers increasingly emphasising the importance of place-based practices and subjectivities in the dynamics of contentious politics, place has arguably become as central to the analysis of mobilisation and struggles as more established concepts in social movement literatures such as scale. This has been echoed by an upsurge in 'relational' geographies (Boggs and Rantisi, 2003; Bosco, 2006; Sheppard, 2008), in which political struggle and other social and economic processes are conceived as proliferating through inter-place relations across space, seemingly without institutionally-structured dynamics for the most part.

Social movement geographies, likewise, increasingly utilise place-based frames of reference to explore how struggles relate to the specific contexts in which they are situated, especially place-based identities and cultures (Bosco, 2001; Martin, 2003; Nelson, 2003). Much of this literature at least tacitly concerns power, and how place and the local are central elements in the constitution of collective agencies and subjectivities that make movements *move*. Foucauldian geographies of power (e.g. Allen, 2003) have also been used, and scholars increasingly recognise how power stems from immanent and localised social interactions, further reinforcing the centrality of place in the constitution of the political. Similarly, Actor Network Theory has also led scholars of contentious politics to emphasise the importance of place and localised interactions (Ettlinger and Bosco, 2004; Featherstone, 2004; Routledge *et al.*, 2007; Routledge, 2008) as actors interact and manoeuvre in specific contexts to create social and political outcomes.

Despite this proliferation of studies that emphasise place, it is important not to dismiss other spatialities of politics – especially scale – wholesale. Kaiser and Nikiforova (2006), for example, identify everyday practices of place-based identity as key forces in both local political mobilisation and wider-scale governmental policy. Thus, place can not only be understood as being articulated through scalar frames of reference, but also as partly producing the dynamics of scale itself. To them, and others, place and scale are interrelated at a fundamental level. As this research develops, it becomes

clear that the kinds of dynamic interactions between spatialities identified by Kaiser and Niforova can help us unravel the organisational geographies of radical praxis.

Place-based praxis has often been cited as an alternative spatial strategy to the perceived drawbacks of global networks, especially in relation to global justice movements (De Filippis, 2001; Escobar, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 2002). There is, however, a danger of fetishising place, and also localism, as automatically organic, untainted and progressive. As the emergent community-based organising of the far-right in the UK shows (e.g. Bowyer, 2008), it must not be automatically assumed that place-based politics is always, or even usually, progressive. In response to these concerns, Massey (1993) has theorised a “progressive sense of place” by emphasising how places are always somehow connected to other places through communication networks, transnational communities, economic processes and so on. This recognition of the global connectedness of places seeks to provide an alternative to reactionary or exclusionary forms of place-based politics<sup>12</sup>.

Paralleling Massey in some respects is Routledge’s (1996b) concept of “terrains of resistance”. Routledge argues that the “terrains” on which political struggles are mobilised – often located in particular places – are constituted by an intersection of political, social, economic and cultural knowledges, histories and dynamics that can potentially originate from a range of spaces, places and scales. This marks out terrains of resistance as unique and particular to certain struggles at certain places in certain times. Like Massey’s conception of place, these terrains are comprised of “both macropolitics and micropolitics” (1996b: 517), constituted by dynamics and phenomena that originate at a range of scales. In turn, Routledge argues that what is so interesting about place-based politics is the ways in which these terrains of resistance are appropriated by movements in order to

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<sup>12</sup> In practice, UK groups such as the Independent Working Class Association have been enacting strategies of working class community politics in a similar way (Hayes and Aylward, 2000).

develop their own tactical and symbolic forms of mobilisation and expression. “Terrains of resistance” can help us frame place-based politics as something that is deeply related to context and is always shifting, and in later chapters, I deploy this term to help analyse the political geographies of social centres and the IWW. As explained later in this chapter, following concerns about the discourse of “resistance” in critical geography, I prefer the phrase “terrains of *struggle*” to describe Routledge’s idea.

This question of how places are constituted by a range of spatialities is similar to debates concerning ‘scale-jumping’, in which groups attempt to extend or contract their spatial reach according to strategic needs and the actors targeted (e.g. Cox, 1998; Soyez, 2000; Glassman, 2002). From the perspective of place, so-called ‘militant particularisms’ (Harvey, 2001) – solidarities or struggles located in, and oriented towards grievances or demands in, specific places and contexts – sometimes involve connections between places in order to achieve more general goals that cannot be achieved solely in their specific sites of struggle.

The contentious issue of how – or if – militant particularisms can develop a workable spatial strategy that at least partially overcomes the problem of the particularity of place brings us to the ‘relational turn’ in geography (e.g. Boggs and Rantisi, 2003). Rejecting Harvey’s (1996) characterisation of militant particularisms as necessarily requiring conscious *a posteriori* connections to generalise from the particular to the aggregate, Featherstone (2005) argues that they are produced *relationally*. Militant particularisms are, he argues,

the ongoing products of the diverse routes and connections that make up subaltern spaces of politics. This allows a more generous and recursive account of the relationship between place and broader political imaginaries than accounts which suggest militant particularisms are formed and *then* networked. (Featherstone, 2005: 252)

Militant particularisms, then, are not established as separate entities rooted entirely to the specificities of place; rather, they are partly co-constitutive of one another, and much broader dynamics. Moreover, Featherstone (2008) argues that militant particularisms can in fact produce new forms of relations through their interaction over time. Taking on board this perspective may help to unpack the role of place in political mobilisation by interrogating how the politics of the case studies in this research are articulated through practice both within and across different contexts.

Throughout the broader contentious politics literature, however, there seem to be fewer works that, like Routledge and Featherstone, consider the ways in which places become sites of political struggle *alongside* wider-scale dynamics and conflicts, as opposed to operating separately from them. As Nicholls (2009: 78) argues,

[t]he central analytical task at hand is therefore not to show how one form of spatiality is more important than the other, but rather to show how these spatialities articulate within one another in actually existing social movements.

Focussing on place, Nicholls (2009) seeks to synthesise 'territorial' understandings of place, resting on a view of place as localities imbued with social value (e.g. Agnew 1987), and 'relational' understandings of place, which situate places as sites of social interaction and intersection (e.g. Massey, 2004). Both perspectives understand that the proximity of place can produce strong ties between (potential) activists, albeit in different ways, but between places both relational and territorial connections weaken. Movements thus engage in a number of networking strategies to address this problem and, in the process, produce spatialities with dynamics and qualities that can be markedly different from the places that constitute them.

Following Nicholls, this thesis engages with precisely the question of how place-based, everyday grievances can become collective forms of political action and can be articulated through a variety of spatial frames. This is

especially interesting in terms of how the mobilisation of highly specific place-based political identities, cultures and grievances that in many respects only 'speak' to those directly in contact with them, might be able to lock into wider strategies and struggles without causing tensions and fractures in their strategy or localised identity.

Accordingly, if we are to take place seriously without fetishising its power or rendering it as the particular 'other' of generalised space (Escobar, 2001), it is necessary to derive our understanding of it from how it is articulated and mobilised by political groups and movements. Cresswell (2004: 12) argues that it is important to differentiate between place "as a way of knowing" and place "as a thing in the world". Place should be considered as something that informs both our epistemology and ontology, and he argues that this should have a profound impact on how scholars approach place.

In this research, I follow the groups studied by understanding place primarily as a "way of knowing" that is applied to political contexts for the benefit of campaigns and initiatives. I consider place in terms of how it is involved in shaping people's perceptions through experience and, concomitantly, the way it is mobilised as a political tool. Likewise, I take place to be a spatial category that is necessarily co-constitutive of other spatialities such as scale and networks. In a study of neighbourhood organising, for example, Martin (2003: 744) addresses place through an analysis of its use in political strategies:

[I]t is too simple to say that a concept of place was evident... Rather, it is more important to examine *how* place appeared in the discourses of the organisations, and why. Unravelling the elements of place in neighbourhood-based community organising illustrates how local dependence is constituted at multiple scales.

This approach to place – what Martin calls "place-framing" – can help us understand how place relates to other geographical categories such as scale. Far from being exclusive, place and the struggles associated with it

may be strategically mobilised through scalar engagements and interactions with opponents and allies. Indeed, if Featherstone is correct, place is already mobile in myriad spatial configurations, locations and scales. This suggests that place has a particular potency in its application to a wide variety of contexts, and through both scalar and networked (e.g. Glassman, 2002) organisational forms. As Escobar (2001: 165) notes,

it is important to learn to see place-based cultural, ecological and economic practices as important sources of alternative visions and strategies for reconstructing local and regional worlds, no matter how produced by “the global” they might also be.

Thus, the importance of place lies not in some form of opposition to perceived totalising discourses of ‘the global’ or ‘space’, but in its role in the constitution of the political, its mobilising effects, and its interaction with multiple other spatialities. In the next section I discuss how geographers have analysed and conceptualised the ways in which groups and movements have sought to solidify and connect place-based struggles and subjectivities, most notably through the network form.

### **Movement organisation and networking**

The geographies of place-based militant particularisms cannot be fully understood without an examination of the spatial and organisational mechanisms that they deploy in place, and those that relationally connect them to one another across space. Arguably the fundamental connective strategy within anarchist/ic movements and groups is the network. Recent geographical literature concerning social movements and contentious politics is, likewise, often concerned with the role of networks as facilitators of participatory and efficient structures for mobilisation between and within places. The significance of networks to this research is not only their prominence in the wave of global justice movements out of which the most recent manifestation of IWW and social centre activity has emerged in the UK, but also in the *continued* centrality of networks to their organisational

practices. Networks, both *in and between places*, are manifested in a number of instances in later chapters, and their study can help us make sense of the complex autonomous spatial strategies enacted by these groups.

Especially in activist scholarship of global justice and anti-capitalist activism, networks have often been understood as powerful communicative and relationship-building tools for the development of emancipatory politics, subjectivities and spaces (Brecher *et al*, 2000; Routledge, 2000; 2003; Juris, 2005; 2008). The network is often understood as an inherently anti-authoritarian form, which develops organically across space through the proliferation of connections and solidarities between sites of struggle.

Within global justice networks, a diverse multiplicity of actors and groups are in operation, and this heterogeneity can lead to tensions and contradictions between different priorities and tactics. Routledge (2003) has noted, following Harvey (1996), how such networks require some level of universalist principles to maintain these often fragile networked connections. The utilisation of internet technologies has supported this, with activists creating cyber-spaces where news and activities from different localities are syndicated onto websites and presented as at least superficially coherent to audiences at a range of scales and places (see Mamadouh, 2004).

However, following criticism of the 'radicalness' of networks elsewhere in geographic literatures (e.g. Hetherington and Law, 2000) there has been a period of reflection on their utility and politics, with activist scholars increasingly taking a more critical and nuanced view of the network form. As Cumbers *et al* (2008a: 184) suggest,

many accounts [of global justice networks], while valuable in providing grounded insights into particular struggles and mobilisations, tend towards hyperbole and inflated rhetoric about the capacity to achieve more sustainable and significant social change.



Cumbers *et al* go on to critique other aspects of networks as potentially hierarchical, exclusive, and locked into a division of labour based on minority world technological privilege. In this research I seek to consider the challenges and possibilities of networks to libertarian forms of organisation, as well as other organisational structures.

Despite concerns with the efficacy or political purity of networks, there has been a move towards counterpoising networked forms of organising against more formal institutional structures characterised chiefly by political parties and trade unions. Juris (2005), for example, rightly criticises authoritarian socialist parties for dominating the processes of the 2004 European Social Forum in London. In turn, he responds that the networked organisational logic of the anarchist-led *Beyond ESF* summit was a more authentic and liberatory mode of organisation. While this may be correct, he and others (e.g. Routledge *et al.*, 2008) often risk dismissing formal and institutional organisational logics wholesale. For example, in Juris' piece, there is little discussion of the formal organisational practices of many of the groups that constituted *Beyond ESF*. Equally, networks are easily misunderstood as (post-)modern creations of late capitalism when in fact they have been in existence for many hundreds of years (e.g. Jones, 1999). Thus networks are neither new, nor necessarily radical or progressive. Nevertheless, they are widely, and rightly, understood to be a major and often effective means of organising and co-ordinating the mobilisation of diverse and geographically dispersed collectivities and militant particularisms. As this thesis develops, I seek to interrogate how networks and formal organisations interact and influence one another in everyday organisational practices. As we will see, the dichotomy that has developed between the two can result in a closing-down of possibilities for radical forms of organisation.

## **Bordering, territory and globalisation**

The continued interest in the political role of place and networks must also be understood in relation to the conditions of contemporary globalised capitalism. It has been argued that political mobilisation at most scales must contend with the dual dynamics of *deterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation*. In the study of globalisation, geographers have identified a trend towards the deterritorialisation of phenomena such as identity and belonging that were previously rooted in various territorial scales of place (the neighbourhood, the community, the nation, etc.) (e.g. Papastergiadis 2000; Roy, 2004). The increased mobility of capital has been coupled with a concomitant increase in the mobility of social and cultural traits. Geographers have investigated a range of phenomena that have at least in part developed alongside or out of this deterritorialisation, including transnational communities, outsourcing, migration, unstable electoral patterns and a range of geopolitical dynamics (e.g. Ó Tuathail, 1998; Hudson, 2000; Brun, 2001; Behr, 2008). It is important to note how this deterritorialisation is in fact rooted in territorial techno-political spaces, meaning that the discourses surrounding it are imbued with utopian capitalistic free-market sentiments.

The social and cultural anxieties produced by this fragmenting process of deterritorialisation have often been articulated, politically, through spatial strategies that can be understood as *reterritorialising*. The rise of the far right in Europe, for example, can be seen as a search by some, in the face of perceived ethnic and social fragmentation exacerbated by international migration, for the re-establishment of a lost sense of homogeneous, 'authentic' community. However, the increasing prevalence of place-based radical and progressive political sensibilities and projects in recent years can be understood as a more progressive form of reterritorialisation. As early as 1993, Harvey (1993a: 12) predicted the possibility of precisely this form of communitarian reterritorialisation:

[T]he increasing penetration of technological rationality, of commodification and market values, and capital accumulation into social life..., together with time-space compression, will likely provoke increasing resistances that focus on alternative constructions of place (understood in the broadest sense of the word). The search for an authentic sense of community and of an authentic relation to nature among many radical and ecological movements is the cutting edge of exactly such a sensibility.

Arguably, both the IWW and social centres seek to reterritorialise politics in their efforts to build grounded, everyday political practices in workplace and community spaces. As noted in the previous sub-section, however, rising levels of defensive and reactionary assertions of place-based politics teach us to be wary of fetishising place and local territory as an unproblematic source of alternatives to globalised capitalism (cf., for e.g. Laurie and Bonnett, 2002; Bonefeld, 2004; Ince, forthcoming).

Networks can contain both deterritorialised and reterritorialised organisational logics. On the one hand, they connect and transfer knowledges, solidarities and resources between geographically disparate struggles, while on the other, these struggles are often located in, and oriented towards, the highly specific spatio-temporal contexts in which they are situated. Indeed, the de/re-territorialised nature of networks may partly explain their continued appeal to radical and critical geographers over the last twenty years.

Networks can therefore encompass de/reterritorialised dynamics and place-based militant particularisms, imbuing in them a powerful sense of connection between different geographical concepts and phenomena in political organisation. Another politically significant element of networks is the way they facilitate *cross-border* solidarities. This sense of creating connection across impermeable or selectively-permeable national and ecological boundaries resonates with the anarchistic rhetoric of 'grassroots globalisation' within global justice movements and the anarchist rejection of

the state more generally. The popular slogans “our resistance is as global as capitalism” and “we are everywhere” speak directly to the border-crossing that networking logics imply. To an extent, networks do facilitate cross-border connections, but some work on networks has also shown how, just like the alleged free movement of capital, networks can remain rooted to certain geographical areas (Soyez, 2000; Wilson, 2001).

It is, however, simplistic to suggest that all borders are necessarily negative in all contexts. As some geographers have noted, certain kinds of borders can act as facilitators as well as preventers (e.g. Timothy, 1995; Newman and Paasi, 1998). Even among anarchists, whose politics reject the legitimacy of *state* borders, there is a recognition that bordering practices – of membership, territory or identity, for example – can be useful and sometimes necessary. One needs only to glance at the street tactics of anarchists and other radicals in riot situations to see how the use of barricades is a crucial spatial tactic for self-defence and street control. Similarly, the controls on membership among some anarchist groups can be considered a form of bordering that develops a particular collective identity.

In this research, I therefore examine the role of borders and exclusion in the constitution and enactment of radical identities and practices. *Bordering*, as a process or practice, has become an increasingly standard term, denoting “the spatial strategic representation of the making and claiming of difference” (Berg and Van Houtum, 2003: 2). While there is a growing body of work concerning the bordering practices of certain cultures and identities (Vila, 1999; Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002; Madsen and Van Naerssen, 2003; Van Houtum *et al*, 2005), there is far less that discusses the role of bordering in the constitution and mobilisation of political subjectivities.

Bordering provides us with a possible means of interrogating the ways in which political groups develop – consciously or otherwise – their particularity and identity. It also links with other themes discussed throughout this chapter, with its emphasis on the everyday constitution of (political)

subjectivities and identities, located in particular places and demarcating certain real or symbolic territories.

The issues discussed in this section are crucial to understand how radical political groups relate to, and create alternatives to, existing society. On the one hand, Lefebvre and the Situationists argue that capital can never quite totally colonise all space, leaving spaces that can be claimed and secured by and for radical or subaltern practices. On the other hand, the issues discussed in this section raise practical difficulties for radical groups, since the spatial characteristics of capitalist society structure possible responses in ways that can be difficult at best, and self-defeating at worst. For example, Harvey (1993a) poses the problem of local economic 'regeneration' schemes which, although embedding and solidifying capital reproduction in a certain place, also tend to find support from left-wing community and labour organisations due to material benefits such as job creation. To support such initiatives is to actively encourage the deepening of capitalist processes (and often state structures) in the very place that you are seeking to mobilise *against* capital. However, opposition to regeneration initiatives outright simply militates against the material benefits of such programmes for often impoverished and troubled areas.

The IWW and social centres provide excellent studies for exploring the conundrums faced by radical groups seeking to enact a politics that is both grounded everyday, material needs and imbued with transformative principles. They also provide opportunities for considering the role of concepts discussed in this section such as place, territory, networks and bordering, and how they operate and interact in everyday political practice. The approaches of both the IWW and social centres, to differing extents and in different ways, manifest formal and networked organisational logics, mobilising around the specificities of their chiefly place-based contexts. Yet there remain pronounced differences with regards to the spaces, scales and subjects of organising deployed by the groups. The contrasts between a hundred year-old international labour federation and a small, short-term community-based collective are myriad, and the concepts and debates

discussed in these sections concerning the geography of political organisation provide a firm basis for exploring their similarities and differences.

The complex dynamics of political organisation – especially radical and autonomous forms of politics, organising through a prefigurative strategy in a hostile political environment – require us also to consider carefully what is at stake in the case studies. Goals and targets for IWW and social centre organising must be at once practical and proportional to resources at hand, yet still oriented towards a radically different libertarian communist future. The next section discusses the issues surrounding the ‘successful’ or ‘unsuccessful’ enactment of prefigurative politics.

### **PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS: TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL (AND GEOGRAPHICAL?) IMAGINATION**

In this final substantive section of the chapter, I turn to address the third research question of the thesis. The anarchist principle of prefigurative politics is arguably the central defining element of anarchist theory and practice that differentiates it from other forms of socialist and radical left approaches. In this section, I follow from the previous section concerning spatial strategy to demonstrate the ways in which prefiguration forces geographers and others to rethink the way we envision political practice. In doing so, I also undertake a discussion of the concept of autonomy, which in many respects is a central mode of articulating prefigurative politics in practice. Autonomous forms of political organisation provide a practical, organisational framework through which prefigurative politics can flourish and, as such, is also an important means through which to analyse groups’ articulation of prefiguration.

## The means and ends of prefiguration

A pivotal element of this research lies in an assessment of the extent to which social centres and the IWW represent a challenge to standard modes of 'doing politics'. The various spatial strategies discussed in the previous section are important factors in the success or failure of movements and groups. However, when considering such radical – some might say utopian – projects, the question of how we can 'measure' success is important to discuss in more depth. For groups such as these, the framing of success is markedly different from standard accounts and affects the way we can understand their significance.

Much of the geographical literature on social movements concerns the notion of success, explicitly or otherwise. After all, the extent to which groups and movements achieve their aims is a major element of any analysis of political action. Clearly the majority of social movement scholarship focuses on particular reforms or policy enactments that do not require major systemic transformation, even if some scholars argue that they have transformative potential (e.g. Cumbers *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, the way in which success is framed – if not by the movements then certainly by those studying them – usually centres on the articulation of political *principles* or moral *values* that are abstracted from, or concretised into, the tangible *goals* of a campaign. For example, a number of pieces (e.g. Pulido, 1998; Wills, 2001; Ross, 2008) show how the mobilisation of general principles such as 'dignity' and 'respect' factor highly in the success of unionisation campaigns, in concert with more concrete goals such as higher wages. Miller's research on anti-nuclear activism contrasts these broader principles against concrete legislative change when he notes that

[a]s a movement to mobilise public opinion, the [campaign] was an undeniable success. Yet when it came to changing U.S. defence policy, the [campaign] fell far short of its goals. (Miller, 2000: 169)

This bifurcation of distinct value categories between the achievement of goals and the advancement of principles is present in other work within and outside of geography (e.g. Banaszak, 1996; Gibson *et al.*, 2008), and suggests that the way success is understood cannot simply be attributed to the achievement of concrete, measurable goals with a finite end. With regards rural British activism surrounding hunting laws, Woods (2003: 316) argues that

[t]he adoption of a holistic 'rural' mantle has been a strategic decision in order to build greater support for a more narrowly focussed core concern. In the case of the Countryside Alliance this was the realisation that the single issue of hunting could not mobilise sufficient public support... but positioning [a ban on] hunting as... an attack on rural identity – could.

Relatedly, Miller (2000: 170) goes on to note how

[m]aterial phenomena must be made understandable through cultural (lifeworld) codes that endow material phenomena with meaning and guide action in the world.

The principles, values or “lifeworld codes” that allow us to make sense of the world and our place in it are a key element through which movements succeed or fail in engaging with and mobilising communities, policy-makers or other actors. Of course, geography plays a central role in shaping the articulation and execution of campaigns and debates. Again, however, in these assertions there remains a clear differentiation between goals and principles, and also between the tangible political questions of success and the intangible (or at least not directly or explicitly tangible) codes and systems of understanding that underpin the desire for those changes.

The social movement literature thus raises the question of how groups understand their immediate goals in relation to broader norms, principles and values. Although it may be easy for academics with relative material



comfort and security to valorise the symbolic extension of abstract principles when a particular struggle has failed, it is equally easy to fetishise concrete, recordable outcomes as the primary or only criteria for assessing political success. It is thus important to ask: is there another way?

The anarchist idea of prefiguration provides an alternative means of understanding the relation between ('concrete') goals and ('abstract') principles. As I argue throughout this thesis, the anarchist vision of revolution is a process-based, contextually-sensitive, everyday one that tends to reject the singular idea of a revolution as a sudden paradigm shift in social organisation. The anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker (2005 [1956]: 111) noted that

I am an anarchist not because I believe in anarchism as a final goal, but because there is no such thing as a final goal. Freedom will lead us to continually wider and expanding understanding and to new social forms of life.

While anarchists propose a certain kind of world, their recognition of the significance of differentiated and shifting terrains and contexts leads them to appreciate that revolution can never have an 'end point' as such, and that an emphasis on prefiguring those practices and relations that they wish to see must be a central element of praxis. This recognition sits alongside the anarchist refusal to assess social practices according to a universally pre-scribed benchmark or end point. Adaptation to the specificity of place, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, can be a major strategic factor in relating anarchist ideas to concrete practice. Thus anarchist means of analysis lie in "a process of immanent critique" (Franks, 2006: 99) that recognises the dynamic relationship between means and ends. Franks (2006: 98-99) explains:

Anarchism acknowledges that there are consequences to actions. The satisfaction of desires, or the frustration of goals, has to be taken into account. Yet these ends are pragmatic and

temporary and the legitimacy of an act does not rest on end-states alone... In carrying out this sort of appraisal of existing social forms, new practices and social relations are formed...

[M]eans and ends are irreducible parts of the same process.

This inseparability of means and ends is at once a process of understanding and engaging the development of social dynamics over time, and a means of prefiguring alternative emancipatory practices. Since the anarchist conception of revolution is immanent, processual and unending, it follows that any notion of 'success' must also be envisaged as part of a process that recognises not simply the intertwinement of goals and principles, but their mutual co-constitution and co-development. Any notion of success must necessarily be pragmatic, processual and based upon the dynamic interaction between means and ends. Anarchists therefore seek to continually revolutionise everyday life itself.

Prefigurative politics is closely entwined with the idea of utopia. Utopia in this thesis acts not as a topic of interest *per se*, but as an ideal that exists within anarchist politics in an unending tension with lived experiences. While I briefly dwell here on utopia, prefiguration is the key subject of study. The significance of utopia lies in the dynamic tension between itself and lived experience that anarchism embraces, alongside its disruption of what is 'possible' and 'impossible'. The idea of utopia drives anarchist/ic politics towards social transformation, yet it is also an anchor, rooting anarchism in an unending journey. It is widely – and usually unfairly – considered to consist of “unitary, totalising blueprints” (Blomley, 2007: 57), in which a perfect future world is imagined in its totality. This caricature of utopia as absolute, impossible and the product of fantasy is often characterised as causing a lack of faith in utopian thought and as a justification for the continuation of the *status quo* and rejection of radical thought and practice wholesale (Blomley, 2007). Moreover, Pinder (2002: 230) notes that some have argued that since utopia

has too often been driven by authoritarian ideals, and too closely associated with totalitarianism, ... its demise should be celebrated or at least met with equanimity.

Yet, a utopianism premised on a prefigurative reading of praxis and a processual reading of revolution is markedly different from these approaches. If we understand revolution as something enacted through everyday practice that has no beginning or end, then utopia – the ‘end’ of revolutionary politics – is necessarily unobtainable. Far from an ‘end’, it becomes something highly practical and immanent to lived everyday experience. Indeed, it has been argued that utopia is at once a means and an end, driving people to ever broader horizons and ever more experimental relations and practices. In an oft-quoted passage by Eduardo Galeano (quoted in *Notes from Nowhere*, 2003b: 499), we can see this processual understanding unfold:

Utopia is on the horizon: when I walk two steps, it takes two steps back... I walk ten steps, and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking.

Galeano’s metaphor of walking towards the horizon is especially relevant to understanding the dynamic fusion of means and ends in prefigurative praxis. The horizon, of course, surrounds us in all directions. Thus, rather than a linear view of prefigurative struggle taking place in a pre-conceived direction towards a specific end-point, it can be conceptualised as non-linear, unpredictable and exploratory in nature. In this sense, a prefigurative spatial strategy has no fixed solutions and can potentially be manifested in a variety of ways. In turn, this means that spatial concepts such as place and networks may be understood and used in a wide range of ways in a prefigurative framework.

As I argue in the following chapters, attempts to revolutionise the everyday are central elements of both social centres and the IWW. While the issue of means and ends does not explicitly permeate all topics considered in

subsequent chapters, its presence is felt in various ways that help us understand the notion of success in terms of the groups' political constitution and action. By unpacking prefigurative politics through the idea of the inseparability of means and ends, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the nature and significance of anarchist/ic praxis.

Prefigurative politics can also make an important contribution to the debates surrounding social movements and radical grassroots political activism. If the everyday mobilisation of place-based subjectivities is manifested through a prefigurative organisational form that refuses established understandings of success, then we may have to question fundamental assumptions about how to enact meaningful and/or effective political praxis. The meanings and uses of certain spatialities such as place and networks may not necessarily be the same within a prefigurative framework than a 'reformist'<sup>13</sup> one. Moreover, prefigurative politics demands of us a careful unpacking of processes within political groups and the ways in which a prefigurative agenda relates to everyday, material needs and practices.

One example of this is the democratic practices of social centres and the IWW, which are a central element of their prefigurative strategies. The "agonistic" (Mouffe, 2000) relations created within a radical democratic system, premised on mutual acceptance of disagreement and debate, is an idea that is deployed to explore how a prefigurative decision-making framework might also incorporate practices of exclusion and conflict. In opposition to agonism is the "*antagonistic*" relationship between working and ruling classes in the politics of the groups studied. The negotiation of these different social relationships is fragile and maintained through careful spatial manoeuvres. As I argue in chapter six, it illustrates the unpredictable and non-linear way in which prefigurative spatial strategies function in practice.

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<sup>13</sup> Here, I write 'reformist' in inverted commas because it is so often used as a derogatory term. In this case, it is not, and simply refers to a framework of political action that seeks to enact changes which do not require fundamental systematic change.

This thesis considers both the way we comprehend the importance of prefiguration to political praxis and how organisations shape themselves to implement prefigurative principles in practice. Therefore, not only is the way we understand political geography at stake, but also how we enact politics in practice. This returns us to everyday life and its centrality to prefigurative organisation in place. Place-based militant particularisms frame political grievances or demands, and help to mobilise people around common interests linked to their everyday experiences in place. When prefigurative politics are articulated and mobilised through everyday experiences of place, however, the goals of political action are transplanted into a different set of meanings and purposes. This research explores these dynamic relationships between geography, prefigurative politics and the everyday.

### **Autonomy: a framework for prefiguration in practice**

The previous subsection outlined the philosophy of prefigurative politics and its central role in transforming the way we understand and analyse political praxis. This section uses the concept of *autonomy* – a pivotal term within contemporary anarchist discourses and practices – to explore how a prefigurative approach to political action and organisation can be applied to everyday circumstances. Autonomy is conceived by anarchists as a tool for developing radical praxis that is both prefigurative and useful for effecting material change. As such, we should not consider autonomy as a research question in itself; instead, autonomy provides the practical framework through which prefigurative politics is articulated and practiced, and therefore can be explored empirically.

Autonomy is a term that denotes self-management and flexibility, and, as we will see, provides a means of exploring the spaces and spatialities of everyday radical politics. Capital's quest to saturate all spaces of the everyday is one that is mobile, ceaseless and decentred. As various geographers have noted (e.g. Smith, 2000; Wills, 2002; Featherstone, 2003; 2005; Uitermark, 2004; Pickerill, 2007), this has increasingly been mirrored in recent years by the development of a popular force against it

that is also mobile, ceaseless and decentred. Furthermore, this form of radical organising has to a large extent been inspired by anarchist and autonomist practices and structures, premised on the creation of spaces and networks of action for the facilitation of political mobilisation in a multiplicity of spaces and scales.

Autonomy has gained ground as a means of both enacting and making sense of radical praxis among both activists and geographers. Inspired by anarchists (Day, 2005; Cohn, 2006), and autonomist (Tronti, 1966; Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Cleaver, 1979) and post-autonomist (The Plan B Bureau, ND; Eden, 2006; Berardi, 2009) Marxists, geographers studying autonomy have come to understand autonomy as a form of social, lived practice that is embedded in continual prefiguration in the spaces of everyday life (e.g. Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). As was established in a previous section of this chapter, capital is a relation that permeates virtually all everyday spaces and interactions, meaning that the politics of production do not rest exclusively in the workplace. For radical theorists of the everyday, we live in a capitalist society – a social factory, as the autonomists put it – that seeks to subsume all life and practices into it. In turn, anarchists emphasise a prefigurative strategy that also seeks to subsume all life and practices into it.

Anarchist approaches to autonomy have emphasised the unequal power relations involved in everyday activities and interactions, particularly with the state, identifying mechanisms of authoritarian governance that structure our daily lives and interactions. Following a discussion with two soldiers on a train, Heckert (2009: no pagination) notes that anarchist autonomy involves

creating cultures which are deeply nurturing, deeply nourishing, honouring the needs (food, shelter, community, intimacy) of all. It means supporting each other to develop our capacities to listen, to cooperate, to connect, to share, to imagine. Nurturing autonomy, then, is empowerment — the realisation that power isn't something that other people *have*, it's something we do

together. In the military or other situations of domination, power means obediently working together according to some claim of authority. In autonomy, power means working together by listening to each other, caring for each other.

'Post-left' anarchists have responded to this call through a refusal to comply with structures of authoritarianism, preferring a lifestyle that seeks to escape and defy the trappings of authority and capital through 'dropout' spatial and economic practices combined with high-profile spectacles of sabotage and physical conflict (Nadia C, ND; Black, 1997; cf. The Invisible Committee, 2009). However, re-reading Heckert closely, we can see how autonomy is heavily dependent on connections and relations. So-called 'social anarchists' have critiqued the post-left 'lifestyle' approach to anarchism as ineffective and self-defeating, and have taken an approach of seeking to revolutionise our relations with other people, rather than resisting contact with authoritarian and capitalist structures wholesale (Bookchin, 1995; W, 2006). These anarchists – just like Lefebvre, the Situationists and autonomists – argue that it is all but impossible to 'escape' capitalism and that an effective revolutionary strategy must take place through the spaces in which people circulate in their everyday lives. This school of thought, driven partly by members of groups such as the IWW and various social centre collectives, has been the driving force behind the changing emphasis among many UK anarchists as discussed throughout this research.

Autonomy – literally meaning 'self-government' or 'self-legislation' – should be understood as a term that fuses individual freedom and collective organisation. This understanding of the term rests on a recognition that the individual and collective are entwined with one another, and is a concept and tool utilised by much of the libertarian left. As Castoriadis, a key theorist of the concept of autonomy, states, "I cannot be free alone" (1991: 166). In this sense, we must be sceptical of forms of autonomy that are premised entirely or predominantly on *individual* free will. Put simply, autonomy is the power for people to make their own rules, and this is best achieved collectively. It is this element of autonomy that is most appealing to

anarchist efforts at developing prefigurative politics. For the autonomists, autonomy involves a strategy of “engaged withdrawal” (Virno, 2006) that seeks to develop self-managed projects independently of the state, capital, and mediating institutions such as social services and mainstream trade unions, while also remaining in close contact with and critically participating in them where it is deemed appropriate. It is linked to the anarchist commitment to the immanence of agency and social capacity, in which

anarchist autonomy refers to the forces constitutive of beings, to their capacity to develop in themselves the totality of resources which they need in order 1) to affirm their existence, and 2) to associate with others, and to thus constitute an ever more powerful force of life. (Colson, 2001: 47-48)

Thus anarchists perceive autonomy to involve the immanent, collective self-constitution of self and other. One example of autonomous strategy is the Italian ‘base unions’ that have been developed since the 1970s. These operate independently among the rank-and-file members of partnership-oriented recognised trade unions, in order to develop autonomous rank-and-file militancy and direct action, and prefigure forms of worker self-management and self-education (Romito, 2003). Autonomy, then, is

our means and our end. It is both the act of planting our “tree of tomorrow”, and that tomorrow of many different hues: rich, diverse, complex and colourful. Autonomy is freedom and connectedness, necessarily collective and powerfully intuitive, an irrepressible desire that stalls every attempt to crush the will to freedom. (Notes from Nowhere, 2003a: 107)

Autonomy is a set of prefigurative practices that lie in the tension between the present and the future; by creating spaces of and for autonomous social practices, people seek to prefigure future worlds while also engaging in struggle for material improvements in the present. This tension has been manifested clearly in the spatiality of autonomous groups’ political



organisation since the early years of *Autonomia* in the 1960s. A key element that differentiated early Italian *Autonomia* from established Marxist politics was a reconfiguration of *spatial strategy*. For example, Ruggiero (2000: 171) notes that

[r]ather than the regeneration of the peripheries in which they lived, young people claimed their right to abandon the periphery altogether and make their presence visible in the heart of cities.

The notion of autonomous geographies is something that is receiving increasing interest, and a number of geographers have made contributions to debates in this field (Chatterton, 2005; Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2006; Brown, 2007; Pickerill, 2007). Much like Gibson-Graham (2006), these scholars seek to rework the lexicon, discourses and practice of political struggle in geographical literatures, specifically in order to develop a new politics of scholarship and activist practice. In arguably the most comprehensive conceptualisation of autonomy in geography, Pickerill and Chatterton (2006: 730) define autonomous geographies as

those spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social and economic organisation through a combination of resistance and creation.

This rather general definition provides space for autonomous geographies to be applied to a wide range of subjects. Their and others' discussions of autonomous space make important contributions to understanding autonomy as a key element of praxis and a useful tool in geographical analysis. Autonomy, both in their work and this thesis, is not a philosophy in itself; rather it is perceived as a means "to structure and articulate [radical political] practices and aims" (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 730). In this thesis, I also understand autonomy as a strategic tool, notably as a means of enacting everyday, prefigurative politics. It is therefore important to explore the concept in depth.

Pickerill and Chatterton identify several central elements of autonomous geographies. First, autonomy is necessarily situated in particular spatio-temporal trajectories. It is also, secondly, a socio-spatial strategy that is manifested spatially according to these spatio-temporal dynamics and in relation to its social context. Third, the geography of autonomy is at once situated within and without existing society, embodying an “interstitial” spatiality of its own. Following from this, fourth, it embodies a combination of creation – of alternative or prefigurative relations and practices – and resistance – to the material oppressions and inequalities that take place within capitalist life. The fifth element of autonomy is its concern with everyday life and social transformation through everyday, grassroots praxis. These five principles of autonomous geographies can be seen as advocating an everyday political praxis that seeks to carve out spaces for the collective development of prefigurative relations.

Pickerill and Chatterton’s principles provide a solid groundwork for further elaboration and exploration of autonomous geographies in practice. In this thesis I interrogate and elaborate on these basic principles throughout the empirical fieldwork. Elements of Pickerill and Chatterton’s theorisation of autonomy are, however, at times debatable. In particular, they emphasise the concept of ‘resistance’ in relation to autonomous geographies, whereas the autonomist tradition explicitly rejects the idea due to the agency it appears to attribute to capital in shaping the terrains of struggle. As Tronti (1979: 1) made clear in the original wave of autonomist Marxism,

[w]e... have worked with a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second. This is a mistake. And now we have to turn the problem on its head, reverse the polarity and start again from the beginning: and the beginning is the class struggle.

Tronti, and others in the autonomist tradition, have argued that what makes capitalism reproduce and reinvent itself is the autonomous self-activity of the working class. As I explained in the previous section, they argue that all

activity is subsumed into the social factory, making all everyday practices productive in some way. This forces us to think about capitalism's development as originating in the everyday activities and struggles of the working class, broadly defined (be they workers, unemployed, home-makers, etc.). While some autonomists have begun to criticise the centrality of production (Katsiaficas, 2006), this argument – that capital relies on labour, rather than the opposite – remains the central premise of autonomist Marxism.

Clough (2009) uses the example of the rise of Thatcherism to illustrate this point. He argues that Thatcherism – and the political economy of many neoliberal right-wing governments elsewhere – was in fact a direct and very effective response to increasing workers' control of industrial relations in the 1960s and 1970s. In other words, it did not simply appear in the minds of the ruling classes as a “great new idea”; rather, it was a response by capital to the threat posed by increasing working class power to the perpetuation of the status quo. As Cumbers *et al.* (2008b: 372) note, it is possible to understand these dynamics as representing capital's “flight from labour,” in a constant search to avoid any confrontation which it cannot win.

Following this autonomist emphasis on “self-activity,” I argue that resistance, both as a category of analysis and a practice of political struggle, is potentially troublesome. The autonomist perspective forces us to reject the notion that resistance is the only – or even the primary – appropriate label for the dynamics of political struggle and, further demands that we rethink the fundamental dynamics on which struggle is based. Cindi Katz (2004) has recently problematised the monolithic discourse of resistance, splitting it into *resistance*, *resilience* and *reworking* in an effort to draw out the nuances of how political struggle do not always manifest themselves in simple opposition to capital's ‘invisible hand’. While she does not reject the concept of resistance entirely, Katz emphasises the way in which political action can take place in a range of ways and that – much like anarchist prefigurative praxis – can permeate a range of spaces, relations and practices. Although her framework remains rooted in the broader discourses

of resistance among critical geographers, she shows that what many refer to as ‘resistance’ is in fact constituted by myriad spatial practices that are not necessarily – or even usually – articulated through reactive opposition against a proactive aggressor. In this thesis, I seek to push Katz’s initial problematisation of resistance towards a reconceptualisation of struggle that does not rely upon such a problematic term.

As such, connecting ‘resistance’ to the practice of autonomy can be problematic, and attaching it to practices of prefiguration is equally – if not more - troublesome. If we are to take the autonomist tradition on board, the couplet proposed by Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) – of “creation” and “resistance” – is in fact one and the same thing, drawn from the multitude of everyday practices of *autogestion* for which Katz sought to develop her distinction. Instead, I draw inspiration from Katz – albeit without the specific categories that she deploys – by endeavouring to explore the ways in which struggle is located in a broad spectrum of everyday practices and relations forged in autonomous praxis. I revisit this issue several times in later chapters, interrogating the everyday operation of both the IWW and social centres, in a range of proactive and reactive initiatives and campaigns.

As we shall see, autonomous politics in practice are far from clear-cut and cannot necessarily be categorised neatly. Indeed, this refusal of tidy categorisation is a major element of what makes autonomy such an interesting and powerful concept to study, and to deploy in political praxis. Since prefiguration is produced and reproduced through complex everyday relations and interactions (e.g. Heckert, 2008; 2009; cf. Chatterton, 2005), autonomous praxis can generate geographical arrangements that do not necessarily conform to established understandings of political organisation. In scalar terms, these geographies can be understood as situated “between and beyond globalisation-localisation” (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 735) since they do not adhere to particular scalar patterns in all cases. As Brown (2007: 2696) argues, autonomous groups and initiatives create spatialities “on their own terms”. The tactical – and therefore spatial – flexibility that autonomous self-management can offer suggests that autonomous praxis

may provide insights into how autonomous groups relate their prefigurative approaches to the contexts in which they organise, and existing ways of doing politics. Autonomous initiatives may either reject established geographies of political engagement wholesale, or else utilise existing political scales and spaces in multiple orthodox or unorthodox ways.

We can therefore practice autonomy in a variety of ways. This is because autonomous politics is a politics derived from the labyrinthine and non-linear approach of prefiguration, and is therefore rooted in *practice*, leading to it operating in an often unexpected manner. Brown (2007) argues that the potency of autonomous spaces lies in the *process* of their construction, rather than the spaces themselves, and Pickerill's (2007) research on left-libertarian internet media shows how autonomy need not require particular spaces through which to operate; rather such spaces develop over time through grassroots connections. These works suggest that autonomous practices are rooted in process and negotiation, and this correlates closely with the anarchist strategy of prefigurative politics which also is a process that is never complete (Gordon, 2007b). As a result of this processual geography of autonomy, we may prefer to talk about autonomous *spatialities*, avoiding the bounded and complete image that the word 'spaces' – rightly or wrongly – can sometimes imply. Autonomy, as inherently processual, develops spatialities that likewise are never entirely finished. These spatialities, premised on self-organisation, can be understood as enabling the development of collective strategies of public self-help immanent to and integrated with the changing concerns and desires of people (Membretti, 2004).

Autonomy is a powerful concept when considering the prefigurative politics of everyday life, emphasising and even celebrating the immanence, relations, agency and process that constitute the bedrock of prefiguration. It is a philosophy of political organisation that sheds light on the real-life, everyday application of prefigurative politics in practice. Autonomy's role, in a sense, is to cement prefiguration to the everyday. As a result, although this thesis does not posit autonomy as the subject of a key research

question, it is an important building block in understanding how the three research questions – concerning everyday life, spatial strategy and prefiguration – are linked.

## **POLITICS, EVERYDAY ORGANISATION AND SOCIAL RELATIONS**

I now conclude this chapter by bringing its key threads together and re-emphasising the significance of this research. This research aims to speak to both activist and academic debates about the nature and significance of everyday organisation and struggle. With the decline of global justice movements and networks in the last five or so years, some anarchists have begun to rethink their spatial strategies to reflect a more nuanced understanding of the realities of movement-building while seeking to retain the radical potency of anarchist efforts to prefigure future worlds in the present. This reconsideration is significant to broader political debates, since it represents an effort by anarchists to challenge existing political imaginations and create a genuine alternative to other forms of radical or progressive politics. Much of this has led to an emphasis on the centrality of everyday spaces and practices. For the most part, I argue, academia lags behind such shifts in activist praxis and discourse. Some work has been critical of the networks and networking logics exhibited among the anti-capitalist and alter-globalisation movements, but little has so far examined how anarchists and others have developed their strategies according to emerging autocritiques of these radical forms of organisation.

Premised on the centrality of everyday life to understanding the nature and significance of anarchist/ic political praxis, this research also situates itself in literatures on the politics of the everyday. An investigation of everyday organisation can help us examine the role of central geographical phenomena such as place, networks and scale in shaping political praxis. As we have seen in this chapter, the importance of the everyday does not simply lie in its centrality to understanding the world; it is also a crucial

factor in changing it. The thinkers discussed in this chapter understand the everyday in often very similar ways. The main differences, between Lefebvre and the autonomists in particular, lie in their differing understandings of how capitalist space operates, and how they approach the role of self-management in political struggle. As a result, the differing perspectives presuppose differing political strategies. By applying their ideas to the analysis of initiatives geared towards transforming the everyday, I seek to understand of how concepts such as *autogestion* and the social factory function – or not – in real life. I therefore examine everyday life from the perspective of how it acts as a site of struggle, shaping the dynamics of political practice in different spaces and places.

I have argued that the way everyday life impacts upon political organisation is linked to a powerful sense of place and particularity – connected relationally to, and networked with, other places and struggles – that serves as a locus for the articulation and mobilisation of collective political subjectivities and grievances. In other words, place, a central element of a geography of everyday life, shapes the terrains on which political subjectivity and activity rests, and is always connected relationally to other places, scales and times. This dynamic connection between the geographies of everyday life and contentious politics drives this thesis, and makes for a potent framework through which to investigate the everyday spatial strategies of social centres and the IWW in the UK.

The way anarchists and anarchist/ic projects articulate their prefigurative politics is chiefly through autonomous practices and organisational forms. Recognising the spatial and tactical flexibility afforded to autonomous politics, this research seeks to explore the multiple everyday spatialities of such practices. Geographers (Leitner *et al.*, 2008; Nicholls, 2009) have called for analysis of how multiple spatialities interact in political action and their insights can help us understand the ways in which differing spatialities create terrains of struggle that are particular to certain spatio-temporalities. Combining this work with efforts to theorise autonomous geographies (e.g. Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006) as interstitial spatialities of subaltern practice

immanent to everyday experiences, I utilise the IWW and social centres as case studies to investigate the role of everyday autonomous practices and their geographies in developing spaces of prefiguration.

Contemporary geography may benefit from the perspectives that anarchists can provide to ongoing debates, especially in the case of everyday life, prefiguration, and the modalities of how we assess the means and ends of political action. Indeed, the emergence of a new wave of anarchist thought in geography shows how these ideas are already beginning to tentatively establish themselves as a potent alternative to established forms of critical and radical geography. This research is situated – critically at times – within this trajectory, and aims to contribute to and build upon this emerging wave of radical political geography. As I have emphasised, a central facet of what makes anarchism such an intellectually and politically distinctive approach is anarchist efforts to prefigure the world they wish to see through the mundane conditions that people experience and constitute every day. This thesis seeks to explore this relationship between prefigurative utopian politics and everyday, material practice.





## **RESEARCHING RADICAL POLITICS, RADICALISING POLITICAL RESEARCH?**

“The political’ is *unavoidably* ‘the personal’,” notes Fuller (1999: 223), inverting the famous feminist dictum. Situating researchers as active constituents in the politics of their own research projects and the broader political field is an increasingly accepted approach within mainstream geography, encouraging geographers to engage with the political realities and consequences of their research practices. This chapter outlines the methods and methodologies utilised in this research and, in so doing, explores and analyses central methodological debates and practices in geography. Throughout, I endeavour to construct an approach to research practice that is at once rigorous in addressing academic issues, and militant in addressing the politics of research and research practice.

The first section introduces the case studies in greater depth, focusing on their size, extent, and activities. These initial introductions to the IWW and social centres allow us to gain a better understanding of how one might study them in practice. Following from this, I outline in detail the methods used in the empirical research. These methods, focusing primarily on an activist ethnography of the groups, are explored extensively with reference to the specific conduct of the fieldwork, such as the duration, sites and practices involved.

The following section discusses the politics of qualitative geographical research in general and politically-engaged research in particular, and outlines the methodological framework that guides the research practice.

Through engaging with a number of debates in the geographical literature concerning ‘activist’ research practices – most notably questions of relevance, reflexivity and participation – the framework is situated in part as a response and contribution to these debates. The politics of the research is underpinned by a commitment to *solidarity* and *mutual aid* as guiding principles of research practice. Indeed, I argue that a commitment to these principles can point towards a fresh approach to some of the debates that geographers have been grappling with in recent years.

In the final substantive section of the chapter, I critically appraise the methods used, sometimes outlining how problems faced were overcome, and sometimes with hindsight pointing towards action that might avoid such problems in the future. In concluding, I reiterate the importance of the principles outlined, and suggest how they might be able to develop our understanding and practice of militant research.

## **WHY THE IWW? WHY SOCIAL CENTRES? WHY NOW? LIBERTARIAN POLITICS TOWARDS A ‘POST-ANTICAPITALIST’ ERA**

### **The IWW: building “a new world in the shell of the old”**

An issue that has been increasingly prevalent since the mid-2000s has been how anarchists can re-connect with the broad spectrum that makes up the working class. There was a sense that anarchists, and the left more generally, had become separated and isolated from it, as well as its diverse identities, experiences and concerns (e.g. Norwich Anarchists, 2006; ‘W’, 2006). This debate not only informed and inspired a new generation of anti-capitalists to transfer their militancy into the workplace. They wanted to re-acquaint with both their own and others’ positionalities within the capitalist system, explicitly, as *workers*. In some respects, this shift was part of the same dynamics that encouraged a transferral of energies towards social centre activism.

In most places and times between the 1960s and early 2000s, anarchists who sympathised with syndicalism – the belief that fundamental social transformation must take place in the first instance through workers’ control of their workplaces – had to argue their case against a much larger group of anarchists who did not identify with ‘workerist’ forms of politics. Nowadays, however, class-struggle and syndicalist forms of anarchism have an increasingly significant presence within British anarchism. Indeed, organised anarcho-syndicalism has been virtually absent from the UK throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and its modest emergence in recent years is somewhat alien to many. Libertarian communist ideas, such as the work of *Aufheben*, have increasingly influenced this group of anarchists which, although it remains highly critical of authoritarian Marxism, is increasingly preoccupied with the question of popularising anti-authoritarian radicalism among workers specifically. They are increasingly recognising that extracting oneself entirely from capitalist relations is not only all-but-impossible, but also disempowering and solidifies exclusive and subcultural activist roles.

The increasing activity and size of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) is a notable example of how syndicalist ideas are spreading through anarchism and related milieux. Its growth can be understood as a direct effect of anarchists and other libertarian radicals seeking to reassert the everyday spaces of the workplace as politically significant in the development of a genuinely emancipatory politics. In its efforts to develop this form of everyday workplace politics, its activists organise and agitate at a wide variety of workplaces, from coffee shops to lumber yards and printing presses, seeking to implement explicitly left-libertarian principles in the practice of organising and its outcomes. Given the largely young and often relatively well-educated membership base in the UK, the IWW has a membership base largely in the service and public sectors, in industries such as education, healthcare and retail. On the other hand, union demographics differ from place to place, and local branches of construction workers, truckers, tailors and cycle couriers are also present, among others.

The IWW is a global union (although predominantly active in Anglophone countries), founded in Chicago in 1905. It is an industrial union, meaning that it seeks to organise across traditional trade boundaries. Moreover, its aim is to organise all workers in all industries into “One Big Union” (IWW, 2007) in order to allow the working class to wield maximum power in direct opposition to the interests of their employers and the governments that support them. As such, the IWW has a strong anti-state current running through it, although it cannot be described as a specifically anarchist critique of the state *per se*. Most other syndicalist unions also operate along these lines. Like many other syndicalist unions, the IWW’s structure is also prefigurative, organising itself in a way that may be applied to organising the future post-capitalist society as well as fighting everyday, material battles in the present.

Despite this political stance, the IWW deliberately avoids political labels, arguing that to label a group as ‘anarchist’ or ‘socialist’ and so on is to artificially pigeon-hole the group and exclude and alienate many potential sympathisers. Instead, the IWW claims its revolutionary principles are commonsense and directly relevant to workers’ everyday experiences of the economy and workplace power structures. In place of a ‘communist utopia’, the IWW labels future society after capitalism as “Industrial Democracy”, again, defying specific political definition. Indeed many IWW members themselves identify with the union’s non-aligned approach. One US IWW activist notes that

my anarchist friends, true anarchist friends, ideological anarchists, say I’m far too much of a socialist to be a good anarchist. My socialist friends, members of the Party and stuff like that, say I’m far too much of an anarchist to be a good socialist!  
(Jacob interview, 18/8/2007).

For the IWW, as with the anarcho-syndicalist CGT in Spain for example, the crucial issue is a particular form of organisation, rather than necessarily

pushing a specific political or ideological line<sup>14</sup>. Nonetheless, there is a close connection between the IWW and anarchism, as Christiansen (2009: 388) notes:

[A]lthough the IWW has never been explicitly anarchist, the extensive presence of anarchistic ideals in the narrative [of the union] indicates a relationship beyond even the level of affinity.

The IWW's democratic structure is such that information and executive power originates at the branch level, and filters 'up' to regional- and global-scale administrative bodies. This is designed to ensure local democratic practices and autonomy at the grassroots whilst maintaining collective organisation at wider scales. Branches and individuals are able to co-ordinate freely with each other, exchanging information and ideas. While the union is organised around a formal administrative and democratic structure (IWW, 2009), most activities operate outside of the central administration.

In its 1920s heyday, the IWW boasted around 100,000 members in the USA and Canada, particularly among agricultural, mining and logging workers, and was feared by employers and governments alike (Thoburn, 2003b; Thompson and Bekken, 2006). Its membership has dropped significantly since the 1930s and it became almost extinct between the mid-1950s and early 1980s. Remarkably, it has seen a significant revival in the last decade, particularly in the last five years (see Thompson and Bekken, 2006). Internationally it has around 2,000 members, mostly concentrated in the USA and Canada, but also with active sections in Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and the UK. There are also members in other countries including Finland, France, the Netherlands, and Japan. In the UK, the IWW has grown dramatically in the last two to three years, with around 500 members, making it the second largest section of the union, after North America. Nevertheless, it is still very much a new and emergent

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<sup>14</sup> For the CGT, this tactic has worked well, and despite heavy criticisms from other anarchists its membership has risen to around 60,000, with a total representation of over a million (Gambone, 2004), making it the largest anarcho-syndicalist union in the world.

organisation that in many respects is far less established in the UK than social centres.

Although not explicitly anarchist, the majority of active members of the IWW are class struggle anti-authoritarians of one form or another. Its explicitly revolutionary ideas of solidarity, horizontal organisation, anti-capitalism, and working class unity, as well as its long history of strong anarchist involvement (see Thompson and Bekken, 2006; Christiansen, 2009), suggests a powerful anarchist influence in its ideas and activities and aligns its philosophy, strategy and tactics most closely to anarcho-syndicalism<sup>15</sup>. Some attempts have been made in the past to affiliate the IWW with anarcho-syndicalist organisations, especially the International Workers' Association (IWA), but attempts have usually failed due to the strong internal culture of 'anti-political' sentiment.

The IWW is relevant to a study of contemporary British anarchism because of the influence it holds among anarchists and, conversely, the high proportion of anarchists actively building the IWW. Its importance is reflected in its influence on other major UK anarchist organisations in informing and sometimes shaping their workplace strategy and theorisation. For example, the anarchist organisation *Liberty and Solidarity* (ND) notes, in a position paper on 'industrial strategy', that

we believe that the IWW has something important to offer the class struggle, as a militant rank and file alternative to more politically composed, or sectarian initiatives. At present we note that the IWW also welcomes wider Labour Movement initiatives such as the National Shop Stewards Network, which also furthers the kind of union approach that we believe necessary.

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<sup>15</sup> The IWW also participates in international anarcho-syndicalist conferences and works closely with anarcho-syndicalist unions on certain campaigns.

Likewise, in their official policy on workplace organising, the *Anarchist Federation* (2009) – the largest formal anarchist organisation in the UK, and traditionally sceptical towards syndicalism – argues that

[w]e do not believe it is possible to recreate mass industrial organizations like the CNT and IWW of the past although we recognise much that is of value in this tradition... At the moment grass roots self-managed industrial unions like the IWW provide opportunities to spread militant struggle from workplace to workplace, strengthen struggle within the workplace and coordinate solidarity action. Where they judge that these opportunities still exist, AF members are encouraged to join them.

Thus the IWW represents a relatively major actor among anarchists, with sufficient power to inform and guide the way in which many anarchists perceive and relate to the politics of the workplace. Their influence on anarchists in North America is also significant (e.g. Jones, 2001; Youth Section, 2007). As mentioned previously, the significance of the IWW to this research is its emphasis on everyday workplace organisation. Its unconventional grassroots approach to union organisation represents a profound shift from not only established industrial relations in the UK, but also the previous relations of many anarchists to the workplace as a site of struggle.

### **Social centres: carving out radical urban space**

Social centres have been present in the UK and other, predominantly European, countries for several decades (Köhler and Wissen, 2003; Cattaneo, 2005; Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006). They are buildings that are squatted, rented or co-operatively owned to provide autonomous political spaces in a particular area. In recent years social centres have played a vital role in bringing anarchist and other radical ideas and practices into the practical everyday spaces of communities and neighbourhoods,

mostly in large urban areas. They have also been increasingly important in co-ordinating between various different radical groups and individuals and providing space for meetings, fundraising, events, discussion and other activities.

Contemporary social centres tend to be organisationally separate from each other<sup>16</sup>, and vary in terms of organisational culture, legal status and terms and topics of engagement. However, they do share some similar traits. Firstly, social centres are located in physical spaces with discrete boundaries. The buildings in which they are based vary widely, but they are all based in buildings of some sort, which provide space to facilitate their activities. A second common trait is that they share common principles that differentiate them from conventional community centres. These common principles tend to be broad, focussing on commitments to anti-capitalism and participatory forms of democracy in particular. Thirdly, they have an open approach to outside groups that are prepared to work within and respect the principles of the centre. In some cases, groups and individuals are encouraged to participate in the social centre before being sufficiently trusted to utilise the space for their own activities. Finally, social centres share an emphasis on a grassroots but multifaceted approach to organising. This means that although they are often community based and tend to operate at a local scale, they are also actively involved in mobilising and organising around a wide variety of issues that are experienced and fought over at multiple scales. For example, the UK Social Centres Network (UKSCN) was a key organisational network in the co-ordination and advertisement of anti-G8 activities in 2005 (Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006).

As will be discussed, the genesis of the contemporary social centre movement lies in the continuation of, or conscious breaks from, a range of movements and traditions. Of particular relevance are the British anarcho-

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<sup>16</sup> However, in early 2009 the Birmingham-based *Justice not Crisis* collective were occupying two buildings simultaneously. The collective operated as an umbrella organisation to co-ordinate between the two (squatted) spaces and provided common principles, bodies and ideas for both spaces.



punk “Autonomy Clubs” of the 1980s and the European autonomist movements that have been active since the 1960s (Anon., N.D. [1994]; Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006). *Autonomia*, as they were called in Italy, founded squatted social centres to meet a need in a locality for a space to co-ordinate political, social and cultural activities. Their movement towards community organising was at once a result of a partial retreat from the streets in the face of mounting state repression (Mudu, 2009) and a development of new principles and analyses (Katsiaficas, 2006). The autonomist tradition argues that relations of capital permeate throughout all spaces of everyday life (Katsiaficas, 2006). As well as advocating the refusal and sabotage of work through grassroots workplace activity, the autonomists view the working class as having economic and political agency outside the workplace (Tronti, 2005 [1966]). One particularly important area for them is the politics of the spaces outside the economic productive sphere – those spaces and places in which some noncapitalist relations continue but which are also under constant attack from capitalist forces, such as neighbourhoods or the family. The political subject for autonomists is a *social* subject, whose (re)production of capital also takes place throughout life, in the social factory (see Wright, 2002; Cleaver, 1979). Thus, the development of social centres was a tactical decision for the protection and extension of noncapitalist relations and the furtherance of anti-capitalist struggles (Mudu, 2004).

In recent years, social centres in the UK have tended to attract those anarchists and other radicals whose politics developed out of the spectacular anti-capitalist movements that took place around 1999-2003. The discursive terrain of these elements has moved increasingly towards reassessing class and domination, and activists have sought to site their politics in relation to more grounded, everyday issues such as migration, casualisation and surveillance. These activists tend to look towards the theory and practice of the powerful Italian and German autonomist movements as the inspiration for their praxis, often drawing on the autonomist thought of Negri, Tronti and Virno, as well as more classical anarchists such as Malatesta (1921), a principal proponent of direct action

tactics. The growing popularity of social centres has coincided (not accidentally, in my view) with the decline in prominence of the ritualised spectacle of mass action at the likes of G8 and WTO summits. Although the social centre network has for a long time been, and continues to be, central to these mobilisations, the mobilisations themselves have become far less central to the activities of many anarchists in the UK.

In London, many anarchists and left-libertarians have moved towards social centre activism, and the seriousness and reflexivity within the social centre movement on the whole appears to demonstrate an increasing level of tactical and analytical sophistication. Interestingly, a number of social centre activists are, or have been, members or supporters of the IWW, and vice versa. The interchange of bodies and ideas makes for a complex arrangement of networks and lifecourses overlapping and intersecting with one another in interesting ways. As we shall see – and paralleling IWW transformations from an “anarchist historical club” to a functioning union, often involving some of the same people – some collectives have begun making steps towards creating strategies for integration and co-operation between social centre organisers and users, and the communities in which their social centres are situated. This involves not only a reappraisal of organisational structures, but also greater aesthetic and cultural inclusivity, and the creation of spaces and forums for relatively broad community participation. It must be noted that not all social centres are run in this way, since they are autonomous from one another, and in some cases a traditional subcultural aesthetic continues.

In 2006, participants in *The Square Occupied Social Centre* in Bloomsbury, central London (January to June 2006) undertook activities such as running free English lessons for immigrants and free yoga sessions. They did this, partly to fulfil perceived needs in the local area, and partly to encourage maximum participation from, and exposure to, those individuals and groups outside the anarchist milieu who would otherwise have not experienced such spaces. Other initiatives included a radical academic conference and providing office space for the radical migrant support and campaigning

network, *No Borders*. There are many other similar stories elsewhere (see Paul, Alice and Isy, 2008), many of which have not been documented.

At the time of writing, cities in the UK with either permanent (rented/owned) or temporary (squatted) social centres include London, Brighton, Nottingham, Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Oxford, Sheffield, Plymouth, Newcastle and Edinburgh. Since squatted centres are highly precarious and generally short-term (usually surviving for between 2 and 6 months) and do not always make use of internet media to promote themselves, it is hard to tell how many social centres are functioning at any one time. Some social centres are also not linked into broader social centre activist networks such as the UKSCN, and many more spaces, such as some art or music venues and radical working men's clubs, occupy ambiguous positions with regards to whether or not they constitute bona fide social centres. Even rented social centres are precarious, relying on donations from frequenters and revenue from events to secure their space. All of this makes counting the number of social centres difficult, if not impossible. Nevertheless, social centres have a relatively large and growing impact in the UK. One estimate (Alessio L, 2007) put the number of people who visited or participated in social centres in 2006 at between four and six thousand, including between 350 and 400 people actively running them.

## **OUTLINING THE METHODS**

Now that I have introduced the groups to be studied, it is possible to outline the methods used. The research interrogates not only how the IWW and social centres seek to develop what could broadly be described as 'a politics of everyday life', but also how this is enacted, through the ongoing minutiae of organising themselves on an everyday basis. In one respect, this is a material question, exploring the ways in which the groups used their environments to develop political identities and organisational forms that are conducive to an everyday politics. In another respect, it concerns the

everyday spoken or unspoken socio-cultural relations between actors that are not always manifested so clearly.

In response to the nuances of studying everyday life, the primary method used was that of long-term ethnographic fieldwork, taking place over a period of approximately eighteen months between January 2007 and late summer 2008. This provided everyday access to the groups studied and allowed me to build lasting relationships to support and deepen the research. In particular, in an effort to contribute to the groups with which I worked, I developed a form of activist methodology reminiscent of Nigel Thrift's (2000: 556) inversion of "participant observation" into "observant participation". As an active participant I had greater access to the internal workings of the groups, was more widely trusted by other participants, and did not need to rely on complex negotiations with gatekeepers or representatives. In developing a methodology that sought to tap into often-unspoken practices of everyday life, ethnography is ideally suited. As will be discussed in following sections, it also aided the enactment of solidaristic relations between myself and others involved in the groups.

The fieldwork was manifested in a range of activities (see Appendix 2). As an active participant in the groups, I attended meetings, events, actions and generally sought to involve myself in the functional everyday spaces and activities of the groups. The actual amount of fieldwork varied significantly, but tended to be between 15 and 40 hours of activity per week. I also took on tasks that I felt would contribute towards their positive development, as well as potentially benefiting the research. For example, in the IWW, I took on the official role of London Branch Secretary not only since there were no others able or willing to fill the position at the time, but also because it would place me at the centre of the everyday organisational practices of the London Branch for a year. Similarly, I have been continuously active within the IWW Survey and Research Committee (SRC), providing specialist research skills to the union on a voluntary basis as well as situating myself in a body that focussed on undertaking research on the IWW's membership, campaigns and targets. The SRC therefore provided an opportunity to offer

support to the union while gaining valuable information and making contact with a large number of activists around the various sections of the union.

The social centres, usually being structured far more loosely than the IWW, required a different approach. Rather than holding official positions, my participation was far more *ad hoc* and informal. Attendance at weekly general meetings was a key element of this, as was helping out at events and simply 'hanging out' and talking to activists in the centre. At the Vortex social centre in Stoke Newington, I was regularly involved in running the café that was its main source of income. This provided the opportunity to engage with visitors and activists alike. Another key area in which I participated was the general upkeep of the building, using my limited DIY skills to help clean and repair the centres. In doing so, I spent long periods of time in the centres, usually working in a small team with a handful of others.

Recording the fieldwork largely took the form of extensive fieldnotes. I cross-referenced these fieldnotes with any relevant news articles, flyers, photographs or other useful materials. Regular visits were made to various online spaces in which activists reported on activities and discussed politics such as Indymedia websites and online discussion forums. These provided a good source of background knowledge on the key issues facing anarchist/ic initiatives more generally. However, attempting to use the internet as a representative cross-section of these milieux would be hazardous and naïve, since not all activists frequented such websites and the few with large amounts of free time dominated discussion of certain issues. Nevertheless, as supporting material for the fieldnotes, the internet was a valuable resource, as were archives of IWW and social centre e-mail lists.

London was the main site in which I undertook the fieldwork. For the IWW, with a branch covering the full extent of Greater London, this made the site of fieldwork extend to various different areas of the city, and sometimes beyond. The IWW's multi-scale organisation – between London branch, UK

section, and international administration – meant that the site of fieldwork was never fixed, and a deep understanding of the union involved analysing local connections to events, debates and activities taking place in different parts of the union and at different scales. In this sense, the activities London IWW were constituted in a variety of scales and places. London, as a major city with a relatively large and active branch<sup>17</sup>, was a reliable and well-connected ‘base’ for the research to be situated.

Similarly, London’s social centre scene is arguably the most active and well-connected of its type in the UK. As the map in chapter five (p. 210) illustrates, throughout the fieldwork period no less than twelve social centres were active in London during that period. The two social centre collectives in which I participated – the *Ex-Vortex Occupied Social Centre* and the *Hackney Social Centre* (HSC) – were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, both centres were situated within a mile or two of my own home. Since social centres are spaces usually rooted in and oriented towards certain communities, my presence would be far less welcome had I participated in collectives further away from my own place of residence, at the southernmost tip of Hackney. Many of the same issues faced by the community in which I live – such as gentrification, police harassment and rising living costs – are also faced by the communities in which both the Vortex and HSC were situated.

Another reason for choosing these centres concerned their specific motives. Social centres all have their own identities and aims, with some, for example, focussing primarily on radical art, others on specific community grievances, and others on general activism. In explicitly seeking to conduct research on community-based radical strategies, I prioritised those centres that were attempting to enact such an everyday community-based politics. Whereas others – such as the Library House in Brixton and the Black Frog

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<sup>17</sup> Branch size varies significantly in the IWW, with a minimum membership to formally charter a branch being only five. London branch has around 60-70 members and an active core of around 20-25, making it currently one of the largest branches in the UK. Only a handful of IWW branches – all of which are located in the USA – currently have more than 100 members.

in Lewisham, both South London – had very similar aims, these centres were located in other parts of the city. In the case of the Vortex, another reason was my existing connection with a large number of the activists involved. I had previously been involved in another social centre, the Square, working alongside and gaining the trust of a number of participants who would eventually set up the Vortex. My existing connection with many of these activists greatly helped my efforts to gain consent for the project and build my confidence when it came to gaining consent at the HSC, where I knew few people.

Although London remained the primary focus, the spaces of the research were sometimes scattered widely around London, the UK and beyond. Drawing from literature on ‘multi-site’ ethnography (e.g. Marcus, 1995; Friedberg, 2001), I constructed my ethnographic practice partly around how I might undertake an ethnography with such a broad geographical coverage. In attempting to find ways of mapping patterns of association and interaction between people and places, Hannerz (2003) argues that a multi-site ethnography is far more than just a comparative project. Acknowledging the situatedness, or “opacity” (Hannerz, 2003: 209), of knowledges in different places aided investigation of the geographies of knowledge within the two groups. In the IWW, for example, such an approach contributed towards a better understanding of the union’s geopolitics between its different sections. This understanding of ethnography also assisted in exploring the extent to which there were inter-local relations between different social centres. As I will elaborate in later chapters, although social centres are loosely networked, they do not co-ordinate in an especially organised way. Recognition of the opacity of local knowledges that are produced out of this situation can help understand place-based political dynamics in greater depth.

Alongside the ethnographic fieldwork, I was also able to undertake other forms of research that enriched and supported the fieldnotes and observations I was making through observant participation. A great deal of textual and visual materials, such as meeting minutes, other documents,

propaganda, photographs and so on, were available to myself as a participant in the groups. Similarly, emails were excellent means of understanding the discourses and dynamics within the groups – especially in the IWW, due to its often widely dispersed membership – and if I wished to quote from an email, I was able to contact the author and ask permission directly across potentially thousands of miles. In order to understand some of the historical and North American context of the IWW, I also undertook a short period of archival research in the USA in summer 2007, combined with a number of interviews with activists. Much of this research formed the context through which I was able to better understand the internal politics, history and culture of the IWW.

Later in the fieldwork period, when I realised that more interview material would be useful to support my fieldnotes, I was able to approach activists for a total of thirteen semi-structured or open-ended interviews. Since I was already an activist within the groups, most potential interviewees were willing to be interviewed. Only three refused to allow me to quote from the interview, and one of these eventually gave permission to do so, after the event.

Thus, a number of methods – including ethnography, interviews and archival analysis – were utilised at various points throughout the fieldwork period. The emphasis changed at different times and according to different research priorities. This flexibility allowed me to continue fieldwork even when, in the case of social centres, there was a long lull in a group's activity. The different methods also produced a variety of different kinds of information that contributed to an over-all picture of the groups involved.



## **THE POWER AND POLITICS OF RESEARCH: TOWARDS A SOLIDARITY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Having outlined an appropriate methodology, it is necessary to discuss the politics and practices of engaged research in geography and the social sciences in more detail. As has been made explicit from the outset, this research is envisioned as explicitly politically partisan, but how does this shape the methods outlined above, and in what ways?

The first concern should be what constitutes 'radical' or 'militant' research. There are a number of broad, sometimes overlapping, schools of thought concerning geographers' engagement with the politics of research. A classical approach to politically-engaged academia is premised upon the idea that the knowledges produced through research will filter out of the academy and into the wider world, through the media, publishing, interviews, and perhaps also online (e.g. Mitchell, 2004). Others have argued that critical pedagogy and activism on campus itself to be a central way in which academics can disseminate and mobilise around certain political messages, ideas and practices. Noel Castree (1999) has been a particularly vocal proponent of what he calls "in-here" activist academia, arguing that "[t]he range of possible vehicles for, and targets of, an in-here geographical activism are potentially manifold" (1999: 967). Through an attempt to produce a geographical knowledge that is somehow 'relevant', some also argue that academics have the opportunity to influence policy through decision-makers and institutions such as government departments and think-tanks (Peck, 1999; Martin, 2001). Another school of thought looks to create a 'third space' for academics to operate outside of both activist and academic milieux, focusing on how "academic writing could merge into action and back again into writing" (Routledge, 1996a: 406; cf. Maxey, 1999). This has often coincided with the rise of participatory action research (PAR), conducted as a mutual process defined and guided by the research subject(s) in collaboration with the researcher (e.g. Cameron and Gibson, 2005; cf. Wills and Hurley, 2005). PAR attempts to disrupt the distinction

between researcher and subject, producing knowledges that are co-constitutive. Finally, there are those who wish to eliminate, or at least minimise, the distinction between activism and academia, attempting to engage academic study directly with grassroots politics without the extra baggage of conceptual dualisms (e.g. Chatterton, 2006; Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007). These scholars are closely accompanied by others (e.g. Lees, 1999) who believe that the boundary should be straddled, retaining a liminal identity that has aspects of both activist and academic roles.

My own research, however, along with a number of other 'activist-academics' (e.g. Wills, 2001), does not neatly fit into any one of these categories. The research proposed here is not a fully participatory project, nor does it retain a safe distance between the researcher and (in this case) his subjects. Instead, I position myself as an activist-academic in which my activism inspires my work, but the research itself is driven in part by academic questions as well as activist principles and priorities. However, academics consistently draw from thought and research in academia in order to inform their own ideas. As such, it can be argued that this approach in fact cuts across the other categories of politically engaged academia. There are, of course, also disciplining measures enacted to ensure that academic work continues to draw primarily from a relatively narrow set of questions, debates and ideas. Situated within intensive and target-focussed knowledge production regimes, regulated through strict funding requirements and measured by abstract quantitative impact grading mechanisms, the academic ignores *en vogue* debates and publications at her peril. Furthermore, academia also structurally discriminates in favour of those projects that draw the most funding into departments and universities, often involving private sector investment. This web of structural constraints means that academics must operate and justify themselves in relation to a set of dominant academic norms for the most part.

Militant research thus seeks to bring academic and activist interests closer, in order that it can "generate a capacity for struggles to read themselves" (Colectivo Situaciones, 2003: no pagination). Linking back to discussions in

chapter two concerning the practices of *autogestion*, militant approaches to research practice seek to support the development of self-organised and self-actualised forms of emancipatory knowledge. Rather than academics conducting research *on behalf of* movements or struggles, their research becomes synergised and collaborative *with* those struggles. Not only do militant investigations propose and bring to light subaltern narratives and practices but they also seek to provide critical analysis of the production of knowledge itself, especially through the university (e.g. Bratich, 2007; Casas-Cortés and Cobarrubias, 2007).

However, the lexicon of academic debates concerning the politics of research – traditionally centring on “activism” being contrasted with “academia” – is worth exploring critically. Geographers have been quick to problematise this rather clumsy dualism (e.g. Maxey, 1999; cf. Blomley, 2008) in much the same way that activists have problematised the discourse of activism itself as inherently exclusionary (Anon, 1999c; cf. Chatterton, 2006). An increased emphasis on reflexivity and an awareness of researchers’ positionality has led many to recognise how the knowledge produced in the research process is constituted through the researcher’s as much as his or her subjects’ actions. Most polemically, John Law (2004) has argued that since we are implicated in, and therefore active producers of, the realities we seek to ‘study’, the way we understand method must have a massive overhaul. He calls for a “method assemblage” that is comprised of principles such as “[e]nactment, multiplicity, fluidity, allegory, resonance [and] enchantment” (2004: 154) that help us make sense of the different realities and truths that are all in existence and all equally valid in their own ways. As Law himself notes, such a view taken to its logical extreme – read as *prescriptive* rather than *provocative* – appears situated in a somewhat nihilistic and potentially dangerous ultra-relativism. Nonetheless, Law’s, and others’, emphasis on the way in which knowledges are constituted partly by researchers’ actions suggests that we cannot see ourselves as anything but political actors. By shaping reality through our own actions, we *necessarily* have political agency through our research, as well as outside of our academic confines as social actors. In other words, academics cannot

choose to be 'impartial' observers of reality; we can only ever be partial, partisan and political.

This assertion is partly rooted in more than a decade of feminist research, in which scholars have attempted to address the power dynamics and relations inherent within research practice (Rose, 1997; Moss, 2002; Kwan, 2002). In much the same way that these feminists have been looking for ways of negotiating their positionality as researchers in non-coercive and anti-hierarchical ways, this research follows their lead. Taking inspiration from recent activist and academic literatures on the "edu-factory" (Federici and Caffentzis, 2007; Beverungren *et al.*, 2008; Krause, *et al.*, 2008), I propose a complimentary angle on the positionality issue. Put simply, since academics are paid to produce (intellectual) capital, the differentiation between the academy and the 'outside world', at least in terms of the labour process and everyday practices, is fundamentally a false dichotomy (cf. Castree, 1999). As Do (2008: 304) notes, the edu-factory, and the related phenomenon of 'cognitive capitalism',

presents us with the inherent difficulty of proposing any sort of systematic dichotomy between intellectual labour and manual labour, the very dichotomy that nonetheless typifies Fordist factory work... [T]he university today produces.

Academics are workers, albeit relatively privileged ones, producing certain commodities (skilled future workers, research with some level of value, new forms of understanding and reinventing social/cultural/economic capital, and so on) with our labour power. At the same time, many of those whose political agency we are trying to augment through our research are also producers of value and commodities through their own forms of (paid or unpaid) labour power. Therefore the question we must ask ourselves is not how academics can somehow 'reach out', but rather how to negotiate the relationships between different aspects of political life. I do not mean to suggest that political activism and academic labour are identical, but that they are entwined in the same processes, practices and relations. Our

individual and collective experiences of labour, and other conditions that are generated through the social and economic systems we live in, are fundamentally related to others' conditions of life, and causally connected to political praxis. As a result, a research agenda that is politically partisan is at once an attempt to provide support for those in struggle, and simultaneously *a part of my own struggle*. Paralleling the ongoing work of feminist geographers, this is a recognition that our own liberation is intimately entwined with the liberation of our research subjects – as workers in a class system, as women in a patriarchal system, and so on.

If my struggle is inherently bound up in the struggles of others, then *solidarity* must be a central benchmark of this research project. As a word, its roots lie in the French term, *solidarité*, meaning 'interdependence'. It is premised on the belief that an individual's wellbeing or protection is not secured unless they support the wellbeing of others with whom s/he shares common interests. In the context of academic research, some critical scholars have mobilised solidarity within their research through the enactment of solidarity activities in support of struggles 'elsewhere'. Higginbottom (2008), for example, has fused the study of criminality of the powerful in Colombia with the development of solidarity networks in the UK. Solidarity is also mobilised by Cardenas *et al.* (2009) as a means to build upon ideas of the *Theatre of the Oppressed* in order to develop a methodological approach they term *Science of the Oppressed*. Theatre of the Oppressed is a means to communicate and explore, through performance, alternative ways of acting and relating. In turn, Cardenas *et al.* embark on a mapping project that seeks to simultaneously forge solidaristic links between migrants and trace their cartographies of mobility. Echoing Chela Sandoval's (2000) black feminist efforts to construct a subaltern history of patriarchy and colonialism, they emphasise that

subject positions that have historically been excluded from institutions of knowledge production can offer unique, relevant, critically important contributions to our understanding of the contemporary world. (Cardenas *et al.*, 2009: 2)

In this research, solidarity is somewhat more immediate and immanent to the relations and subjectivities developed through the research process. It describes the relations I sought to forge alongside my research subjects throughout the fieldwork, thus pushing solidarity beyond a sense of stewardship or support for others' voices and struggles and towards the original meaning of the term as *interdependence*. Although it seems a straightforward concept, it brings with it a number of issues with regards to the politics of research.

The inclusion of the term "relevant" in Cardenas *et al's* quote above is particularly interesting. Solidarity, premised on the interdependence of multiple struggles, does not necessarily fall under a single, clear understanding of relevance, since it does not respect difference as a legitimating factor for inaction. It thus raises the question of how we can, or should, define relevant research. While debates within radical and critical geography have focussed increasingly on participatory forms of research, a question has been raised about the relevance of such research; namely, "relevance to whom?" While this question stretches as far back as Bill Bunge's pioneering work in Detroit that subverted accepted norms of relevance (see, for e.g. Heyman, 2007), a contemporary debate has developed concerning what is relevant research. A notable body of literature (e.g. Tickell, 1995; Ward, 2006) concerns relevance to policy-makers in government and other forms of established political engagement. Another area concerns general 'public' relevance, emphasising the role of geographers as public intellectuals beyond strict policy areas. These scholars identify spaces of relevance such as the media, unions, the charity sector, or other bodies of public discourse as legitimate targets for political research (e.g. Pollard *et al.*, 2000; Murphy, 2006). Increasingly, however, geographers have begun to question the assumptions of these approaches and are re-working the idea of relevance to include smaller-scale and/or more radical and experimental forms of politics (Dorling and Shaw, 2002; Wilbert and Hoskyns, 2004). Through this, geographers are also implicitly

questioning the centrality of the state, including broader supranational geopolitical systems, as the primary or 'natural' focus of political energies.

Indeed, we might ask: is 'relevance' relevant at all? As researchers with political agendas, of course we want to conduct our research in ways that will make a difference to some element of the quality of our and/or others' lives. As such, state-centred power structures and political processes appear to be very sensible targets for politically-engaged research since they are often the key political actor in the enactment of political change (Glassman, 2001). However, there is an argument that needs to be made questioning the assumption that making the world a better place needs to happen through power structures that are already established and institutionalised into liberal capitalist society (see Wilbert and Hoskyns, 2004). We can take inspiration from scholars such as Pinder (2002) and Fenton (2004), much of whose research focuses on the potentially transformational nature of experimental and utopian practices. If we approach relevance from the perspective that discovering or making space for unconventional ideas and practices is also relevant, then we might well argue that conceptions of relevance that foreground established modes of political transformation – the ballot box, the lobbyist, the think-tank, the Party, even the trade union – are in fact closing down our understandings of the possible.

Another question that concerns the enactment of solidarity within the research process is a profoundly geographical one: *where* should our research take place? In a thought-provoking paper, Mitchell (2004) responds to an increasingly vocal body of work that argues that politically engaged research must centre on actively participating in some way in the activities of one's research subject(s). These scholars (e.g. Fuller, 1999; Maxey, 2004; Routledge, 2004b) understand the place of political academia to be at the 'front line', alongside activists who often wield power in the research process. Mitchell, on the other hand, rejects this primacy of "being there", suggesting that practically useful and politically radical research can also take place external to the site of struggle itself, and potentially also

external to the perceived needs of those for or with whom one is conducting research. This distinction between direct engagement with particular groups and more distanced forms of politicised scholarship appears to create another false dichotomy. I contend that the site of execution – be it the archive or the street, the office or the squat – is not really as important as it seems. The central issue is the principle of solidarity. This principle can be enacted in multiple sites, and through multiple constellations of social, cultural and informational relations that sometimes necessitate certain sites and rule out others.

Solidarity is thus located in the practical concerns of those in struggle, much like militant and participatory action forms of research. Leveraging the asymmetrical power dynamics that we face in our everyday political engagements requires the consideration of myriad tactics, strategies and practices that may or may not be appropriate for the development of a political praxis with the potential to make particular changes. Thus, a politically-engaged methodology requires careful thought as to what is most appropriate for the topic of study. As some have rightly noted (see Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007), in many cases this requires collaboration with one's research subjects in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of particular campaigns or projects.

Answering the question of where solidarity research should take place also requires a certain level of individual discretion as to the site(s) and emphasis of the research project. As a researcher enacting anti-authoritarian principles of solidarity, I do not want to make assumptions about the nature and conduct of my research simply because I am an 'expert' and the group with whom I am working appears to know less than I do. However, as a researcher who is lucky enough to have had the opportunity to dedicate my life to being the best researcher I can possibly be, I have a moral and political obligation to use my knowledge and experience to support the group with whom I am working as best I can. In other words, the radical researcher wishing to enact a research methodology based on solidarity should be responsive to the needs and



desires of the research subject, but also be able to make difficult methodological decisions based on knowledges and skills that only they are likely to have. This presents us with a seemingly-impossible choice: either risk becoming entirely subservient to the whims of those who do not necessarily fully understand the intricacies and practicalities of research design and execution, or risk using a greater pool of specialist knowledge as a means of vetoing others' wishes and creating dominating or oppressive power relations in the research process.

This choice, I contend, can be deconstructed somewhat. Solidarity also involves constructive critique. One might work in solidarity with a group and, in doing so, discover that it is dysfunctional, ineffective or even corrupt. As such,

[s]olidarity is based on mutual respect and understanding, not agreement for agreement's sake. If real solidarity is worked at, respectful critique and disagreement are vital. (Chatterton *et al.*, 2007: 219)

Blind adherence to a 'party line' is therefore not true solidarity. When we speak of 'solidarity research', we speak of adherence to broader movemental principles and priorities that may or may not align fully with the principles and priorities of the specific research subject. Combined with the difficult negotiations required by the researcher to enact such a framework, it appears that solidarity is far from straightforward. How, then, can we explore it in greater depth?

By breaking down the idea of solidarity a little further, it is possible to see how the relationship between researcher and participants may be reworked. Solidarity is most directly expressed through the anarchist principle of *mutual aid*. Mutual aid, most famously discussed in Kropotkin's (1972 [1914]) work of the same name, is a form of gift economy based upon the voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources, services and knowledges for

mutual benefit. Drawing from his background in the natural sciences, he argues that

the vast majority of species live in societies, and that they find in association the best arms for the struggle of life... The mutual protection which is obtained in this case, the possibility of attaining old age and of accumulating experience, the higher intellectual development, and the further growth of sociable habits, secure the maintenance of the species, its extension, and its further progressive evolution. The unsociable species, on the contrary, are doomed to decay. (1972 [1914]: 246)

Just as solidarity is based on a voluntary and reciprocal emphasis on one group or individual supporting another's struggles, mutual aid is based on a recognition that offering to others can be a mechanism of safeguarding one's own wellbeing. Forms of research practice related to mutual aid exist within much activist geographical research, most clearly expressed in the concept of 'giving back' (e.g. Price, 2001; Breibart, 2003; Cahill, 2007; Kindon *et al.*, 2007; Walker, 2007). By 'giving back' to research subjects, academics attempt to provide support or services to the groups they study and work with, in exchange for permission to write about the group in academic publications.

However, in seeking to enact practices of giving back, some problems arise. One concern lies in the question "to whom?" A research project studying a neo-fascist organisation, for example, should clearly not support that organisation in any way. As such, the positionality of the research subject is not necessarily congruent with those with whom one wishes to enact solidarity or mutual aid. The subject of giving back must therefore be defined carefully in relation to the specific context. Indeed, even when working with groups with similar political persuasions, the researcher must be keen not to mistake solidarity as something that requires blind praise. On the contrary, one of the most solidaristic things one can do as a researcher

is to provide constructive criticism of a project, initiative or group (Chatterton *et al.*, 2007).

By exploring the discourse and knowledge economics of giving back this simple and beneficial exchange also becomes less clear-cut. What situates mutual aid as a separate form of economy from capitalist economics based on the exchange of goods is that, while it is in part based on exchange, the form of exchange involved in mutual aid is *voluntary*. The importance of voluntarism, from an anarchist perspective, is clear, and centres on the anarchist commitment to both collective responsibility *and individual liberty* (see, for e.g. Graeber, 2004a). Exchange based on what a Marxist might call 'exchange value' – the market-driven value for which an object is bought and sold – is something that instrumentalises the giver and receiver as receptacles of the object given or received, reproducing a form of capitalistic relation in which exchange value is prioritised over all else<sup>18</sup>. This question of value was discussed extensively by early anarchists. Proudhon's (2008 [1840]:138) *What is Property?* is relevant in this regard:

Fix for me the value of a wood-cutter's talent, and I will fix that of Homer. If any thing can reward intelligence, it is intelligence itself. That is what happens when various classes<sup>19</sup> of producers pay to each other a reciprocal tribute of admiration and praise. But if they contemplate an exchange of products..., this exchange must be effected in accordance with a system of economy which is indifferent to considerations of talent and genius, and whose laws are deduced... from a balance between DEBIT and CREDIT.

In other words, under a capitalistic exchange economy, the exchange value of an object is the authoritative denominator of exchange, and is generated externally from the exchange itself. Conversely, in non-capitalist forms of

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<sup>18</sup> This process of exchange value becoming imbued in all exchange *per se* is referred to by Marxists as 'commodity fetishism'.

<sup>19</sup> Here, Proudhon is referring to different specialist or artisan trades, rather than social or economic classes.

exchange, such as exchange based on principles of mutual aid, value is immanent and derived autonomously from within the act, rather than the object.

In using the term '*giving* back', there is a sense that there is a form of exchange economy taking place based on authoritative exchange values. 'Giving' invokes a sense of obligation on the part of the receiver to receive, and authority on the part of the giver. The object being given is often emphasised, rather than the actors in the process of giving. In exchange for producing research that is useful to, and guided by a group, the group must give access to its internal workings. This relation is premised on the 'objects' being exchanged (knowledge and access), rather than the act of exchange itself. It reifies that which is exchanged and by so doing, instrumentalises the exchangers as *containers*, rather than as *actors*. Clearly activist academics are not deliberately instrumentalising themselves or their subjects, or 'giving back' simply in order to secure access. On the contrary, they are utilising this sense of instrumental exchange value as a means of creating a mutually beneficial relationship between researcher and subject. However, if *giving* back is truly what is taking place, then the form of economy enacted is an exchange economy based on reciprocal equivalent obligation, meaning that it is (implicitly and inadvertently) reproducing capitalistic relations.

In imagining what a voluntary knowledge economy ingrained with mutual aid might look like, we can begin to piece together what a truly solidaristic research methodology can do to break down the impossible choice between paternalistically exerting authority over research participants and ceding all decision-making power to them. Crucially, the researcher must minimise their 'externality' to the group, and seek to transform "me" and "them" into a "we". Moreover, it should take place in a way that is collective and co-operative between the researcher and subject. In doing so, exchange relations – between, in a sense, 'researcher value' and 'participant value' – are less likely to develop because the separate entities of 'researcher' and 'participant' can become entwined. "All liberatory struggle," declare Skukaitis

and Graeber, “is ultimately the struggle against identity” (2007: 12), and a solidarity research methodology should also seek to develop forms of social interaction that refuse and negate categorisation between researcher and subject. This approach is what some have called “transversal” (e.g. Colectivo Situaciones, 2003), emphasising immanent lines of cross-fertilisation and affinity between categories.

Such an approach might also increase the connection between the researcher and the research participants in terms of their collective interests and priorities. By investing time and energy into a group, the researcher is more attuned to the principles and goals of the group, since the researcher is both accountable to the group and partly constitutive of it. This means that although the researcher is subject to the rules and processes of the group, the group must also respect the researcher as a participant, with certain knowledges, skills and experiences. Just as any other participant might be recognised as knowledgeable in plumbing or website design, the researcher is seen as knowledgeable in research.

Thus a solidarity research methodology is one that encourages voluntary participation, both from the researcher as ‘just another’ participant in the group, and from the group as contributing to the research in some way. As Graeber (2004b: 11-12, emphasis added; cf. Ferrell, 2009) notes, ethnographic research is especially well suited to a radical research agenda of this sort:

The practice of ethnography provides at least something of a model... of how non-vanguardist revolutionary intellectual practice might work... One obvious role for a radical intellectual is... to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then *offer* those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts.

The practice of *offering back*, rather than *giving back* is of particular interest in reworking the form of exchange taking place. Graeber evokes a sense of utility alongside a sense of humility: by offering back our (hopefully) thoughtful and reasoned analysis of a group, idea or campaign, we can be insightful or even critical, but *giving back* risks simply reproducing an image of the academy as an elite vanguard of prescriptive and authoritative knowledge production. A solidarity research methodology, therefore, involves encouraging practices and relations that refuse and disrupt *fixed positionalities* – of researcher as either authoritative/distant or subservient/embedded – and encourage *differential qualities* – of a participant or supporter with potentially useful skills to offer – to become the benchmark of the research agenda. By doing so, research conducted through statistical or archival analysis may well be valued to the same degree as a more participatory project. The difference in terms of method is to be found in the way in which it is enacted. It is also equally possible to imagine instances where GIS cartography producing specialised data, for example, would also be enacted through principles of solidarity and mutual aid. The difference is that it produces a *different form* of potentially useful knowledge, in contrast to ethnographic or participatory knowledge.

This form of methodological approach also has an impact on the ongoing engagement among geographers concerning reflexivity. Following an upsurge of work encouraging reflexivity as a crucial element of a responsible research framework (McDowell, 1992; England, 1994; I Maxey, 1999; Widdowfield, 2000; LJ Maxey, 2004), there has been a wave of reaction to it. Reflexive research allows researchers to critically evaluate their own positionality and activity by interrogating the extent to which their research practices reproduce certain forms of inequality or oppression. By engaging in such a process, geographers have attempted to develop strategies to avoid such oppressions. However, as noted by a number of scholars (e.g. Rose, 1997; Kobayashi, 2003), reflexivity has increasingly become problematic, often understood as a 'box to be ticked' in the production of ethically-sound research, rather than a means of helping us

change the way in which we approach research and human relations at a fundamental level. As Kobayashi (2003: 348) forcefully outlines,

[w]hile reflexivity is an important, and some may say essential, aspect of recognising the difference between the studier and the studied, and even in some cases of taking moral responsibility for that difference, indulgence in reflexivity is ironically the very act that sets us apart. Reflexivity thus opens us to the charge not only that it is a selfish, self-centred act that is the very antithesis of activism, but that it can even work actively to construct a sense of the other, to deny the reflexivity of others, and to emphasise the condition of detached alterity.

This debate in some respects parallels similar ongoing debates among anarchists and other radicals concerning how organisational practices and structures can reproduce oppressions and inequalities (e.g. Waltz, 2007; 'Our Dark Passenger', 2008; No Pretence, 2009). Both activist and academic debates focus, broadly, on how oppressions operate through structural mechanisms and, as I note later, my research was not entirely free of such structural problems. Echoing Bourdieu's critique of reflexivity, Crang (2005: 226) notes that "reflexivity is not marked out by especially sensitive texts but is endemic and structural". By this, Crang is arguing that when we talk of reflexivity we should envisage it as a structural response integrated with the rest of our research to a structural problem embedded in the reality we seek to understand. In this sense, reflexivity cannot be understood as something separate from our everyday practices of research. To 'institutionalise' reflexivity within research praxis, however, endangers the researcher to simply grinding to a halt, immobilised by the weight of their ethnic, gender or economic privilege (or indeed all three, or more).

Calls to use reflexivity as a structural response to a structural problem can also be interpreted in another way (a way, incidentally, I feel Crang points towards, at least implicitly). We can understand structural reflexivity as contributing to a "toolkit". By this, I mean that reflexivity is not a singular and

fairly abstract concept of retrospective self-exploration or autocritique, but a range of possible techniques at hand – or ‘tools’ – that can be implemented to solve practical problems throughout the research process. This understanding can help us re-imagine reflexivity to be something that is embedded in our practices, as a practical problem-solving tool, rather than a problem itself.

Especially in an ethnographic project such as this, understanding reflexivity as part of an ongoing process embedded in practice also supports the adaptation of research conduct to changing circumstances over the course of a year or more of fieldwork. It can provide practical guidance to our research conduct as ethnographers by enhancing awareness not only of flaws in the research conduct but also, crucially, it demands of us attention to how conduct can be changed during the fieldwork. Long-term ethnography gives researchers the opportunity to change their research practices during the fieldwork period, and consciously adopting reflexivity as an immanent, structural tool means that researchers can develop, refine or even experiment with research practice during that period.

By asserting the immanence of reflexivity as a tool, there can also be possibilities for developing strategies of mutual aid between participants. If we perceive reflexivity as a tool, we also perceive it as something that can contribute to, rather than detract from or complicate, the research process and the development of the group with which we are working. Reflexivity in this case can become a collective reflexivity since it takes place through practice; enacted as a mutual tool in order to respond to structural problems with the research design, and to support the research subjects in breaking down their own structural inequalities. As I explain below, this practice of collective solidarity had practical resonance during the fieldwork conducted for this research.

We can now begin to see how principles of solidarity and mutual aid can contribute to a radical research agenda, and how they contribute to contemporary methodological debates in geography and the social



sciences. While not vastly different from other activist methodologies, these principles create a form of research agenda and practice that can help refine current debates, collapse binaries and problematise the way in which geographers have often perceived key questions concerning the politics of research. In light of this, the next section outlines and discusses how this methodological framework operated in practice.

## **THE PRACTICE OF MILITANT RESEARCH: ETHICAL AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES**

Following James Scott, Colectivo Situaciones – producer of arguably some of the most powerful writing on militant research – has noted that “[r]esearch militancy” is “the art of establishing compositions that endow with power (*potencia*) the quests and elements of alternative sociability” (Colectivo Situaciones, 2003: no pagination). This refers to the development of assemblages that provide space for re-organising social relations and, in a sense, is closely related to the anarchist principle of prefiguration. In particular, they argue that these alternative sociabilities must be located in the connections between university and popular knowledges. Due to this liminal positionality of the research and researcher, the research process is likely to be highly complex, unpredictable and explorative. This section explores and discusses some of the key problems and challenges faced during the research. Although such an activist methodology outlined in the previous section has a number of benefits, it also presents the researcher with difficulties and drawbacks in a range of issues.

The research for this thesis involved grappling with a number of difficult and often not clear-cut ethical issues that were derived in part from my efforts to forge a solidaristic and militant research agenda and practice. These issues stemmed partly from the methods used, partly from my participation in the groups I studied, and partly from the nature of the groups. Each question of research ethics manifested itself differently in different contexts and at

different times, as we shall see, requiring an ongoing, processual understanding of research ethics. Ferdinand *et al.* (2007: 540, emphasis added) similarly practice a processual view of research ethics, arguing that

[o]ur responsibility as ethical researchers we believe lies with finding solutions to the situated dilemmas we encounter *throughout the course of the research.*

Anticipation of this need to refine and re-examine the ethics of the research over time posed a significant problem with regards the inevitable negotiation of the institutional ethical demands and constraints on the research project. Since I had already been involved with social centres and the IWW – for around a year in the case of social centres, and six months in the case of the IWW – I had a reasonable working knowledge of the norms, values and practices I expected to encounter. This, combined with the well-documented emphasis within university ethics committees on medical models of ethical practice, inevitably lead to difficulties. As Bradshaw (2004: 203) notes,

[t]he standard approach adopted by ethics committees for research on human subjects is biomedical and/or psychological. This approach is firmly grounded in quantitative positivist science and applies either a deontological model of ethical absolutism or a utilitarian model of balancing costs or risks against benefits.

The thrust of Bradshaw's argument is that to be 'ethical' is not necessarily dependent on fulfilling the demands of institutional structures that are not always appropriate for the research in question (cf. Ferdinand *et al.*, 2007). It was clear from the beginning of this research that consent would be a particularly difficult issue to deal with. Ethnographic fieldwork tends to secure consent through 'leaders' of the groups or communities being studied. The anti-authoritarian structures of the groups concerned in this research had no formal leadership from whom to secure consent. Moreover, the groups – especially social centres – had a notable turnover of

membership over time, meaning that total consent would never quite be achieved. Consent, for both social centres and the IWW would have to be a collective decision as a practical necessity and as part of the politics of the research. The collectivity of thought and practice is a key tenet of anarchism (Malatesta, 1995 [1891]; Ferrell, 2001; Rocker, 2004 [1938]; Franks, 2006) and, although some anarchists premise individual liberty above the collective (Stirner, 1995 [1845]), the anarchisms encountered and supported in this research are of the former kind.

Individual consent forms are generally required for approval by university ethics committees, but given the often security-conscious nature of the groups and individuals, securing written consent would be all-but-impossible from most participants. It would also undermine the collective and solidaristic nature of the groups and the proposed research. Individualising and contractualising consent when researching an anti-authoritarian group not only individualises decision-making practices, thus undermining internal practices of direct democracy, but also potentially compromises the bonds of solidarity and trust between participants.

As someone who had been active in the IWW and the London social centres 'scene' before the commencement of the fieldwork period, I had the benefit of a certain element of trust from a reasonable number of the core activists. They and I had wo/manned barricades, handed out flyers, attended meetings and (more often than I care to think about) risked arrest together for some time previously. This meant that, while earning the consent of the groups still required proof that the research was not simply 'extractive', and assurance of anonymity to the best of my ability, one hurdle had already been partially overcome in the cases of the IWW and Vortex.

In order to ensure maximum consent at all times, I undertook a number of practices that varied according to the context. Firstly, and perhaps most controversially, I rejected written consent forms from the outset. Individual consent in interviews was still gained because these were individual narratives, but this remained entirely verbal, recorded on the Dictaphone.

The only time in which I requested written consent was in cases when I wished to directly quote from an email, in which case consent was sought and given by email.

Consent procedures for the group ethnography, which made up the vast bulk of the fieldwork, was ongoing, messy and complex, and is worth elaborating on. The consent process I endeavoured to follow is what one might term “collective participatory consent”. Taking inspiration from the PAR literature (e.g. Manzo and Brightbill, 2007), I attempted to gain consent through a process of mutual aid, beginning with essentially no terms of consent whatsoever – a *tabula rasa* – and attempting to build criteria for consent as ground rules that all could agree on. In order to do this, I initially attended executive meetings of the groups – a weekly social centre collective meeting, and a UK IWW delegates meeting. First, I outlined my personal priorities for the research, and how I imagined it to work. I emphasised that I wanted to offer my skills, as a participant in the groups who was lucky enough to have received funding to explore the everyday spatial strategies of the groups. Through this, I built up an image of the sorts of knowledge I would be looking for, and the extent of access to information I would ideally have. Individuals were able to respond, ask questions and make suggestions, according to the meeting rules and protocol for that particular group. Over time, an image of a research project was born – with collectively-decided parameters, checks and provisos – that would eventually be acceptable to myself and the group.

Of course, this process was not easy, and I spent a great deal of time allaying fears concerning security, anonymity and my positionality within the institutionally conservative, statist, capitalist and (neo-)colonialist academy. Data protection issues were raised with the IWW, questioning the security of members’ personal details and the union’s covert activities. Some social centre activists were concerned that individuals could be identified from my research and have their bail conditions broken, or be linked to criminal activities associated with other projects. Both groups expressed concerns that they could be exposed to potentially violent aggression from political

opponents, especially on the far right. In developing the parameters of the research, I became aware that I was also dealing with matters of legal and corporeal *self-defence*. As a participant in both groups, I needed to defend myself, and others; it was a sense of self-defence that also involved defending participants' physical, emotional and political wellbeing. Although standard codes of ethics often require the researcher to uphold the law and report illegality to authorities, there was no question that my primary loyalty was to the groups and, more importantly, the broader movements in which they were situated.

Through this difficult process, I gained consent from all groups<sup>20</sup>. In some cases, the process felt more like a negotiation between an 'external' researcher and a group into which he wished to embed himself artificially, and I fought hard not to push the interests (total access, full compliance, minimal interference) of this 'researcher-self'. Avoidance of this identity was something that I did not always achieve, and it took the most part of the fieldwork period to 'acclimatise' myself to the liminal, solidaristic identity I hoped to develop. Securing initial consent, however, was not an end-point; rather it began a long-term process of consent-seeking and feedback that continued throughout and beyond the fieldwork period. As I met new people, I endeavoured to mention my research and explain what I was doing. Most were positive, and I encouraged those who were unsure to discuss the research at the next meeting.

The ongoing consent process also raised the issue of the nature of the broader milieu in which I was operating, and the way I was receiving information. The fieldwork period took place over around eighteen months, but I had been politically active for around seven years before that point. Much of the information that I was using, at least to contextualise the specifics of the fieldwork, was accumulated over a much longer period of

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<sup>20</sup> The process at the Hackney Social Centre was, however, somewhat more complex than the others. As will become clear, their organisational practices – especially their ambivalent approach to formal decision-making – made it especially difficult to secure informed consent from the collective. As a result, it is difficult to tell if consent was secured in its entirety, from all main participants.

time. Moreover, the systems of knowledges and practices in which the IWW and social centres are positioned are far wider than their own spaces. As such, if I was to gain full, informed consent from all those contributing to the research in some way, I might have spent several years tracking people down and still be unsuccessful. Clearly, this was neither workable nor completely necessary.

After gaining initial consent, and despite some participants expressing concerns about my research, no-one ever brought the issue to a meeting. This raises concerns about institutional inertia and how a decision to approve consent can be (mis)understood as final. As a participant in the groups and the researcher in question, I did not feel comfortable to raise the issues myself except when directly relevant. In keeping with anti-vanguardist political principles discussed throughout the research, I was not prepared to try to 'liberate' someone paternalistically on their behalf. Similarly, following interviews, I sent transcripts to interviewees to ensure that they were accurate and to ask for further comments or clarification points. Not a single interviewee – some of whom were highly vocal in the consent process – responded to the transcripts. The only responses to interviews were received by two social centre activists and one IWW activist requesting to not be quoted in the research, and this took place *before* the interviews were conducted<sup>21</sup>. Encouraging interviewees to respond to their interviews is an important part of ensuring that I am accountable as an activist and a researcher, but the responsibility for using those structures of accountability lie with respondents. In most cases, even arranging and attending the interview was a hassle for these busy people (cf. I Maxey, 1999). Aggressively encouraging participants to give detailed, critical feedback against their wishes thus becomes self-indulgent and verging on patronising. It may suggest a need for the codesign of future research with participants from the outset, in order to ameliorate or minimise such problems.

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<sup>21</sup> This figure was initially higher, with a third social centre participant refusing to be quoted, but this activist changed her mind a few months later.

Through the consent process, I was also approached to provide some support for the groups with whom I worked. As someone with highly flexible work patterns, a secure, relatively long-term income, access to resources, scholarly journals and specialised software, and good writing and analytical skills, I was perceived as a useful asset for the groups. Throughout the fieldwork period, and beyond, I was regularly asked to undertake tasks that my particular position would allow. For example, I worked with another researcher involved in the HSC to draft leaflets and write for the space's online weblog. At the Vortex, I used my access to academic journals to provide supporting information for their legal case to keep the building as a community space. Based on findings from the Vortex I was also able to help a new social centre collective based in my home town of Worcester to develop their ideas. In the IWW, I committed to writing a practical report at the end of the research, and also undertook membership mapping and surveying, both of which were highly appropriate given my specialised skills. I was appointed to the IWW's international Survey and Research Committee, a committee that conducts research on the union's demographics, priorities, organising activity, as well as specific research on companies and labour issues. At a local scale, I was involved in writing and designing literature for the London IWW construction workers branch. In all cases I was able to use my academic skills and access to resources to support the groups' efforts in ways defined and executed by myself and others as participants within a group with skills to share. In turn, participants often actively supported my research by signposting me to interesting or useful documents, people or issues.

In writing up the research, I also encountered another ethical problem, related to the sensitivity of some of the information that I was handling. I had assured participants that their identity would be protected, but through the writing process I found it especially difficult to find the balance between too much detail and too little. When dealing with a group that is associated with certain ideological traits and ways of operating, people's styles of activism can become almost as identifiable as their names. This first arose when investigating the geopolitical tensions between certain elements of the IWW

in different regions. Anyone connected to the 'workerist' tendency within North American anarchism is likely to have come across certain groups of people – not even necessarily knowing them by name – who are highly vocal and identifiable within the debates surrounding this particular issue within the IWW. As one IWW member put it, the IWW includes some "very large fish in a very small pond". There also could potentially be opponents or disgruntled former IWW members who could use my research as a way of getting revenge on certain groups. Another example of anonymising participants beyond names alone took place at the Hackney Social Centre, where a small number of people associated with the collective were undocumented migrants to the UK and understandably fearful of deportation. Rather than risk exposing their identities, I deliberately minimised my use of names or nationalities when discussing the activities of the HSC. These issues weighed heavily on me, and the attention to detail required in *truly* anonymising the debate was significant. As mentioned above, this was a question of solidaristic self-defence and responsibility to the ongoing success of the projects and the legal and corporeal security of their participants, as much as it was about 'research ethics'. The culture among anarchists in particular is one that emphasises the importance of security and attention to details that could be used against people by the state in particular.

Recently, a number of instances of police and media infiltration among radical groups have been uncovered (see for e.g. miss x, 2008; WRR, 2008; Gerald, 2009; Martin, 2009), leading to an even greater awareness of security issues. Anarchism by its very definition is wary of authority figures and institutionalised forms of politics. Furthermore, the long history of state repression of radical movements (e.g. Boykoff, 2007) is considered by anarchists a stark warning from history to be cautious about trusting people who are entwined in such state power structures. As a result, the bonds that I had built up before and during the fieldwork, alongside the practices of mutual aid between myself and other participants that built and maintained social ties, enabled the research to be conducted in an atmosphere of trust. Were I not actively involved in the groups, there is a likelihood that I would



not have been allowed to conduct the research at all, or at best in a severely limited way. These questions of security and self-defence are bound up with bigger principles of solidarity and mutual aid, and enacting research on these interlocking principles also helps to deal with more 'practical' problems regarding access.

Other practical issues were encountered throughout the research, and it is worth dwelling on these briefly. Most clearly apparent from the outset were the notably different temporal trajectories of the groups. The IWW is an organisation that has permanence and stability, with only relatively minor fluctuations in activity over time. On the contrary, the squatted social centres that I worked with involved short bursts of intense activity while operational, interspersed with potentially rather long periods of inactivity between one centre's eviction and another's launch. These contrasting experiences made simple things such as time management a problem, with each making demands on my time that often clashed. Management of these differing temporal trajectories therefore inevitably involved compromises. This was exacerbated by a dearth of social centre activity during the middle period of my fieldwork, resulting in a significant asymmetry of material for each of my case studies. The resulting lack of material generated from social centres was partly counteracted by several in-depth retrospective interviews conducted with activists from the Vortex and Hackney Social Centre. By pondering the temporal asymmetry between the groups, I inadvertently ended up interrogating the different ways that the IWW and social centres recorded ideas and information. This became, as will be revealed, a topic for discussion in the empirical sections of the research. As a result, I was partly able to use this anomaly to help build a better picture of the two different modes of organising.

A more pressing problem was how to 'represent' the two groups. While neither is especially diverse in terms of ethnicity and the IWW, in particular, is rather male-dominated, both incorporate a range of ideas, beliefs and priorities among their membership. In the case of social centres, a relatively high turnover of activists also means that this ideological diversity is

potentially multiplied over time. As such, since neither group can be described as purely anarchist, incorporating a range of anarchisms and broader left-libertarian perspectives, representation of the groups as singular or uniform was not an option. The nature of the research questions as focussing largely on 'internal' questions of how spatial strategy is produced, made this problem less distinct, since the multiplicity of voices could be used to explore many of the themes laid out within the research questions. However, this did not remove the problem altogether, since I was situated as one of these voices contributing in some way to the wider discourses of each group.

There was no easy answer to this problem, and the unspoken practices that I sought to 'capture' through the ethnography meant that it was even more likely that I would represent from a certain perspective. My voice – or the voices of those with whom I agreed – inevitably came to the fore. As a participant in the groups, I was also aware that I was privileged in having greater access to communication channels in order to bestow my own perspective on 'outsiders' and 'insiders' alike. The way in which I attempted to enact the sort of structural reflexivity I discuss above was undertaken in two ways. The first was simply by discussing my ideas with others, to see how they responded. Based on responses to my (mis-)understandings of certain issues, I was able to incorporate a range of views into the written thesis. Second, after being notified of a singular voice within earlier drafts of my written work, I made efforts to clarify who was 'speaking' where and when. These were effective to a point, but did not entirely ensure that I represented my views as they were, rather than as objective 'facts'.

## **FOR RADICAL AND RIGOROUS RESEARCH**

This chapter has outlined the methodological questions and practices of the research. In it, I have introduced the various specificities of this particular research project, the groups studied, and some of the challenges

encountered in executing the fieldwork. Of particular note is the attempt to construct a politics and practice of research militancy that incorporates rigour – in terms of academic criteria of ethical practice, accountability and (a redefined notion of) ‘relevance’ – and radicalism – in terms of the political principles through which the research was enacted – throughout all aspects of research design and practice.

I have argued that by envisioning politically-engaged research through the complimentary anarchist principles of *solidarity* and *mutual aid*, it is possible to reconfigure radical research agendas in ways that constructively challenge some of the existing literature around ‘activist’ research. Activism is a term that I deliberately seek to avoid throughout the research, as an attempt to break down the exclusionary binary that it constructs (cf. Anon., 1999c). Similarly, I reject simplistic binary understandings of ‘relevance’ – as opposed to ‘irrelevance’ – that serve only to reinforce the centrality of institutional and established political power structures, and close down possibilities for making positive change through imaginative and direct intervention in our everyday lives. Indeed, both the IWW and social centres would vehemently agree with this point, as emerging examples of this form of ‘relevant’ political action.

Another area where I have sought to challenge existing debates and practices is through a reassessment of the notion of ‘reflexivity’. I have argued in favour of a conscious return to the original meaning of reflexivity, as a toolkit, structurally embedded in research practice, for *solving* problems, rather than perceiving it as a problem or complication in itself. Through a detailed discussion of some of the issues faced throughout the fieldwork period, I have explained how a structural understanding of reflexivity has helped to deal with some problems of power asymmetry and oppression.

I have demonstrated how I attempted – not always successfully – to implement the principles of solidarity and mutual aid into the research practice. By rejecting authoritative ‘giving back’ discourses and, instead,

*offering* back, I have made admittedly small steps towards constructing an image of research practice as a gift economy, rather than an instrumentalising one implicitly linked to capitalistic exchange relations. The model discussed and used in this research is far from perfect, but it sheds light on how radical scholars can make steps towards developing research practices in more refined directions in future projects.

# IV

## THE IWW: CLASS POLITICS AT WORK

*11<sup>th</sup> April 2008, 9.00 am. A dozen or so IWW members descend on a nondescript trading estate in Watford to picket the National Blood Service headquarters. Management was refusing to release a series of restructuring documents to the public, or meet with IWW representatives. It was a hurriedly-organised action and took place early on a weekday morning. All things considered, the turnout was pretty good.*

*For mid-April, it was bitterly cold and windy, and no sooner had we set up the picket when it began to hail. The wind drove the hailstones almost horizontally, and they stung every time they hit. The wind was so strong it snapped one of the banners' poles like a twig. We had printed hundreds of flyers to hand out but they were disintegrating in the hail, and in any case, there was virtually no-one to give them to. The place was all but deserted, with offices on one side of the road and suburban houses on the other. Was this really the cutting edge of revolutionary grassroots unionism? I had my doubts.*

*As the hailstorm died down, and our shouting and chanting increased, two middle-aged men in suits came out. One of them spoke, and the other took notes. A picketer filmed the events. After a long and heated bout of negotiation on the street with our most vocal picketers, he agreed to release the report. Perhaps our effort was not in vain after all.*

A small victory in an IWW campaign to fight Blood Service cuts may not seem revolutionary, but in the development of left-libertarian politics in the UK it hints at a noteworthy development. It is one event in arguably one of the largest and most visible campaigns by an explicitly revolutionary union in the UK since the height of British syndicalism in the first four decades of the twentieth century. Far from the romanticised images of that era, this passage illustrates how radical workers' organisation can be messy, unpredictable and oriented towards relatively small, mundane issues. A picket and collective negotiations on the street – rather than negotiations between representatives in an office – hints at the emphasis placed on rank-and-file control, class confrontation and autonomy in the IWW's spatial strategy.

This chapter considers the IWW's attempts to forge an anarchist/ic politics of everyday workplace organisation. In it, I tease out the geographies of workplace organisation in the IWW's distinctive approach to unionism. The primary objective in this chapter is to interrogate what the IWW can tell us about what possibilities, challenges and issues arise in the development of everyday radical politics in the spaces of work.

The forms of praxis that the IWW enacts are often far from the exciting and embodied direct actions that other radical groups, including social centres, tend to utilise. As we will see, the IWW undertakes very little of what we might consider to be radical activities; indeed, most of its activities are no different from the forms of action undertaken by 'mainstream' unions. As such, this chapter explores what *really* makes the IWW distinctive; why it can call itself a revolutionary organisation and how it goes about enacting its principles in everyday practice. At stake is how we perceive and enact emancipatory politics in the contemporary workplace, and what this means to the broader project of transforming everyday life.

The growth of the IWW in the UK over the last three years represents a modest but notable shift in emphasis in the theory and practice of British anarchism, from the spectacular to the mundane. In some ways, we can

understand this change as an attempt to re-imagine value in movements, and which projects are 'worth the effort'. While the IWW has always included people from a variety of political backgrounds, the high concentration of anarchists within its ranks can be understood as representing an attempt to develop a different kind of anarchism through popular struggle. As discussed in previous chapters, this modest emergence from the hinterlands that previously demarcated anarchism from the general populace has taken place through key groups such as the IWW. This has not been a total shift and, for many, anarchism sits in the grey area between subcultural lifestyle approaches and the ultra-workerist politics still dominated by authoritarian socialism. The IWW is therefore situated at the centre of these debates.

I begin the chapter by outlining the IWW's ways of operating, explaining the contemporary IWW in its historical and cultural context. The former glory, and subsequent decline, of the IWW in the twentieth century leaves traces inscribed in the organisational and cultural fabric of the union today. This section thus situates the IWW between two poles – the past it has inherited and the future it is striving to build – and emphasises the centrality of this organisational culture to a once-powerful union trying to revive itself eighty years after its heyday.

The second introductory section explores the two key modes of organisation in the IWW. First is the traditional form of 'greenfield' organising that all unions undertake, in which a single union branch is built from nothing. The IWW differs from other unions, since traditional organising tends to be undertaken largely by external organisers, whereas the IWW's strategy resides almost entirely within workplaces, with workers leading their own unionisation effort. The IWW also employs "dual-card" strategy in which activists operate both within and beyond the recognised mainstream unions at their workplaces. These two strategies are interrogated and contrasted through a number of examples of IWW activity from the UK. This further elaborates on the IWW's idiosyncratic *modus operandi* and opens up

questions concerning the way in which the union adapts to, and shapes, the spaces and places in which it operates.

Following this initial discussion, I turn to interrogate the IWW's practices in greater depth. This is broken into three sections, each focussing primarily on one of the three research questions. First, I discuss the spatial strategies of the IWW, exploring how the IWW's distinctive approach shapes the spatialities it creates and adapts to the particular context of struggle. The second substantive section considers the ways in which activists seek to create or appropriate autonomous space for the development of the prefigurative principles that lie at the centre of the IWW's philosophy. The third section explores the role of everyday life, particularly focussing on how the IWW engages with the workplace as a strategic site of everyday political intervention, and how everyday working life structures and influences the geographies of workplace activism within the union.

## **THE FALL AND RISE OF AN “ANARCHIST HISTORICAL CLUB”**

### **Towards a (re)new(ed) unionism**

From its inception in 1905, the IWW has sought to build the forms of unionism that would be conducive to a radical transformation of society along worker-run lines. In its early decades, the IWW was buoyed by mass radicalism among the US working class and dissatisfaction with increasingly corrupt and partnership-oriented mainstream unions. From around 1909 to 1924, the IWW controlled large swathes of American extractive industries, and had a powerful influence on the rail, sea and road transport industries upon which US capitalism heavily relied (Dubofsky, 2000; Hall, 2001). Despite its relatively small size – reaching around 100,000 members – the IWW had significant influence over many sections of the working class and the conditions under which they worked.



Such was their (real or perceived) subversive influence, the combined forces of the US government and capital explicitly sought to demonise and crush the IWW during the 1920s and 1930s. Aside from this long-term campaign of intense state repression (see, for e.g. Dubofsky, 2000; Thompson and Bekken, 2006), much of the decline can be attributed to the overwhelming concentration on the largely male and itinerant 'hobo' workers in its early decades. The union failed to adapt to economic and demographic changes in the 1930s (Hall, 2001), and never recovered its former power or membership. Members desperately clung to the old-time images and propaganda of the union and, as a result, its iconography (see figs below) and literature rapidly became obsolete.

As the IWW shrank rapidly to a small core of North American branches in the 1950s and 60s<sup>22</sup>, it turned in on itself and became increasingly self-referential and ineffective (see Thompson and Bekken, 2006). By the late 1980s it had been widely seen as an "Anarchist Historical Club" for thirty years and, in some respects, it has retained this identity until the present day. A number of small workplaces were organised between the 1960s and 1990s, but rarely was the IWW operating as a union in any real sense outside of its larger branches in places such as Chicago, Detroit and New York. Even in these places, there was not a single workplace with an IWW union contract between 1955 and 1979 (IWW, ND a).

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<sup>22</sup> Already by 1950 IWW membership had fallen to 1108 members (IWW, 1950), and numbers dropped significantly from then. At one point in the mid-1960s, it has been suggested that there were no more than a dozen members remaining. Currently there are around 2000 members in the union. This number is still very small, but to put the figures in context, until the 1950s the IWW was still considered a potentially dangerous and influential organisation.

We Are Coming Home, John Farmer--We Are Coming Back to Stay



Fig. I: Cartoon, IWW Agricultural Workers Organisation, 1910s.



Fig. II: Poster detail, 1920s



Fig. III Poster detail, 1940s

Throughout much of the IWW's propaganda, especially its iconography, it is possible to see a stylistic development over the years, but a number of trends point back to the heyday of the IWW. Characters tend to be white, male and blue-collar, and the imagery is usually reminiscent of revolutionary movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with metaphors such as rays of sunlight and simplistic representations of linear progress. Despite the IWW remaining in obscurity throughout a sizeable period of its life, the traditions of the old IWW remain prominent elements of the union's identity and practices. For example, this contemporary book cover (Buhle and Schulman, 2006) makes strong references to old-style IWW iconography:

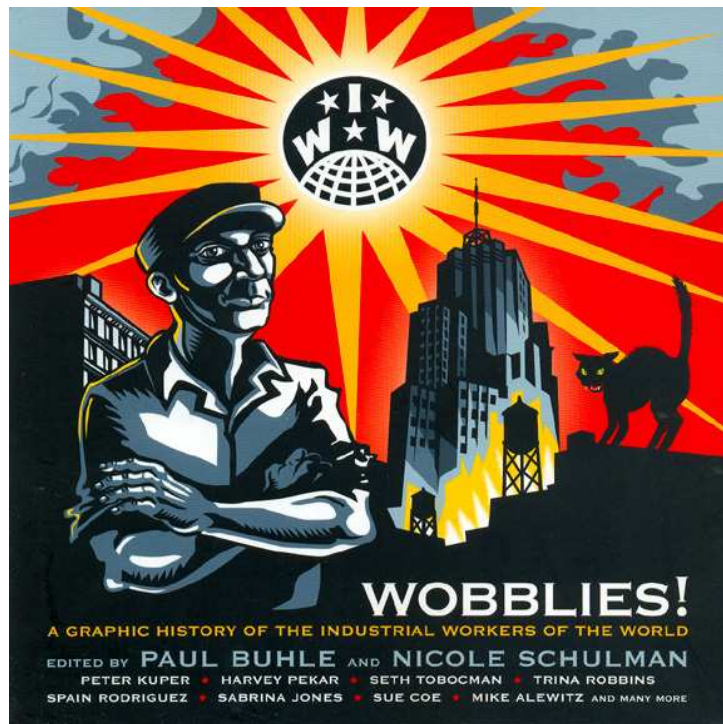


Fig. IV: Book Cover, 2006

Members take great pride in arousing imaginaries centred on the IWW's glory years. These traditions in fact sprang from the specific conditions of industrial relations in the early twentieth century, and the target demographics towards whom the IWW marketed itself. Glancing at the most 'sacred' and long-standing text of the union – the Preamble to the IWW constitution (IWW, 2009: 3) – we can see hints of this:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth.

We find that the centring of management into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-

growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars.

These conditions can be changed and the interests of the working class upheld only by an organisation formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

[...]

The army of production must be organised, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

This text sets the IWW squarely in the revolutionary optimism of the early twentieth century. It evokes a romantic image of a revolutionary organisation whose progress is unstoppable. More interestingly, this document is in fact speaking directly to the wider US labour movement – particularly the American Federation of Labour (AFL) – that was becoming increasingly institutionalised, undemocratic and elitist around the time of the IWW's formation. In part, the IWW was a conglomeration of various radical and democratic independent unions that felt intimidated by the prospect of being crushed or raided by the AFL and the state simultaneously. These unions had become fed up of having their strikes broken by unionised workers who were supposed to be 'on their side'. Furthermore, the IWW tended to organise workers that the AFL (or its more progressive counterpart, the Confederation of Industrial Organisations (CIO)) would rarely organise – the low-skilled and dirty workers, usually rural, often black, immigrants or female

workers, including textile workers or migratory agricultural workers and lumberjacks<sup>23</sup>.

Thus from its inception, the IWW was a specific organisation with a specific perspective in a specific historical and geographical context. It continues to organise along similar lines, maintaining a critical distance from mainstream unions and often organising among pariahs, such as casual workers, 'illegal' immigrants, the unemployed and even prison labourers. As Black (1998: no pagination) notes, "[u]nlike the fat-cat AFL-CIO unions... the IWW embraced the humblest workers". Similarly, the IWW's originally very strict membership criteria have remained part of the union, despite other unions allowing middle and upper levels of management into their ranks. This makes the IWW stand out further from other unions and instils in it – as we shall see – a strong confrontational sensibility towards employers.

Despite a re-emergence around the early 1990s, the IWW did not begin growing at any significant rate until the late 1990s. This culminated in 1999 with a large and colourful IWW presence at the 1999 Seattle WTO protests (Anon, 1999a; 1999b; IWW, 1999), which also coincided with a number of organising campaigns coming to a head (IWW, ND). This point for the IWW was crucial, and further growth required a critical reappraisal of the organisation and strategy of the union. The process of almost 're-learning' the art of running a union that the IWW has had to undertake has been especially notable in Britain, where the IWW has only been formally registered as a union since mid-2006.

As part of this re-learning process, the language used in some IWW publications has created divisions within the union. Some have argued that

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<sup>23</sup> Peculiarly, though, figures in IWW iconography tended to remain white and male. It is difficult to know exactly why this was the case. One possible answer is their primary membership base among the agricultural and logging industries which were, at least until the 1930s, almost entirely populated by single white men. Thus, their iconography needed to be reflective of their intended audience. Another possibility is the fact that the most active IWW artists, such as "Bingo" and Ernest Riebe, were predominantly drawn from these sectors of the economy. Further research would be required in order to ascertain the validity of these tentative suggestions.

the old style language, epitomised in the Preamble, is an integral part of the union's identity and should be preserved. Others argue that in order to grow and build a lasting presence, the IWW must be ruthless and cast off its potentially alienating historical 'baggage' and adapt to changing times. This latter opinion is particularly prevalent in the UK, where many IWW members are likely to have little knowledge of famous Wobblies such as 'Big Bill' Haywood and Joe Hill, or their concomitant folklore. In North America, these are cultural references that hold powerful resonance in the broader labour movement, just as the likes of James Connolly<sup>24</sup> or the Tolpuddle Martyrs do in the UK labour movement. The re-branding of the union that has taken place in the last few years has proven to be a contentious topic that problematises the role of traditions and multiple IWW identities again and again. This experience has demanded a course of action that blows open the doors to a number of awkward questions concerning mass-oriented prefigurative strategy and, crucially for this research, a number of inescapably geographical issues.

### **Education, Organisation, Emancipation**

There are three stars on the IWW's logo, representing education, organisation and emancipation. These are the fundamental, interlinked principles of the union, and it is worth briefly dwelling on their relevance to the union's organisation in practice. Superficially, they represent a relatively straightforward logical process: without education and knowledge, how can we organise effectively? And if we cannot organise effectively, how can we ever hope to emancipate ourselves?<sup>25</sup> It is, however, better to perceive the three as co-constitutive, strengthening and feeding off each other. This is

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<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Connolly was an IWW member, as was Larkin and a number of other participants in the 1916 Easter Uprising. He and other Irish socialists of his era had brought the idea of the IWW to the British Isles through their Trans-Atlantic links with Irish migrants and seamen in the USA. In a similar fashion, it was partly Irish migrants and exiles who first introduced the IWW to Australia and New Zealand around the same time.

<sup>25</sup> A London-based IWW member has a tattoo which includes an IWW logo with only two stars. When I asked him why it only had two stars, he replied "I'll add the third one when we're emancipated".

because the IWW is an explicitly prefigurative organisation that seeks to build a “new society in the shell of the old” (IWW, 2009: 3).



**Fig. V: The IWW logo:** remaining the same since the union’s foundation in 1905

As a result of these prefigurative principles, the IWW has institutionalised various practices for their implementation. In its early years, when the union was populated largely by low-paid workers many of whom had little or no formal education, IWW branches organised lessons in literacy and numeracy for members, using IWW report sheets and radical tracts as much of the subject matter. In fact, in its first three decades, the union ran the ‘Work People’s College’ (WPC), a large educational institution in Minnesota for members to undertake formal training. The WPC also utilised experimental forms of libertarian education, along similar lines to the Modern School movement (see Altenbaugh, 1989). In 2006, the WPC was resurrected, admittedly on a far smaller scale. Such forms of education seek to create prefigurative, self-managed forms of voluntary education that do not rely on capital or the state for their topics, funding or delivery.

Many of the topics covered at the WPC included practical organising skills for workplace and other forms of activism (IWW, ND [c. 1930]), alongside more academic topics such as economics and mathematics. Organising – and organising in the IWW way – is a central element of the learning process of being an IWW activist. Although practices vary from place to place, there are common organisational practices enacted throughout the union. A statement of principles of a branch of IWW dock workers typifies



the fundamental organisational principles on which the IWW stands, which includes “direct action”, “international solidarity”, “defence of class war militants”, “rank-and-file democracy”, “no scab unions”, and “mutual aid” (MTWIU San Francisco Bay Ports Local #9, 1998: no pagination).

Since the principle of organisation, for the IWW, is in practice a principle of *self-organisation*, IWW members tend to take an interest in the institutional structures and democratic practices of the union. Designed to maximise grassroots participation and local autonomy, the union enacts a strict and deliberative decision-making process. This takes place through several scales of democracy from the individual, to the branch, the regional union, and eventually the international union, with a referendum of the entire membership being the supreme executive body of the union. The intricacy of this system means that a proposed change in the constitution might take four or five months to be approved, with a further three months before it is implemented.

At the branch scale, various mechanisms exist to facilitate prefigurative forms of self-organisation and participation. For example, branch meeting agendas have a “good and welfare” section, under which members can request or offer help for issues unrelated to union business. While this is relatively standard for some US unions – which offer small grants to support members in difficulty – the practices offered in IWW meetings range far beyond financial or workplace support alone. For example, a London IWW member asked for – and was offered – a place to sleep for a few weeks after splitting up with her partner. Other instances have ranged from fixing bikes to job interview advice. The sharing of problems and efforts to find collective solutions to individual problems is designed to institutionalise practical, educational and emotional mutual aid at the nucleus of the IWW.

As an international union which seeks to ensure that power remains entirely among the membership, the IWW has undertaken a number of measures in order to ensure grassroots control while also retaining organisational coherence between localities. Various decision-making processes are used,

such as the delegation of voting members with specific mandates to attend regional or international meetings that can only propose (rather than enact) major changes to the union's constitution or policies. All major changes are then voted on by mass ballots of all members. Other mechanisms also exist, such as only retaining one full-time employee for administering the union internationally, who is elected by the membership, near-instantly recallable, and cannot vote on union business (IWW, 2009). These checks and balances are specifically designed to ensure good co-ordination as well as maximum grassroots control. As we shall see, however, they do not always work according to plan, and the uneven and dispersed geographies of the IWW can result in organisational difficulties.

The union has gone through various configurations over its century-long life. The emphasis placed on local autonomy and grassroots networking means that organisation for the IWW is very much controlled by the membership, much like its democratic structures. Since the decline of the union in the 1950s, it has had to adapt to its changing circumstances and has lost much of its original focus of organising along industrial, rather than trade, lines. The IWW tends to consider itself to be organised in two parallel structures: industrial and geographical (cf. IWW, 2006). In its heyday, the IWW would have several Industrial Union Branches (IUBs) in an area, with each operating in its own industry, co-ordinating with its industry's IUBs in other areas, and working alongside the different IUBs in its locality where necessary through an Industrial District Council (IDC). This is what IWW members refer to as the industrial element of the union's structure; the co-ordination between branches in the same industry.

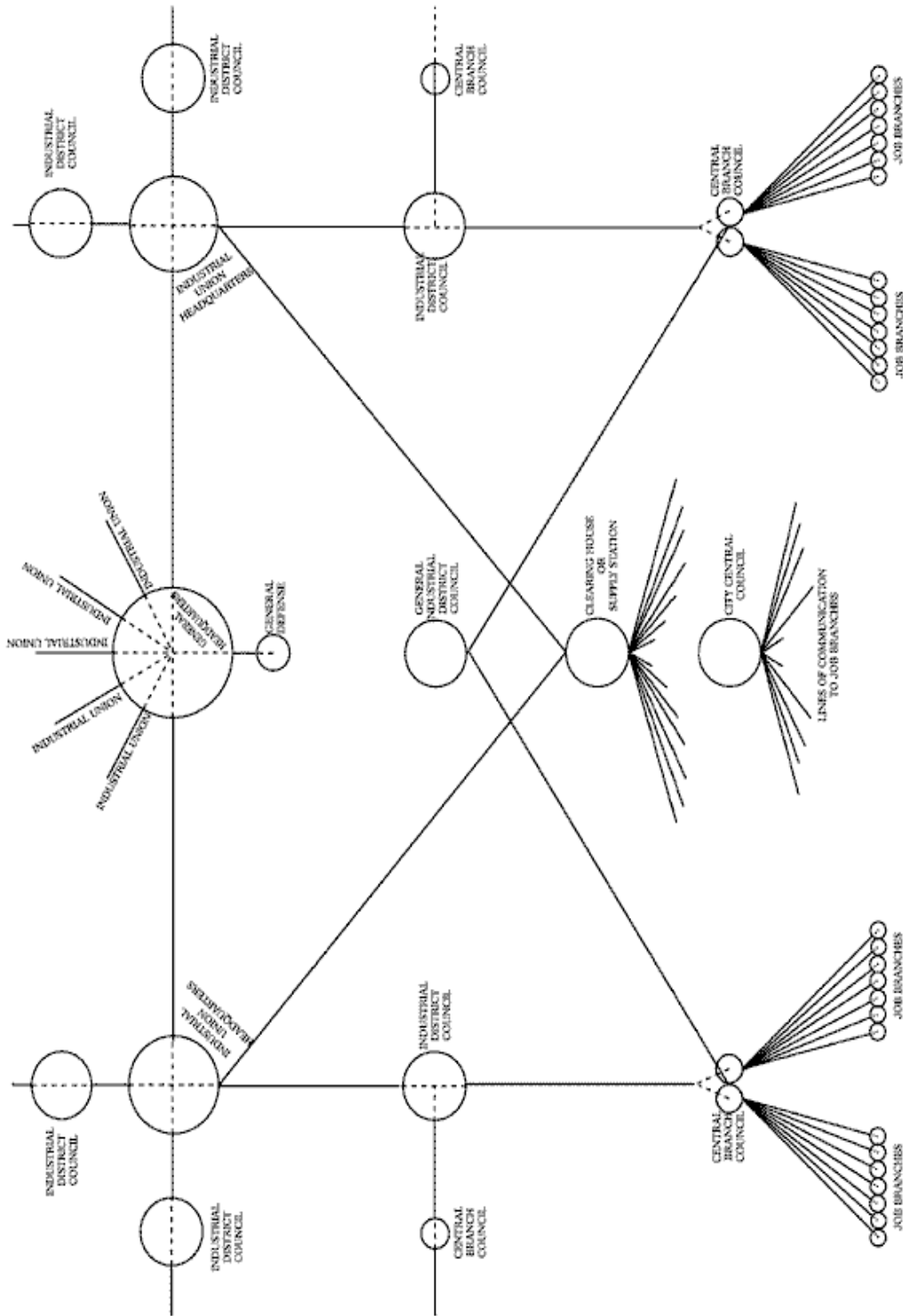
The other form of branch, considered 'geographical', is the General Membership Branch (GMB) and, due to the low membership of the union since the 1960s, has been the mainstay of the IWW ever since. GMBs are also called 'mixed locals' because they are general branches for all IWW members in a given locality, regardless of their job or industry. Regional groups of GMBs co-ordinate and self-legislate semi-autonomously through a Regional Organising Committee (ROC). At the international level, Industrial

Unions (IUs, federations of IUBs) form a level of organisation that is separate to ROCs but linked via the General Administration, the international administrative headquarters of the union.

|                            | <b>Industrial</b>                     | <b>Geographical</b>                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Global</b>              | Industrial Union (IU)                 | General Administration              |
| <b>Regional</b>            | Industrial District Council (IDC)     | Regional Organising Committee (ROC) |
| <b>Local</b>               | Industrial Union Branch (IUB)         | General Membership Branch (GMB)     |
| <b>Local (unchartered)</b> | Industrial Organising Committee (IOC) | Group                               |

**Fig. VI: Industrial and Geographical IWW Organisation**

However, this divide between industrial and geographical forms of organisation is far from clear-cut. Firstly, industries, and therefore IUBs are necessarily geographically rooted; branches must be located in *places*. Similarly, it is possible to conduct industrial organising campaigns through GMBs. As such, the rhetoric of these two structures being parallel is not quite true. In reality, they are two facets of the same, integrated structure. The diagram below, from 1920 (Hardy, 1920), gives an impression of the complex, integrated, multi-scalar geography of the early IWW that drew no such boundaries:



Job Branches are in camps, mines or shops, etc., heading in to the Central Branch Councils; several Central Councils make the Industrial District Council; and, several Industrial Districts lead into the Industrial Union, with a national headquarters; all Industrial Unions make the One Big Union of all the workers—General Headquarters. Where various Industrial Unions are operating in a District a General District Council is formed to unite the whole body of workers in a District, with City Central Councils formed on territorial lines to care for the communal interests. The Defense Council is maintained as a legal department with a fluctuating importance according to the work that comes under its jurisdiction. Supply Stations are for distributing supplies to jobs, etc., where several Unions exist a long way from Headquarters.

**Fig. VII: Early IWW Organisation**

As the union has grown in recent years, IUBs have become more viable once again. This has become highly prized as the IWW's international connections have grown, with greater co-operation between the IWW and larger industrially organised revolutionary unions, particularly in Europe.

Contact with these unions, and the growth of the IWW in European countries has brought the once rather isolated IWW rapidly into the international arena. IUBs remain in the minority but increasingly the IWW is prioritising the forms of industrial organisation that the early IWW enacted. This requires careful strategy and gives rise to questions explored in the remainder of the chapter concerning how – or if – a small, poorly-resourced organisation can build a truly revolutionary politics of everyday life in a politically inhospitable environment. Moreover, the tension between local autonomy and the broader scale of the international union is also apparent. The campaigns discussed below consider these questions in several different contexts, each with their own practices, tactics and dilemmas that uncover interesting insights into the geographies of radical organisation and everyday politics.

## **ONE CARD OR TWO? TAILORING STRATEGY TO CONTEXT**

In this section, I discuss the two primary approaches to IWW activity, and introduce three central examples of IWW organising in the UK from which this chapter chiefly draws. Out of the lowest ebb, between the 1960s and 1980s, came the rediscovery of what would become a key IWW organisational strategy of the current era: the “dual carder”. At the time, Wobblies would function as labour militants within the bigger mainstream unions, pushing for greater democracy, transparency and militancy. This took place covertly or overtly, according to the specific context. Although this strategy was generated out of necessity, it has been developed and refined into what it means today. Alongside this sits traditional union organising in a range of industries such as printing, food distribution, retail, trucking, and others. This so-called “single-card” IWW organising remains the most common form of activity for the IWW. The dual-card strategy, however, has become and remains an important mode of networking and co-ordination within and between workplaces and industries (Freeze, ND). It

opens up geographically significant and interesting topics for debate, as we shall see.

As a practice based around the shifts in the fortunes of struggle, dual-card unionism can be seen as a direct, autonomous strategy developed over time and seeking to closely mirror the changing fortunes of working class organisation. Dual-card activists must apply themselves to the specificities of their own situation, meaning that the dual-carder takes on an identity that is inherently fused to the amorphous and contextually shifting strategy of dual-card activism over time and across space.

In sectors with high union density and coverage, the IWW has become effective at building networked forms of alternative unionism both inside and outside the big unions, and also *both with and against them*. The idea is propagated by word of mouth, and deed, designed to build militancy and unity among workers and build the IWW presence at the workplace, while not endangering the collective power of the workers established through the recognised union (Freeze, ND). The IWW seeks to build a critical distance from the unions without risking the further division and weakening of the workers that would follow from challenging the unions directly. It has in a number of instances in recent years linked up different unions and bargaining units and has led important cross-union campaigns and actions.

In the 1990s, Australian dual-carders were integral to the ousting of the corrupt leadership of a large construction union. More recently, the dual-card strategy has been successfully used by IWW members in Scotland as a means of successfully preventing the closure of a university campus in Dumfries. IWW members spearheaded a campaign that mobilised the big unions, non-union workers, students and the local community (IWW Scotland, 2007). The dual-card strategy can therefore potentially become a powerful means of both linking workers between workplaces and jobs, and fostering the sense of solidarity that the IWW holds dear. In this sense, it can also be differentiated from the vanguardist 'entryist' tradition among some British socialists. While both attempt to build power and membership

within a bigger organisation, a key element of the entryist strategy involves taking control of the leadership of the larger organisation (see, for e.g. Socialist Party, ND). The IWW, organising through the prefigurative principle of grassroots democracy, rejects this approach and even goes so far as refusing membership to the leadership and officers of any other union (IWW, 2009).

By using personal links between and within workplaces and industries, the networked dual-card model can also be used to bridge the gap between otherwise distinct industries. One example of cross-industry dual-card activity was in 1998, when IWW dual-card construction workers in the USA led 300 workers off-site to strengthen the picket lines of a striking UPS delivery depot nearby (IWW, ND a). IWW members on the construction site had been in contact with IWW members in UPS to co-ordinate the action. The action was effective and no one was disciplined due to the word of mouth and other informal or unofficial means of communication used.

The campaign to fight cuts and build an IWW presence within the National Blood Service (NBS) in 2007-2008 was the largest of these dual-card campaigns undertaken by the IWW in the UK, and is a central focus for this chapter. The NBS – the arm of the National Health Service (NHS) that collects, processes, and distributes blood around England and Wales – was to be centralised from thirteen processing centres to three ‘supercentres’, resulting in the loss of 600 jobs and a potentially lethal reduction in service. The IWW, initially with a single member working in the NBS, took up a campaign to fight the cuts through a dual-card strategy enacted through the grassroots of the recognised unions in the NBS. It was a bold – some might say foolish – move.

The leaderships of the two major unions involved – Amicus-Unite and Unison – had been lobbying at a national scale on behalf of members for a few months before the IWW had any NBS workers on its books. These unions had relatively good membership density in the NBS, but very low participation rates, making it hard for any campaign to be built, even within

the existing unions. Reports from IWW members within one of the major unions in the NBS repeatedly referenced low morale and a sense of resignation.

The campaign, firstly, sought to place extra pressure on management and potentially see the cuts overturned. Secondly, it could build a name for the IWW as a dynamic, militant and growing force in the healthcare sector. The geography of the NBS, relative to that of the IWW, was another factor complicating any potential campaign. The NBS headquarters is based in Watford, and its new 'supercentres' were to be built in Bristol, Colindale (North London), and Manchester. Without an active opposition to the plans in the proposed supercentres or administrative centre of the NBS, there would be no way of connecting any struggle against closures of the other centres with the workers there. At the time of the campaign, only two of these four key cities had an organised IWW presence. Furthermore, of the thirteen cities with major NBS processing sites, only four of those cities had well-organised and active IWW branches, and three further cities had small active groups. As such, the geographies of the IWW and NBS simply didn't fit. An effective campaign against the closures would require a strategy that took these geographies seriously.

As a response to these ill-fitting geographies, it was decided to create a national committee to support the development of the campaign. The NBS Action Committee (NBSAC), as it became known, had arguably existed in an unofficial capacity for several months beforehand, with a core of eight key activists from around the UK helping to co-ordinate the increasingly widespread campaign. Through the campaign, and as increasing numbers of NBS workers began to either join or actively co-operate with the IWW, the IWW's presence in the NBS became increasingly high-profile. While IWW membership in the NBS never exceeded a few dozen, the presence of an 'unknown quantity' operating outside of the established industrial relations framework gave good publicity to the IWW and made management nervous. Through organising at work, combined with pickets, stalls, leafleting, pressuring local councils, publicity stunts, demonstrations, mass



'phone-ins', forging alliances with other groups and other more imaginative activities, the IWW was able to mobilise hundreds of people in their campaign.

It is hard to estimate the extent to which the campaign achieved its immediate goals since other actors were involved, most notably the recognised unions. However, at the height of the IWW campaign in spring 2008, the head of the NBS, Martin Gorham, resigned from his post and the cuts were significantly reduced in a major u-turn in NBS management policy. The campaign also brought widespread exposure to the IWW in the NHS more generally, and solidified it as a union that takes itself seriously and has the capacity to aggressively fight for workers' interests by any means necessary. By early 2008, the "Anarchist Historical Club" that two years previously had been a small group hoping eventually to form a union had more than tripled its size and was operating in many respects like a small but fully-functioning union.

The confidence and membership that the NBS campaign brought the IWW led to a greater focus on collective workplace organising. In late 2008, the vast majority of the twenty-five 'front of house' workers at the independent Showroom Cinema in Sheffield joined the IWW as single-carders. The workers joined the union in response to problems with aggressive management refusing to work co-operatively with workers, a lack of formal contracts, and unreliable scheduling. The union was forced to 'go public' prematurely, when one of the main organisers was sacked on dubious charges that were clearly linked to his union activities. Following actions such as pickets (IWW, 2008) and a mass phone-in<sup>26</sup>, the workers decided to demand formal recognition for the IWW at the cinema.

Voluntary recognition was at first flatly refused by management, but when the IWW began procedures to force recognition through legal channels, combined with continued and increasingly confident shop-floor activity,

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<sup>26</sup> Incidentally, this tactic was chosen partly because it had been very effective during the NBS campaign.

management changed their tactics. They approached a local Trades Union Congress (TUC) representative, in the hope of securing what is commonly called a 'sweetheart' recognition deal, designed to quash the independent IWW organising drive. Sweetheart deals impose the union of management's choice in order to ensure that the terms of the contract are largely dictated by management. However, through pressure from IWW dual-carders in BECTU, the entertainment sector union that was eventually approached by Showroom management for such a deal, BECTU refused the offer and recommended that they recognise the IWW instead.

As a result of legal loopholes and the draining and unsuccessful fight to reinstate their fellow worker, the Showroom workers' campaign to gain formal recognition petered out. Instead, they regrouped and continued activity without a contract. Their activities on the shop floor were consistently well-organised and often successful. For example, after an IWW member was suspended for a small cash mishandling, others threatened to walk out on wildcat strike and submitted a collective grievance, forcing management to reinstate him and grudgingly apologise. Soon after, the workers forced the sacking of one of the most aggressive senior managers, and the implementation of more reliable scheduling patterns. Despite the lack of formal union recognition, then, the IWW was acting as the *de facto* recognised union. While, at the time of writing, union activity and membership has decreased a little at the Showroom – largely due to staff turnover – the workers remain in this position, with management still fearing the return of unrest and consulting workers collectively on issues that affect them.

The successful use of BECTU dual-carders in supporting the Showroom campaign is one of several examples where single-card and dual-card IWW members have worked together. In London, dual-card members in the education sector have supported single-card members in the construction sector to research and write a report on health and safety violations on the 2012 Olympic construction site (Anon., 2009a). Combining the experiences of construction workers on the site and the research and writing skills of the

education workers allowed a number of volunteers to compile a detailed and extensive piece of work.

Construction workers in London had been active, with relatively little success in comparison with the NBS and Showroom campaigns, for more than six months. As a group of less than a dozen active members working a range of shift patterns with a wide range of trades, skills, nationalities and union memberships and non-memberships, they have struggled to organise effectively or find a common target and purpose for their efforts. This partly reflects the construction industry in general, with a growing union membership but relatively low levels of activity outside of certain sectors, and high levels of casualisation and self-employment. Nevertheless, the construction industry has some level of militancy at the grassroots, with a long tradition of wildcat strikes, work stoppages and other forms of unofficial direct action. The strategy undertaken by London construction workers therefore involved an engagement with members of the established unions and ongoing agitation at work as an independent union. However, without a specific focus for activity there was little that these workers could do except build contacts among rank-and-file workers and shop stewards, and recruit non-union workers where possible.

Several instances where a genuine campaign might have taken off did not come to fruition, such as agitation on a large site among agency workers with pay problems, and a near-walkout over poor working conditions among demolition workers at another site. Had either of these opportunities erupted, then the London IWW construction workers branch may have had more success. Construction workers and supporters in London branch continue to agitate and network, and numbers grow slowly but steadily. While this case is the least successful of the three examples of IWW organising, its blend of single- and dual-card activism raises interesting questions about the relation of strategy to context in the next section. Indeed, it also raises questions concerning the significance of failure to understanding political action. In many respects, the failures of the London construction workers branch may be able to tell us as much as the more

successful elements of IWW activity, since the constant reinvention and development of radical politics, in a sense, needs failure in order to make such a process move and change.

The broader question of success and failure has been explored theoretically in chapter two, and is discussed in greater empirical depth in chapter six. The following three sections investigate the everyday, prefigurative spatial strategies of the IWW in different contexts, primarily through the NBS, Showroom Cinema and construction workers campaigns. Each of these examples sheds light on different aspects of IWW spatial strategy. I analyse the ways in which the IWW attempted to organise in particular ways – as responses to their conditions and environments, and as attempts to actively rework those conditions in their favour – and what this can tell us about the distinctiveness of the spatial strategies enacted in their campaigns. As I argue, although many of the immediate goals of the campaigns were reactive and reform-oriented in nature, beneath the surface existed a multitude of proactive, prefigurative practices that were made possible by the reactive campaigns in which they were embedded. Nevertheless, the spaces in which IWW members find themselves influence not only their choice to enact single- or dual-card strategy, but also the way in which they implement such a strategy and attempt to shape the spaces in which they act. In the following sections, I explore the practices of the IWW through the three research questions: the spatial strategies of IWW organisation, the prefigurative spaces forged through autonomous IWW practice, and the ways in which such organisation is related to everyday life.

## **SPATIAL STRATEGIES OF NETWORKED UNIONISM**

This first substantive section discusses the spatial strategies enacted within the three main campaigns discussed in this chapter. In particular, I discuss the question of how the IWW adapts to, and shapes, the inhospitable

environment in which it organises, and the geographies of IWW activity more broadly.

### **Building a broad-based syndicalism**

A large part of the campaign to prevent cuts in the NBS involved a great deal of outreach to NBS workers and the public alike. This was largely co-ordinated by the NBS Action Committee (NBSAC), and tended to be channelled through IWW branches in certain areas within reach of a target, be it a processing centre or a blood donation session at a church hall. Alongside this was a continual process of feedback from IWW NBS workers – passing on information on board meetings, updating activists on new directions in management discourse and tactics, and so on – in order to ensure that activists were equipped with the necessary information.

There were a number of principal targets for this outreach campaign. Firstly, support from the general public was recognised early on as a key factor in the success or failure of the campaign. Activists around England<sup>27</sup> distributed flyers to donors, flyposted near processing centres and spoke with collection workers in an effort to build connections between donors, community members, collection staff and processing staff. Donor sessions and newspapers local to NBS centres were targeted in particular, in order to maximise exposure to those most directly affected by the closures.

The majority of the relatively mundane leafleting, picketing and petitioning activities undertaken by the IWW were not sanctioned by the authorities, and activists did not have a union 'leadership' from which they could request permission. Skills that IWW members had learned from more confrontational political activities – such as flyposting, stickering and flying pickets – were utilised in order to develop a campaign that did not make use of established forms of mediation such as police permission and had no central executive control. Small acts such as organising stalls in city centres

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<sup>27</sup> Although the NBS supplies parts of Wales, there are no processing centres in Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland have separate Blood Services.

without police permission were, essentially, forms of direct action, and succeeded in bringing on board a range of people who tended to be otherwise averse to unlawful activities.

Unofficial and potentially more controversial forms of direct action enacted by IWW members, however, remained relatively covert. A small group of members in London spent a week flyposting in the vicinity of the three blood centres around London and Essex. An IWW-organised printing press made thousands of nylon stickers out of scraps from other print runs and printed them unofficially for the NBS campaign out of hours. Another branch dropped a banner from a motorway bridge. These direct forms of action were almost exclusively low-level, relatively subtle, sustained over a period of time, and designed to intervene in the immediate public spaces near blood processing centres and donor facilities.

These activities were at once useful addenda to other forms of organising and a direct challenge to the control over these public spaces by state and capital. In the case of the IWW printing shop, the workers also creatively re-used the detritus left over from commercial printing jobs. In these practices, spaces are shaped and appropriated in subtle yet significant ways that subvert established authoritative norms and expected behavioural patterns and uses of that space. Following Pickerill and Chatterton (2006), autonomous IWW activity feeds off, and back into, the space to which it is applied. Interestingly, these autonomous practices were made possible precisely by the existence of a campaign that was largely reactive and mainstream on the surface. Nevertheless, IWW members are keen not to fetishise such tactics for their own sake; rather, they are perceived primarily as avenues for the furtherance and support of struggles. Indeed, as Jacob notes, many IWW members are wary of obsessing over confrontation for its own sake:

I think there is this sort of “I’m a radical, I do not believe in society’s norms... therefore I will flaunt anything that society has to say”, you know, “I will speak vulgarly because society dictates

that we're not supposed to, I will get in people's faces because society tells me I'm not supposed to"... I think that's a problem within a lot of activist groups and something we must try to avoid. (interview 18/08/2007)

From a more distanced position, relevant publications were targeted by IWW members who were among their readership, such as IWW nurses writing to the *Nursing Times*. IWW journalists and academics also conducted research to support the campaign. In recognising the wide industrial scope and skills base of the IWW, NBS activists were able to activate the principle of mutual aid in practice, as seen in the support from education workers to the London construction workers branch mentioned above. This recognition that everyone's interests as NBS workers and potential patients were interlinked allowed the NBSAC to use these sentiments to encourage members outside of the healthcare sector to participate:

By protecting the National Blood Service in England, and strengthening it strategically and democratically for the future, we will literally be saving 1000s and 1000s of working people's lives every year... A victory in this campaign will not only see more health workers joining, it will give heart to struggling, downtrodden workers everywhere, who dream of taking on their own destructive employers (IWW BIROC, 2007)

Pressure on key government actors was also a priority, especially given the state-run nature of the NBS. As with the identification of key local and national newspapers, targeting of ministers and councillors took place according to their locality, or position within government. However Alan Johnson, the Health Secretary, was also subject to regular demonstrations outside his surgeries, largely for the benefit of the local media.

A notable result of the NBSAC's national-scale organisation is that it was explicitly mandated to meet via online teleconferencing software (IWW

BIROC, 2008a). It was a direct response to the geographic dispersal of such a centralised committee, and its need for regular meetings as the campaign developed. At the same time, the growing IWW branch at the Harlsbury NBS plant, where the majority of IWW members in the NBS were concentrated, passed on information and practical and strategic guidance to the NBSAC. Through this committee, activists approached and made contact with NBS workers in processing centres without an IWW presence in order to make links, as well as networking with campaign groups. At the same time, NBS workers in the IWW continued to make use of other unions' formal structures and informal networks to mobilise from the 'inside'. This included the use of activist email lists or networking with other shop stewards through stewards' councils. Furthermore, IWW members used internal trade union reports and memos to help inform IWW activists of the best approach to the campaign.

In later sections, I explore the unpredictable nature of everyday internal NBS organising, which is rooted in place but networked through a maze of social connections that are hard to trace, let alone control. In relation to the orderly spaces of the NBSAC, this suggests a contrast in these two spatialities of autonomous action, both geographically and strategically. On one hand, internal organising in the NBS is situated in place and, since it is undertaken through networks of social and workplace relations, its trajectory is also hard to control or predict. On the other hand, the NBSAC organised at a national scale, but remained oriented towards particular sites of struggle. Their national support campaign did not rely to any great extent on the bundles of place-based relations that NBS workers in the IWW mobilised to garner support. Instead, the NBSAC sought to mobilise through networking at a larger scale.

The use of scale and place in these two cases is linked to the different relations, priorities and targets for organising. Identifying the context of organising led the two elements of the NBS campaign to approach the same issues from markedly different perspectives, and therefore also through different spatial strategies. In other words, the geographies of



organisation are constructed by the relations, priorities and targets to which they are applied. It thus returns us to the centrality of place to the shaping of other spatialities. The NBS campaign exhibited networks in place alongside networks across space but focussing their energies on a central place. The assumption that networks have no centre thus becomes incorrect when those networks are *structured by* and *oriented towards* place. When Martin (2003) suggests that place-framing is a central element of political mobilisation, her discussion is not oriented towards the *networking practices* in and between places that influence those place-framing practices. As Nicholls (2009) argues, when political groups and individuals network across space, networks can exhibit spatialities that are distinct from the places from which they arose. The different forms of networking that are generated according to their relative position – rooted in, or focussing around place – can be understood as acting in precisely the way to which Nicholls refers.

### **Union organising and networked relations**

As discussed in chapter two, autonomous praxis is especially adaptive and flexible, since it is not restricted by institutional fixity or top-down control. This perspective clearly allowed the IWW the freedom to enact the NBS campaign strategy in a variety of modulations according to various levers of pressure. Identification of a multiplicity of pressure points took place without regard to structures of authority – in the case of flyposting and sticker printing – or institutional ‘partnership’ arrangements – with regards to the picketing of Alan Johnson and street-based *ad hoc* negotiations. This disregard to formal external structures is a key tenet of autonomous approaches (Colson, 2001; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006), as a means of encouraging prefigurative self-management and empowerment. The grassroots, decentralised mode of organising at times made it difficult to co-ordinate effectively between places, yet it also gave the IWW the opportunity to proliferate the spaces and sites of struggle.

The NBS strategy also involved extensive networking with organisations and groups that had an interest in the campaign. The IWW co-operated with a number of political organisations, medical and patients' associations, and campaign groups. Over the course of a year, the campaign had built up a sizeable list of supporting organisations, although few actively participated in large numbers. The plan was to build up a supporters' network outside the IWW in order to broaden the relatively small activist base the IWW had at hand and unite with other groups through shared interests and priorities. Most active support was from individuals and organisations that the IWW had worked with previously, such as libertarian-leaning members of the Trotskyist group *Alliance for Workers' Liberty*, the anarcho-syndicalist *Solidarity Federation*, and a Trades' Council in London where an IWW activist worked at the time.

The utilisation and mobilisation of social and political networks was also essential in certain elements of support for the Showroom Cinema dispute. Mobilising sufficient people for pickets or mass phone-ins utilised person-to-person ties and histories that could mobilise large numbers of sympathetic groups outside of their official organisational context. When mobilising for a phone-in, London IWW members deployed different approaches that targeted people according to a personal knowledge of others' anticipated responses. As I explain in my fieldnotes,

Todd and Adam called around as many people as they could on the day [of the phone-in]. Later, they explained that they had to be sure not to put certain people off by using the wrong phrases. They made sure the anarchists thought they were doing a militant “communications blockade” to jam up the phone lines at the Showroom, while others were told to “voice their concerns to management” or thereabouts. It all meant the same thing... Even between individuals, depending on our relationships with them, they spoke or acted differently. (Fieldnotes, 13/9/2008)

Again, personal knowledges and connections allowed for a particular form of networking that could be utilised as a means of maximising participation. Importantly, rather than a monolithic idea of 'the network', we must be aware that within networks are myriad different connections which exhibit qualitative differences from one another. These differential dynamics constitute and re-constitute a network, through practices enacted by those within the network that reproduce or differ from previous connections between the same two individuals. Of particular interest is that the connections made in the networks mobilised in the phone-in contain certain *qualities*, as well as being simple connections. These are charged with personal relations that are not manifested in the simple fact of connection *per se*.

It also raises the issue, to be discussed in greater depth in subsequent chapters, of how these localised relations and knowledges can be broadened to create systems at a bigger scale. Such nuanced personal relations are built through everyday interaction and necessarily embedded in or between places. The spatialities of mobilisation through such relations are therefore almost inevitably rooted in localised relational interpersonal connections. This example of mobilising solidarities in and between places bears a striking resemblance to the dynamics of relational militant particularisms outlined by Featherstone (2005). Like Featherstone's argument, these solidarities and connections were not necessarily rooted in particular places indefinitely, and activists mobilised qualitative characteristics and shared histories rather than simply the connections themselves.

What complicates these relational dynamics, however, is that the shared histories on which these connections were based were by no means unitary in all cases. In a number of instances, there have been conflicting perspectives between IWW members internally, and between the IWW and external individuals and organisations. Not only are there IWW members who passionately disagree with certain political groups and tendencies, but also some members of those organisations hold profoundly anti-IWW

perspectives. This was especially clear when IWW construction workers within the UCATT trade union were confronted by leading UCATT activists after they released a report criticising UCATT for their conduct on a worksite. Reconciliation is often difficult in situations such as this, but this individualisation of inter-organisational networking can produce a non-politically-affiliated network of supportive individuals, rather than relying on inter-organisational co-operation which involves a complicated balance of organisational principles and external relations for each IWW event or action. In the case of the dual-card construction workers, IWW members mobilised interpersonal relations and shared histories in order to partially ameliorate the pressures on friendly UCATT activists by their superiors.

It is the deliberate and careful assemblage of small connections that constitute broader dynamics of the network as a whole. As Nicholls (2009) has argued, wide-scale dynamics constituted through smaller spatial configurations do not simply become those smaller spatialities 'writ large', and often take on dynamics of their own. IWW networking mobilises precisely around this principle, since the individual connections on which it is based are charged with a range of different – or potentially even contradictory – social, cultural and political affinities.

The fact that the connections in the IWW's case were often developed out of collective histories of struggle suggests that their bonds are likely to be stronger and less volatile than purely 'instrumental' arrangements since they are rooted in relations that intersect connections in space (collective experiences, struggles, campaigns) with connections in time (being involved in those experiences, struggles and campaigns simultaneously). As Murdoch (1998: 360) explains,

networks pleat and mould space-time through the mobilisations, cumulations and recombinations that link subjects, objects, domains and locales..., gathering diverse places and times within common frames of reference.

Of the debates concerning relations with other organisations during the NBS campaign, arguably the most prominent one concerned a proposal to formally affiliate to the anti-privatisation network Keep Our NHS Public (KONP). This question of affiliation was contentious precisely because it was a formal institutional connection, rather than being enacted through the multiple individual connections that had served the IWW so well in other situations. KONP is a broad-based coalition of NHS workers, community organisations and political activists and is united along the common principle of maintaining a nationalised healthcare system. However, a number of IWW members expressed strong concerns about formally affiliating due to the politics of the group and its position in squabbles over ‘territory’ between opportunist socialist parties.

The eventual decision to affiliate came after members of the IWW health workers section decided to support the move. It was represented as a point to be scored for the grassroots activists in the mainstream unions and against their unions’ leadership, with an emphasis on the benefits of grassroots activist connections. Since most IWW health workers are dual-carders, this was also a decision that stemmed from direct experience, rather than ideology as such. Sandra, an IWW NBS activist, feeding back from a meeting of IWW health workers noted that:

We believe affiliation would raise our esteem in the eyes of health activists (both union and community)... Remember the trade union leaderships, due to their links with Labour, are not keen on KONP, while the rank and file trade union memberships most definitely are. Here is an opportunity to show disillusioned healthworkers that in a very real sense we are a better alternative to the recognised TUC unions. It is a bonus point to us in an industry where we are outgunned by the big boys on every other front. (Sandra, email to national IWW email list, 2008).

The commitment to carving a place within broader activist and union networks was therefore a key element of the IWW’s organisational strategy

in the NBS campaign. The IWW balances a fine line in all of its relations with external actors, between an image of a radical, gritty band of no-holds-barred militants that appeals to anarchists and other militant leftists, and a professionally-run union that has all the knowledge and credentials of any other. The emplacement of IWW identity at favourable points within these different terrains of activist cultures and traditions is dependent on a highly nuanced assessment of the networks in which the IWW circulates. This assessment is largely informal, and tends to take place outside the official spaces of the union. I mention in my fieldnotes:

We are still trying to negotiate our positionality between the various allies we've made through this... campaign. A number of people have shared similar concerns... but it seems that the real allies are the individuals who act as entry points into the good will and support of broader organisations. (fieldnotes, 11/04/2008)

These complex, evolving and contested terrains of activism are, by their very nature, interactive and shifting. Indeed, many of the IWW's members themselves have their own place as a member or participant in some other political scene, group or tendency. A high proportion of IWW members are also formal members of political groups and organisations, bringing with them these different organisational cultures and traditions. As such, IWW members individually, and the union as a whole, actively participate in the shaping of this terrain.

Such an approach to networking challenges established 'social movement unionism' models of networking and alliance-building that are traditionally enacted through formal alliances between the leaderships of different stakeholders (see Johnston, 1994; Ince, 2007). The IWW model, however, mobilises largely through a multitude of individual social networking practices. This means that it is especially resilient to factionalism between groups, but also fragile: on several occasions in recent years individuals inside and outside the IWW have caused trouble by disrupting these networks and using them to spread rumours and accusations.

The networked spatial strategy of the IWW mobilises and interacts with institutions (groups, organisations, and so on) on a plane that does not respect formal organisational boundaries and protocols. In many respects, this strategy is mobilised out of necessity, but it also serves an important practical purpose with regards to partially circumventing the complex geopolitics of radical left groups and tendencies. The networking that is undertaken – premised on interpersonal relational connections in and between places – is therefore closely related to autonomy’s rejection of fixed institutional structures and emphasis on relations (Colson, 2001). Indeed, in the IWW, interpersonal relations are regularly mobilised specifically to undermine institutional boundaries and to develop cross-fertilisation.

The autonomous emphasis on self-organisation appears to fit neatly with the rejection of inter-organisational coalitions, but it does not so easily account for the IWW’s decision to formally affiliate to KONP. This can best be explained as an enabling tool; a means of gaining access to new networking space, at once established within the grassroots membership of mainstream unions and organisationally separate from those unions. It suggests that the autonomous politics enacted by the IWW are rather more pragmatic and flexible than the somewhat prescriptive definition of autonomous spatialities and strategies discussed in chapter two, incorporating different institutional and relational manoeuvres in different networking contexts.

The IWW as an institution sits in the interstices of these fluid, networked terrains of left-libertarian activism and the formal spaces of industrial relations. Rather than ‘institution’ in this case being described as a discrete, homogeneous node in a network of actors as one might expect, we can perceive the word to mean an everyday “pattern of human relations” (Neilson and Rossiter, 2006: 397). One of the benefits of the London construction workers branch lies in its ability to pattern its relations in a way that institutionalises certain forms of organisational practices, for example.

Through its combination of dual-card and single-card members, it is able to use these relations to other unions – of membership or non-membership – to develop different institutional identities in different contexts. When among other trade unionists, the dual-card strategy is emphasised, but when around non-union workers, IWW activists are able to promote their identity as a union in and of itself. Much like in the NBS, IWW construction workers in London have begun to gain a greater influence in the industry than their small membership suggests.

This ability to re-invent collective identity in different contexts is one benefit of operating both within and without other unions, and relates closely to the networking strategies enacted in the NBS and Showroom campaigns. It provides the opportunity to approach different political spaces in different ways, and this can shed light on how political space itself functions. If organisations are patterns of everyday relations, then the way we (inter)act in organisational space can have a profound effect on the space itself. IWW construction workers, having the flexibility to represent themselves as a particular kind of organisation in a particular situation, reshape the political space in which they operate, in some small yet potentially significant way. This, coupled with political space conceived as constituting a spatialised “politics of the possible” (Moore *et al.*, 2003: 42), suggests that such self-representations can be understood as major causal factors in the outcomes of events and situations, not to mention possible future worlds.

Whereas a number of geographers (e.g. Routledge, 2003; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006) have theorised networked political practices as positive prefigurative modes of organisation by virtue of their *properties*, such as decentralisation, rapid knowledge exchange or horizontality, the IWW experience shows how networked strategies can also be understood through their exhibition of certain *relations*. This thesis concerns itself partly with how spatialities such as networks perform roles in the constitution, articulation and mobilisation of radical political agendas, and there is a strong sense that the political role of networks cannot be fully understood without understanding how they operate as transporters and sustainers of



relations. As the anarchist Jamie Heckert (2004: 113) notes, in the context of sexual politics,

[r]espect, empathy, informed consent and shared pleasure are values to be supported in all relationships, [and] must be central in any efforts to produce and sustain non-hierarchical relationships, organisations and societies.

Political praxis, for Heckert, and the IWW, is derived from the forging of certain everyday relations that can be propagated, negotiated, sometimes contested, and developed over time and through a variety of spatialities.

In this sense, we can understand networked IWW spatial strategies as practices of shaping the possible in particular contexts. Their adaptation to different situations requires a flexibility that can flip not only between different relational configurations, but also between distinctively radical strategies and relatively mainstream institutionally-bounded ones. The spaces of modality or possibility that we call political spaces are thus partly dependent upon how these “patterns of human relations” operate and are shaped differently in different times and places.

## **PREFIGURING WORKPLACE RELATIONS THROUGH AUTONOMY**

In this section, I develop themes within the previous section concerning the politics of IWW spatial strategies by exploring the role of autonomous practices within the union and how they relate to the broader research question of how prefigurative politics can be articulated and practiced in real-life political situations.

### **Carving autonomous spatialities within and against work**

Much of the activity and organisation within the NBS took place outside of the formal spaces of the IWW. It was a condition of the everyday workplace experience, with a number of IWW members who were shop stewards and

members in the recognised union, and also a result of the geographical concentration of IWW members in one workplace. As with most dual-card campaigns, members at Harlsbury NBS blood processing centre, the main site where IWW members were active, were extremely careful not to be too open about their activities with the IWW. A website was set up as a “Save the NBS” campaign site that syndicated internet news feeds from union, press and industry sources. This allowed IWW news and views to appear within the campaign, but without directing the gaze of trade union leaders or bosses towards certain people or processing centres. This website gave the IWW a space alongside other unions and campaign groups that would otherwise have been unthinkable.

Since it was a localised campaign, in a single building, the Showroom Cinema organising drive did not require such a website. Their organising effort was made easier because of the close social ties between many of the workers, and the leverage they were able to wield as workers at a relatively small and 'PR-conscious' employer. Their organising took place exclusively through word of mouth, telephone and face-to-face contact. Located within bigger social and political networks, most of the workers had ample contact outside of the workplace to conduct union business. As a result of this, outreach to workers at the Showroom who were not part of these social groups was initially difficult. As the campaign grew, and a sense of collectivity emerged among the workers – alongside the emergence of a common enemy – the social networks that were initially central to the organising effort increasingly became secondary to the struggle that was unfolding before them. It forced a more serious approach to unionisation to emerge that required the deliberate forging of social connections, especially when reaching out to 'back room' staff with whom the main activists rarely interacted. Clearly, then, social contact and interaction was a key facet of organisational strategy, as with many other unionisation struggles (see, for e.g. Slaughter, 2005). The significance of these particular forms of networking was that they were generated through the self-activity of the workers, operating largely without the support of the rest of the union.

Pre-existing union recognition agreements at all sites and in all sections of the NBS meant that a pure-and-simple IWW recruitment campaign would have been dangerous and divisive. By blurring the edges between IWW and mainstream union spaces, activists were able to operate through the other union's structures, 'hide' from NBS management and the big unions' leadership, as well as strengthening the side of the workers in the potentially bitter and hard struggle ahead. By engaging in a dual-card strategy, IWW members in the NBS sought to diversify and multiply the campaign's targets and tactics, and increase overall leverage. It was crucial in this context to understand the place of the IWW in broader NBS labour relations.

To this end, Nathan, an IWW activist involved in the NBS campaign, wrote that

[t]he IWW is not in a position to offer some of the kinds of employment protections that TUC unions sometimes can... I don't think the IWW is theorising our involvement in those activities in quite the same way as UNISON or the RCN might... [W]e should [not] be discouraging dual carding. I think that would be very reckless of us, and also would limit our strategic capacities in the future (Nathan, email to Scotland IWW email list, 2007).

With regards to "theorising our involvement", the IWW is quite clear that its participation in statutory employment procedures such as disciplinary and grievance hearings is not its primary *modus operandi*. Direct action, for the IWW, is preferable because it is grassroots, self-organised, and can be democratising and empowering (Anon., 2009b). This stands in contrast to the somewhat individualistic, albeit often necessary, statutory procedures. Similarly, it is not interested in stealing members from other unions during dual-card activism (Freeze, ND). Indeed, the IWW's sphere of influence in the NBS, Showroom Cinema and among London construction workers became far greater than its membership. The sphere of NBS influence

stretched into other wings of the NHS, with a number of workers in NHS sections unrelated to the NBS joining the IWW after having heard about the NBS campaign. By creating autonomous spatialities within their respective workplaces and unions, IWW members provided opportunities for creating grassroots connections and relations that refused boundaries between IWW members and other unionised and non-unionised staff in their workplaces.

It is important to note that, while these spatial configurations were developed in part through contestation between the IWW and other actors, there was not necessarily a sense of competition between the IWW and other unions in the NBS, except, perhaps, for the latter's leadership. As the text of an IWW organiser training course explains, “[f]or a dual-carder, the IWW is not a new competitor in the union ‘market’, it is a parallel and separate structure altogether” (IWW, 2007: 2). While also operating through the recognised unions' structures, IWW dual-carders also organised outside these structures, creating alternative networks of activism, feeding back into the recognised unions, and mobilising and radiating into the broader IWW. The way in which the IWW straddled internal trade union spaces and external IWW spaces can be understood as a very clear autonomous strategy, exhibiting autonomous properties – particularly “interstitiality” (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 732), self-organisation and adaptability – identified in chapter two.

However, with only a single NBS worker in the IWW initially, such a campaign of ‘inside, outside and beyond’ developed slowly over the course of the campaign, and only began to take any meaningful shape five or six months after the campaign commenced. This gradual development suggests that practicing autonomous politics is not simply a case of establishing a fixed positionality in relation to established frameworks; rather, it develops slowly over time as relations and connections are made, strengthened, proliferated, and charged with certain qualitative political norms and values. Such an approach cannot therefore be defined by its ‘pure’ spatial characteristics alone: it must be considered on a temporal axis and mark a qualitative difference between the functional relations of

workplace activity and the politically-charged relations of autonomous activity.

The campaigns discussed also raise the question of recognition, not only in terms of formal recognition from employers, but also the politics of recognition and how it affects the way in which groups understand and negotiate their place. Geographers are increasingly engaging with how recognition, political identity and organisational practice are connected, often focussing on the way in which others recognise political groups and movements influences the way they perceive and organise their own structures, identities and purposes (Nicholls and Beaumont, 2004; Staeheli, 2008). Single-card campaigns, such as the Showroom Cinema, have a relatively straightforward geography of recognition, relationally manoeuvring and shaping the role of the union according to the particularities and events of the campaign, such as management reactions. Management responses to IWW activity framed the IWW as a dangerous organisation that, since it was not located within the relatively 'safe' spaces of the TUC, was unpredictable and unmanageable. IWW members responded to this by utilising dual-card members in TUC unions to ensure that the IWW was the only union that management could deal with and therefore to secure its position as the *de facto* bargaining agent of the workers, whether management liked it or not. Showroom workers thus utilised the IWW's autonomous status as located inside and outside of TUC spaces as a means of securing its place at the centre of workplace politics. In this sense, autonomous strategy need not be covert or otherwise hidden; Showroom workers openly asserted the IWW's autonomous positionality in relation to the TUC precisely to gain power on the shop floor:

We... ensured that the meeting with the TUC rep was packed out with [Showroom workers] sympathetic to our cause and gave the guy a really tough time, making it absolutely clear that this was our struggle and that we would not tolerate being undermined by another union. (Anon., 2010: no pagination)

However, the semi-covert nature of dual-card activism in the NBS necessitated a certain element of *non*-recognition, with IWW members often operating as militants within the mainstream unions and explicitly seeking to *avoid* recognition. Thus recognition, although a factor in the constitution of autonomous strategy, is not understood straightforwardly in all places and times. Dual-carders sought recognition as dual-carders only when strategically useful.

This issue of (non-)recognition in different contexts exemplifies the immanence of autonomous praxis. In pursuing autonomous praxis, IWW dual-carders in the NBS and among London construction workers chose to represent themselves differently in different situations, whereas Showroom workers were very assertive about their union membership being separate from the TUC. The liminality of the IWW – as a recognised union, militant network of trade unionists, unrecognised workplace action group, or all three – allows members a great deal of flexibility, in order that the “interstitial” (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 732) positionality carved out can be mobilised flexibly and according to spatio-temporal context, potentially changing in the space of a few minutes or remaining steady over long periods. This links back to discussion of autonomous networking practices in the previous section, where IWW members utilised different lexicons according to their audience, and the nature of their relationship with them. The role of autonomous practice in this sense is to open up spaces for alternative relations to develop, feeding off the characteristics of its context and reshaping it in a way that provides space for potentially emancipatory and prefigurative politics to flourish. The next subsection explores these spaces in greater detail.

### **Between confrontation and co-operation**

The geography of IWW dual-card organisation cannot be simply categorised as a tendency within mainstream unions. As Pickerill and Chatterton (2006: 732) remind us, there is no such thing as an “out there” in autonomous politics; rather, there is a constant interplay between

autonomous spatialities and the spatialities to which they are applied. The role of the dual-carder, certainly in the NBS campaign, took the form of a sort of connective membrane, building points of everyday cross-fertilisation between the IWW and the other unions' membership, seeking to strengthen both, while also structuring and mediating their relationship to one another through manoeuvring social ties and information flows.

Moreover, dual-carders' connection with the IWW and other political networks outside of the NBS was also a major factor in their everyday organising. Their unique geography in the campaign – situated simultaneously inside the IWW, the recognised union, and the NBS workforce – although hard to negotiate, facilitated this process of self-organised knowledge transfer. This worked to ensure that conflict between members of both unions remained at a minimum, through acting on a keen understanding of the organisational and political cultures of both unions. The position occupied by dual-carders was facilitated by an autonomous approach to political practice which, in turn, created space for prefigurative solidaristic relations to flourish. By refusing structures of authority and, instead, developing grassroots forms of connection and self-help, dual-carders pursued a highly prefigurative politics, using autonomous spatial and social strategies to achieve it. They provided opportunities for a prefigurative subversion of established norms, identities and positionalities between the two unions. The importance of autonomy to broader prefigurative aims is very clear in this regard.

This is one example of everyday knowledges feeding directly into autonomous strategy, as argued by a number of scholars discussed in chapter two (Cleaver, 1979; Chatterton, 2005; Katsiaficas, 2006; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). A keen understanding of the localised everyday practices and dynamics of work and unionism, at the NBS in particular, allowed activists to mediate relations between the IWW and other unions. This was crucial in order to ensure that the IWW could pursue its own strategy while respecting the needs of the workforce as a whole to remain undivided.

Interestingly, the only inter-union conflict between the IWW and another union in the NBS was initiated by the leadership of the latter. Although a national official of this union forbade his members from taking part in a mass telephone call action called by the IWW in early 2008, many members participated despite – or perhaps even because of – this disciplinary measure. In an email forwarded by another IWW activist, one non-IWW NBS worker explained that

I don't really care what [the union official] says. If this helps us keep our jobs and make sure that [our blood centre] keeps going then I'm more than happy to defy what he tells us to do... I think it's called "management of defeat" – that's exactly what he's doing and that's exactly why I am going to call in on Monday and encourage my workmates to do the same (Anon., personal email, 4/1/2008).

Defiance of union leadership, then, often supported and sometimes initiated by non-IWW workers, contributed to a cross-union collective sense of purpose and solidarity. The theoretically neat and bounded spatial strategy of the IWW's campaign, once again, extended beyond their control through organic social networking among workers at the rank-and-file level, albeit sometimes inadvertently assisted by trade union leaders. This situation also tells us something deeper about the way prefigurative politics are made possible since, by enacting such a strategy, the IWW was able to expose hierarchical structures. If the central element of prefigurative politics is to develop forms of organising and relating that prefigure future worlds (Gordon, 2007b), then another element of such a strategy may also be the delegitimation, exposure, or even mockery of structures that stand in opposition to such an approach. By building prefigurative forms of non-hierarchical connection across institutional and geographic boundaries, the IWW was able to expose the way in which hierarchy produces structures and personalities that are incongruous with principles of equality, democracy and accountability.



However, some forms of IWW organisation were not so easily maintained. Alongside its co-ordinating role, the NBSAC was designed to maximise efficiency and collective purpose around strategic targets. Ironically, the sheer volume, optimism and complexity of the documents, papers and publicity materials disseminated to branches served in some cases to alienate the grassroots of the union from the NBSAC. At the height of NBSAC activity, around late spring 2008, there was a small but sharp decline in participation among branch activists. A number of branches had prioritised local organising campaigns, the first round of redundancies had taken place, and the longevity of the campaign was taking its toll on members' stamina. As I wrote in my field diary,

[t]he campaign is reaching a critical point now. Either we can keep up the momentum and continue to build power or we will sink away... People, certainly in London, are getting tired of all the strategy and unworkable plans coming out of the [NBSAC] and are getting snow-blind from it all. The job branch in Harlsbury is still holding out but growth has slowed and a couple have already been told they're losing their jobs soon. (fieldnotes 14/4/2008)

The sapping of energy and almost alienation of members from the campaign was directly related to both the effort involved in sustaining the campaign despite its uneven geography, and the NBSAC's apparent inability to sustain positive working relationships with other members over a long period of time. Although the NBSAC was a member-run, grassroots committee, the situation caused it to become a stratum of its own, neither 'giving orders' in a traditionally hierarchical sense, nor entirely engaging with the rest of a union from a truly rank-and-file level at all times. This is directly affected by the uneven geography of the campaign and jars with the IWW's prefigurative commitment to horizontal organisation.

This issue raises questions concerning the nature of anti-hierarchical prefigurative organisations and their contexts. A number of labour

geography scholars have argued for a movement-based, worker-led labour movement, often modelling themselves on what Waterman has called 'social movement unionism' (Waterman, 1991; cf. Eimer, 1999; von Holdt, 2002). However, the unions themselves have tended to remain under the control of a small cadre of professional organisers and full-time officials who have the time and resources to effectively co-ordinate across spaces and industries. With a revolutionary syndicalist union such as the IWW, campaigns rest entirely on the shoulders of members themselves who are usually fairly place-bound and have limited time and resources to give. As one London IWW activist noted,

We can't get around the country with the ease of a lot of other unions. They've got the money and time, but we're only able to organise where we are. It's frustrating but we have to work with what we've got and stick to our guns... [P]rofessional organisers sap working class autonomy and take away their power, we don't swing that way... No-one's gonna liberate us except ourselves (Tony, personal email to author, 2008).

Thus, in the context of this type of voluntary labour, telephone, online conferencing and email technologies 'compressed' (cf. Harvey, 1989) some distances, while others were 'stretched' by the immobility caused by lack of funds and time. The IWW's potential for inter-local co-ordination is therefore somewhat complicated by its entirely volunteer activist base, with the same distances understood as further or shorter according to the medium of contact and activists' everyday commitments in other areas of life. In its prefigurative enactment of anti-hierarchical and anti-vanguardist principles, the IWW made effective co-ordination across long distances more difficult in practice.

### **Border-crossings and autogestive identities**

The enduring presence of dual-card identity also raises questions about the nature of IWW membership. The borderlands of the IWW are hotly

contested and always shifting. According to the IWW constitution, almost all members of the working class are eligible for membership, but with a variety of interpretations of membership criteria by IWW members, matters are complicated. One such example is that at the end of the membership application form a declaration must be signed, essentially as confirmation of membership of the working class. In 2007, a debate broke out concerning a typographical discrepancy between different membership forms that were circulating in the union. Some forms stated “I confirm that I am a worker and not an employer” and others stated “I confirm that I am a worker with no power to hire and fire”. This minor differentiation, an innocent typographic error, has since fuelled debates concerning membership eligibility and, more broadly, membership and identity of the working class. With the increasing stratification of supervisory power relationships in many workplaces (Olin Wright, 1996; Sennett, 2006), the economy and nature of work is very different from the conditions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. “The power to hire and fire” is therefore held by large portions of the working class. Indeed, many workers come to the IWW first asking whether they are eligible for membership. This management strategy of ‘divide and rule’, combined with changes in the labour process more generally, has proven to be very effective in quashing workplace organisation, and most unions accept managerial strata into their ranks by default. With the IWW, individual cases are often discussed by the branch concerned and democratically decided upon. I explain one case in my fieldnotes:

We had a membership application from a woman who was a charity project manager with two administrative workers below her. When she asked to join, we had to ask her about her relationship to these workers. What level of unilateral power does she have over them? What level was she over-all in the organisation? I think she was a bit taken-aback at all these questions, but after a short conversation we saw no reason why she shouldn't join, and signed her up. (Fieldnotes 7/5/2008)

Thus the borderlands of membership are flexible and in negotiation, despite the stark black-and-white categorisation that class membership superficially suggests. Membership discussions provide an opportunity for IWW definitions of class to be refined according to variations over time and space, thus affecting the internal spaces of the union and its self-perception potentially in an uneven manner.

This negotiation also shows how historical questions that dominated discussions of IWW identity are malleable through everyday experiences of class difference. While union traditions are powerful and sometimes divisive within the contemporary IWW, there is a widespread acceptance that the economic conditions of contemporary capitalism require developing or refining ways of understanding and constituting the union, partly through its membership criteria. The IWW's self-produced identity is therefore a profoundly autonomous, everyday process of bordering (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002), attuned to multiple places and contexts simultaneously. The contested bordering practices of the IWW can be understood at once as a prefigurative assertion of democratic control by the grassroots and a practical tool in the renewal and adaptation of the union over time and across space. These bordering practices, however, also make it rather vulnerable to ruptures or changes. In some respects, the traditions that live on within the IWW are a major element of what binds geographically, culturally and politically disparate groups and contexts within it.

IWW identity is produced spatially, not only in geopolitical or territorial terms, but also in terms of the emplacement of the IWW in relation to other actors such as other unions, political groups and broader activist networks. The construction of identity in this way brings geography to the centre of how IWW members make sense of the IWW and their place in it. The way in which this shifting and contested IWW identity influences IWW practice is twofold: firstly the IWW's identity, and the contestation thereof, shapes the targets and extent of collective action; and secondly, it plays an active role in developing the organisational culture, strategies and structures of the

union. As Miller (2000) argues, these two elements of an organisation are entwined together as co-constitutive, and in the case of the IWW, the identity produced through the contestation of traditions and membership criteria is a central element that binds these two sides. As other sections of the chapter show, the strategic deployment of different IWW identities in specific everyday economic, social or political contexts forges relations with external actors that have important effects on the “terrains of struggle” (Routledge, 2003).

This section has discussed the role of autonomous strategy in the IWW, and how it relates to the broader question of how the IWW seeks to prefigure a future society. Although the section has chiefly focused on autonomy, it has also shed light on the negotiations and complications of practising prefigurative politics. Not only do everyday experiences and knowledges play a pivotal role in the positive development and efficacy of an autonomous strategy, but also everyday commitments and needs can sometimes play a limiting role. In chapter two, prefiguration was characterised as inherently complex and unpredictable and, using the IWW as an example, it has been proven to be so. While autonomous forms of networking between unions among dual-carders have been shown to produce prefigurative spaces of anti-hierarchical relations, prefigurative practices of grassroots control also create challenges through the closing-down of opportunities to co-ordinate across space. Prefigurative politics is thus in tension, not only between this society and the next, but also between the opportunities that it affords to groups through autonomous practices and the difficulties it poses for effective action.

## **EVERYDAY GEOGRAPHIES OF WORKPLACE ORGANISATION**

### **Building and sustaining everyday relations**

This section turns to consider the first research question, focusing on how the IWW operates on an everyday basis, and how the union seeks to

construct a politics of everyday life. As both anarchists (e.g. Heckert, 2009) and Marxists (e.g. Lefebvre, 2002 [1961]) remind us, everyday life is chiefly practices and experienced through relations, and most of the organising that resulted in membership growth and mobilisation for the IWW in the NBS campaign took place through workplace relations at the Harlsbury NBS processing centre. Routine workplace interactions and social networks formed an extensive web of influence and mobilising capacity, centring on certain departments in which IWW membership was strongest. Emergence took place through everyday social and organisational networks, and this took time to filter through into accepted everyday practice. This emergence preceded and was reinforced by a shift in organisational culture as new members became comfortable with IWW principles and passed on the message to others. In contrast, leafleting activities at a national demonstration against health cuts prompted one IWW NBS member to write:

Most other leafleters that were doing the rounds were from political groups, socialist, green, etc. Therefore giving someone a leaflet 'cold' which says 'join', in a situation like that they will presume it is more of the same...I'm sure we all know that the best way to recruit is to set a good example and just talk about the IWW with people we know and see every day at work. (Katy, personal email to author, 11/06/2007)

Clear lines of connection became apparent, with a strong trend towards the recruitment of workers either in the same department as IWW activists, or those who were active in the recognised union. In some cases, the two were not separate. Nevertheless, this structure very closely mirrored the everyday interactions between individuals. IWW membership spread clearly along the social and organisational lines that are practised regularly and reinforced through collective workplace experiences. Literature on labour organising has repeatedly emphasised that this is precisely how a strong union branch can be formed (see Ince, 2007 for an overview), and the powerful ties that are developed between co-workers raise the issue of the

enduring power of workplace politics: if, as geographers rightly insist, our experience of work is so central to our identities (e.g. Ni Laoire, 2002), political activities (e.g. Southworth and Stepan-Norris, 2003) and social practices in general (e.g. Beaverstock, 1996; Stenning, 2003; Tufts, 2006), then the workplace remains a key site of praxis and production of political subjectivities. However, the changing fortunes of workplace organisation open up the complexities of its relation to other aspects of life. It is worth quoting at length an email from Sandra, an IWW NBS activist, outlining her perspective on everyday workplace organising in the NBS:

Most people I work with enjoy relaxing with celebrity dancing shows, soaps, perhaps some outdoor pursuits, cars, dog walking, going to the pub. Not 'liberation from the chains of class oppression'.

Last week, while we all talked about the proposed 3 year pay cuts in the NHS, I lost count of the number of times that my workmates used the actual words 'why can't there be one big union?<sup>28</sup>'. This is always my cue to cough and remind them about the IWW... [E]veryone is quite aware that the IWW has been consistently fighting this campaign where UNISON and Amicus have just been scratching their arses.

[...]

Sorry but healthworkers are very sick of their unions, and sadly at present most healthworkers just do not get hot at all over the idea of a better union... However, these people who are understandably resistant to signing up and receiving all kinds of lefty mail they are not interested in, ARE interested in coming along to stalls, leafleting etc, in order to fight for their jobs and protect our public services.

We have managed to recruit some very very experienced and active NHS stewards [to the IWW]. I am trying to effectively recruit all the time, but I will only do so where appropriate. I am not willing to come across like some kind of fringe, outsider nutcase in a misguided attempt to boost numbers... [Y]ou can't just push or nag

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<sup>28</sup> "One Big Union" is a term that is central in the IWW, denoting the IWW goal to organise all workers into one big union to maximise working class unity and power.

people; that does no good at all. Over time I know we will increase our NBS membership [but] what is important is to get those most active people on side one way or another... [T]he class struggle is not just about red card<sup>29</sup> holders. It is about what is happening on the ground. Militants take time to develop. (Sandra, email to national IWW email list, 2008)

Thus there is an underlying theme to this that refuses the boundaries of traditional forms of unionism. The defining difference between this situation and traditional union organising is the difference in purposes. Whereas most unions organise to gain a union recognition contract at the workplace and a majority of workers in their membership to secure a collective voice at work, the IWW's intentions are purely to build workers' power, confidence and self-management, with or without a formal union contract in place or the majority of the workers in the IWW. However, the idea that "militants take time to develop" could be interpreted as a form of vanguardism, focusing on cultivating a core of radical workers who can lead others. This accusation is certainly valid in some cases, and the IWW has struggled against vanguardism in a range of ways throughout its life, including an outright rejection of Leninism (e.g. IWW, 1922), the refusal of membership to any executive officers of another union (IWW, 2009) and a culture of – as Sandra notes, above – focussing on results, rather than proselytising.

As Sandra emphasises, this is a long process, slowly socialised into personal and working relationships through a combination of exposure to ideas and practical implementation of those ideas. One small example of this was a picnic held by the Harlsbury IWW NBS branch to celebrate the resignation of Martin Gorham, the former director of the NBS who was widely seen by NBS workers as aggressive and incompetent. This action was at once deliberately confrontational, and inclusive enough to allow non-IWW workers to participate.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Red card' is slang among IWW members for an IWW membership card.



Union growth was therefore very much contained within the everyday material spaces of the workplace, and IWW members attempted to forge spaces of autonomy within this disciplined arena. As Lefebvre (2002 [1961]: 335) reminds us, the everyday as a politically transformative notion is trapped between accumulative (work) spaces and processes, and non-accumulative relations:

Everyday life lies at the ill-defined cutting edge where the accumulative and non-accumulative intersect. On one hand, it must submit to the demands of accumulation, and suffer its consequences. It exists on the level of the most pressing conditions and effects of the process of accumulation. On the other hand it sees itself increasingly 'distanced' by the process [of accumulation]...

In this passage Lefebvre outlines the relationship between accumulation – the basis of work – and everyday life. He intimates that the everyday is in tension between the materiality and immanence of labour on one hand, and the alienation it causes on the other. From this, we can draw out the sorts of social networks mobilised within the Harlsbury NBS centre that were effective at building sympathy for the IWW. It is in the process of work – of having surplus value extracted from labour – where everyday sociality between co-workers can be generated and reproduced as a means of coping with (and potentially challenging) the 'condition' of wage labour. Geographers have expressed similar perspectives, focussing on how the spaces of work are involved in the constitution of social relations, and how workers find collective reprieve through social activities or de Certeauian forms of 'making do' (e.g. Secor, 2003; Katz, 2004).

However, it is the prefigurative possibilities of social networks that speak to anarchist thought and action (e.g. Ferrell, 2001). The presence of social spaces within the workplace provides a non-productive vantage point from which to critically view work and, given the right conditions (in this case, an already-existing IWW presence in the workplace), propagate radical ideas

and practices through these autonomous networks of sociality and solidarity. The power of the workplace as an everyday political space is based upon precisely these social networks that can never quite be stifled completely by the discipline of wage labour. In this sense, campaigns are partly just 'containers' for the forms of sociality, collectivity and solidarity that the IWW seeks to build between workers. They support the development of autonomous everyday relations by providing an outward target for organising.

Some of the IWW's best strategies utilise these social spaces, connections and bonds within the workplace. In the absence of paid organisers in the IWW, workers seeking to organise at work are somewhat forced to seek out tactics that are embedded in the social and connective practices among workers. The Starbucks Workers' Union (SWU), one of the IWW's most high-profile campaigns in the USA and Canada, has pioneered these tactics, and bicycle couriers, truckers and taxi drivers have followed suit in local campaigns. Activists organised parties, raffles, lottery pools and barbecues specifically to encourage workers to seek out these spaces within a workplace context (whether or not this was actually located in the workplace itself, or in the broader social context of being around workmates) where social interaction and solidarity could be nurtured. In the UK IWW, similar tactics have been used at the Showroom Cinema, and in organising printers in Birmingham and freelance teachers in Cambridge. Importantly, using 'non-political' activities, activists had the mobility and freedom to talk to workers that they would not normally meet in their day-to-day working patterns.

The ungovernable nature of social relations, combined with the 'innocent' activities undertaken to forge a sense of community, has proven to be a potent organising tactic among workers such as Starbucks baristas, whose status and working conditions are highly precarious and prone to change. Likewise, London-based construction workers spoke regularly about the significance of break times and the camaraderie of working in small teams against 'the elements', as well as bosses and foremen, in the development

of socialities and solidarities. As a result of such teamwork, one IWW construction worker was almost able to persuade several dozen non-union workers to wildcat against hazardous working conditions, precisely through the trusting bonds that they had built through working together in such conditions. Ironically, it was as much down to the ungovernable nature of social relations that these workers did not walk out as it was that there was a real possibility of doing so. The proposal to walk off the job was rejected by a margin of a single vote, partly due to the fact that there was a high proportion of casual workers who had not built the strong social bonds developed by the longer-term, directly employed workers on the site.

The practices of IWW organising challenge us to delve into the concept of everyday life and its relation to radical politics. In chapter two, I argued that it is more accurate not to refer to autonomous *spaces*, but to autonomous *spatialities* in recognition of the multiple and interstitial spatial configurations that the concept of autonomy seems to presuppose. In the everyday practices of IWW members claiming quite distinct spaces – lottery pools, barbecues, and so on – it appears that autonomy certainly does not preclude such clearly demarcated spaces. What is interesting about these spaces, however, is that although they are everyday spaces, they are not permanent, and practices therein do not lay claim to ownership of certain territories. In a broader sense, the dual-card strategy more generally seeks to create ongoing everyday spatialities through networked relations at work, but does not attempt to do so through the explicit claiming of existing spaces. Dual-card activism, in Lefebvre's (1991 [1974]) terms, *produces* spaces within and between existing spaces of workplace activism, using a network form to facilitate the development of alternative relations and practices in place.

This observation does not simply reinforce the assertion, made previously, that autonomous praxis can be manifested in a range of spatial configurations, even with a common target. In terms of the present question of the significance of everyday life, it is clear that this range of spatialities is also derived from a deep *knowledge* of the everyday functions and nature of

the capitalist workplace. Both the Situationists and Lefebvre agreed that investigating the experience and nature of everyday life is a central element in transforming it. This chapter shows how IWW members in a range of contexts sought to use their knowledge of workplace structures and processes to identify 'weak points' for the proliferation of non-productive sociality and collective political action.

If this is the case, and these weak points were already woven into the fabric of everyday workplace experience rather than wrenched free from capital's reproduction, then the social factory is not the totalising productive machine that the autonomists perceive it to be, even at its epicentre (the workplace). The question that I posed in chapter two is whether these gaps are pre-existing elements of a capitalist mode of production that can never quite colonise all space, or actively claimed by the workers. The answer is that in the empirical context the difference is minimal at best. These everyday spaces were potentialities, but nevertheless they required proactive autogestion on the part of the workers for them to be realised.

It is therefore possible to view the use of everyday social practices for workplace organisation as produced partly by design and partly by necessity. The anarchist and Lefebvrian perspectives are by no means mutually exclusive, however. Early autonomist Marxists (Tronti, 2005 [1966]; Cleaver, 1979) might also assert that both ungovernable sociality and alienation among workers are equally relevant. The workplace, to them, is an alienating space that by its very nature drives people to seek out humanity among colleagues. Given that Autonomia arose partly out of a mass disillusionment towards the established trade unions in 1960s Italy, it is somewhat appropriate that this same disillusionment with the recognised unions in the NBS led workers to join the IWW, admittedly on a far smaller scale.

Thus there appear to be two clear lines of contact within the everyday spaces of work used for IWW organising at Harlsbury NBS. Firstly, the drive of workers to find non-accumulative or non-productive spaces and relations

as means of coping with the experience of work; and secondly, seeking to create spaces of autonomy for the development of alternative practices of organising. Both are interlinked and relate directly to the particular condition of the workplace as a social space for the development of prefigurative practices. The presence of these spaces of non-productive sociality seems to suggest that a Lefebvrian analysis of the everyday geography of capital is an appropriate approach. Work spaces are punctuated with 'gaps' within them that are – although structured and partly mediated by the capitalist processes 'surrounding' them – not fully incorporated into the production process and that can be used as autonomous spaces by the workers. On the other hand, it is clear that the anarchist and autonomist arguments are also relevant, and that these gaps must be actively grasped and claimed in order for them to become charged with autonomous political currents. In this sense, it is problematic to assume that such spaces are automatically political; instead, they are spaces of *potential* despite often facilitating communalistic or solidaristic relations.

### **Reworking everyday conflicts**

As noted earlier, the emergence of the union over time was slow and took place largely through networks of relations, and the IWW's sphere of influence among NBS and construction workers remains far wider than its actual membership. Without a doubt, the everyday politics of the IWW NBS branch at Harlsbury is primarily grounded in grassroots social connections. This development of what has been called 'base unionism' (see Romito, 2008) is an autonomous, continually reproduced rejection of top-down structures and a direct attempt to build prefigurative forms of workers' self-management. Such an approach is undertaken not primarily as a response to existing conditions dictated by employers but as a conscious decision to operate as a union in a certain way.

The geographies of this approach to union activity, as we have seen, are very much rooted in the everyday spaces of work itself, traced through the lines of contact and interaction between workers, rather than the traditional

spaces and practices of workplace organisation that are predominantly linked to trade union bureaucracies and 'partnership' frameworks. External actors in the broader union, conversely, only play supporting roles, rather than controlling ones. The Harlsbury IWW NBS branch is, in essence, an everyday practical critique of established trade union orthodoxy.

At another scale, the grassroots activist networks in which the IWW places and manoeuvres itself also feed into this framework. As discussed above, a great deal of IWW structure and process refuses to conform to standard 'institutional' interfaces, preferring a multitude of interpersonal interactions as the bedrock of organisational relations, both inter-organisationally with other groups and intra-organisationally within the IWW itself. In the practices of human relations that are patterned into an institutional form, such as the IWW or the NBS anti-cuts campaign, we find hints towards prefigurative spatial practices of organisation. The Showroom Cinema struggle is an excellent example of this: through already-existing social bonds between many of the workers, practices of mutual aid were already being enacted at an everyday level, and their politicisation served to strengthen and proliferate them. At the same time, however, since the mobilisation of connections is not simply a linear 'on-off' engagement and involves a wide array of qualitative factors, such an approach can be volatile and vulnerable to manipulation.

The interactions between dual-carders and others discussed above cannot simply be seen as straightforward oppositional resistance to mainstream unionism. Cindi Katz's (2004) separation of the singular term 'resistance' into *resistance*, *resilience* and *reworking* relates strongly to the multiple forms of relations that are produced between dual-carders, mainstream unions and bosses. This spectrum – from oppositional conflict, to reworking existing relations in workers' favour, to resilience in coping under difficult circumstances – is useful in connoting the range of relations and practices that the dual-carder negotiates in different spaces and times. Of course, there is direct conflict in the dual-card strategy, not least because the dual-carder is fighting the employer and the leadership of the other union at

once. But the repositioning, manoeuvring and reworking that the dual-carder must undertake represent a wide range of tactics that feed into, *but are not*, direct opposition. The self-managed, autonomous forms of reworking that take place among dual-carders strengthen more noticeable practices of direct class conflict and are in many ways more important – in terms of the prefigurative, transformative project of the IWW – than the confrontation into which they feed. Contrary to what one might imagine, confrontation is not somehow ‘more political’ than subtle forms of prefigurative practice taking place among IWW members on an everyday basis.

It may, however, be surprising to see dual-card activism remaining as a prominent element of IWW strategy, despite the re-emergence of the union as a union in its own right. The continuing appeal of dual-card activism can tell us more about the way temporal context shapes IWW identity and organisational culture. It tells us that traditions can not only be mobilised, but also honed and shaped from something fairly negative (a survival mechanism amidst a background of decline) into something potentially effective. These traditions, given the powerful role of history in the construction of the contemporary IWW, have a deep effect on how IWW members represent themselves on an everyday basis, and their use subverts negative historical connotations. In turn, this suggests that the contemporary IWW has the agency to make clear choices to retain, modify or reject existing traditions and norms through practice, despite their powerful resonance. Jacob, a former General Secretary-Treasurer<sup>30</sup> of the IWW, notes that

when I see that argument you know “we’ve always done it this way before”, you know I don’t care. “Fifty years ago they decided not to do it that way”. Well, you know, it’s fifty years later and maybe now that would be the way to do it... I don’t care what

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<sup>30</sup> The General Secretary-Treasurer (GST) is, for the purposes of US Department of Labour records, the highest-ranking position in the IWW. As Jacob noted half-jokingly, this lofty position is “slightly below ‘janitor’, in terms of pay and power”. The GST runs the administrative headquarters of the IWW, dealing with a range of administrative issues, including accounting, reporting and internal communications.

they were doing in the 1920s – that’s where it is. I will learn from history, but I’m not down to history... [S]omething that didn’t work 50 years ago may be what we do need to do. (Interview, 18/8/2007)

Although Jacob is quite dismissive of tradition, his dismissal seems also curiously justified in relation to it. The way IWW members approach the thorny issue of tradition in the union varies, and even well-established traditions that have developed positively over time, such as dual-card organising, are not safe from constant criticism, questioning and pushing of boundaries.

One of the main activities undertaken by the London construction workers was a form of multifaceted co-operation between members in the construction industry and those with time, skills and contacts to support them. As has already been mentioned, IWW education workers supported construction workers in drafting a major report. Also, a dual-carder employed, ironically perhaps, as a full-time worker for another union was also able to use his knowledge of internal trade union cultures and practices to generate interest in the IWW among shop stewards and lay organisers in the construction industry. His relations with a number of militants within other unions enabled him to target them specifically for recruitment and support for the IWW’s project of building a rank-and-file direct action network in London. Again, then, everyday life structures the kinds of relations that people are able to make. Through an everyday working knowledge or experience of a certain organisation – or, rather, people within that organisation – IWW members’ relations with others are shaped by this collective history of everyday interaction.

Relations are also, as we have seen with the case of IWW dual-carders in the Harlsbury NBS, crucial to everyday political organisation. Ongoing everyday negotiation and renegotiation of relations at the interpersonal scale parallels the same negotiations at the inter-organisational scale, since, as I have argued, *inter-organisational* relations tend to be dominated



by *interpersonal* connections (cf., in a business context, Ayios, 2003; Marchington and Vincent, 2004). Relations are, of course, crucial for the anarchists and Marxists discussed in chapter two, since the alienation of human relations (through the spectacle, for example) profoundly influences the way in which the everyday is experienced. The malleability of relations is central to how everyday spaces are regulated by capital and authority, but also an important aspect of how capital and authority might be abolished or transformed. The case of the IWW shows how different types of relations can be forged, developed or disrupted on an everyday basis, according to their utility in developing effective spatial strategies.

Understanding political organisation – especially autonomous forms thereof – through the lens of relations can feed back into the more fundamental questions of this section concerning the forms of everyday organisation enacted by the IWW. If we conceive of relations as partly constitutive of organisational structures as well as practices, then a group's capacity to adapt to and affect the context in which it is placed is notably increased. This potent agency that lies within workers' everyday experiences and practices, in a sense, is the central theme running through the thinkers discussed in chapter two and referenced throughout this chapter. It also resonates with the anarchist refusal of mediation and commitment to direct connection also discussed in chapter two, with IWW members seeking to maintain an immanent and direct approach to forging relationships in political organising. Not only can such an approach be understood as a distinctly prefigurative effort, but also a practical attempt to simply make the most of a relatively tiny pool of resources.

The spaces and spatialities produced through this relational, networked approach to everyday organising are designed to nurture the organic political power of sociality as both a tactic of developing solidarity in the present and prefiguring emancipatory worlds of the future. The spaces produced are rather messy, since they are structured by largely ungovernable social dynamics and relations specific to particular individuals and their experiences, contacts and skills. They can be understood as

networked, but not necessarily networks in the sense that most use the term. Juris (2008) and Nicholls (2009) note that networks are traditionally structured by (often communicative) connections between actors in different places, and do not necessarily rely on social bonds for their continuation. However, the political networks enacted by the IWW thrive best when those *communicative* connections are charged with *social* connections in and across places.

Thus, not only does adaptation to context necessarily require flexible, grassroots connections, but these connections operate through social relations (of trust, solidarity, collective histories, mutual aid, friendships, etc.). The values with which these connections are charged are traced through lines of interaction, often, in workplaces, through everyday working practices themselves. The grounding of anarchist/ic political praxis in such powerful connections as those that can be developed through the everyday processes and experiences of work, combined with the equally powerful social bonds outside of the workplace, can make for a potent – if at times somewhat unpredictable – spatial strategy of political organisation. Such a strategy has been shown to adapt itself, through single-card organising, dual-card organising, or a combination of the two, to a variety of spaces, places and environments. It also challenges the assumed efficacy of top-down modes of organisation whose spatial strategies are not enacted through such organic social networking logics.

## **IWW GEOGRAPHIES: PLACING NETWORKED STRATEGIES**

In this chapter I have addressed the three empirical research questions of the thesis, concerning the politics of everyday life, spatial strategy, and prefigurative politics through the lens of autonomy. I have attempted to build a picture of the spatial tactics and strategies of the IWW in a number of different contexts by interrogating three examples of contemporary IWW activity in the UK that differ according to industry, context and success rate.

Through the various strategies of single-card and dual-card organising, I have examined the union's everyday organisational geographies from the perspective of attempts to build a prefigurative politics of everyday life in the workplace.

This chapter sheds light on how prefigurative organisational practices are constituted and reproduced on an everyday level. Relating back to theorists of both autonomy and everyday life has shown how the IWW's practices mirror and add empirical verification to the ideas of many of those discussed in chapter two. In particular, I have shown how autonomous workplace organising tends to draw from place-based, everyday knowledges and experiences, and prise apart spaces and spatialities for the development of prefigurative practices and relations. In this sense, the extent to which campaigns are successful is also related to geography. This echoes Lefebvre's view that everyday life embodies both potential for radical praxis and the constant colonisation of space by capital. This question will be re-examined in the following chapter concerning social centres, whose creation of physical community spaces geared towards mutual aid and collectivity delves deeper into the question of literally *making* space for prefigurative political practices in everyday life.

Following the Situationists and Lefebvre, we have seen how IWW activists seek out weak points in the everyday fabric of the production process in order to establish themselves, not as 'owners' of certain spaces, but as users of existing spaces and spatialities and as 'producers' of new spaces within and through them. These spatialities – ranging from producing short-term physical spaces to ongoing communicative spaces at the interstices between the IWW and other unions – tend to be identified and pursued because they can support their organising in some concrete way. In this sense, the way the IWW uses space is not so much about symbolic gestures of defiance than pragmatic needs in a particular context and with relatively few resources at hand. Autonomy, for the IWW, is fundamentally a pragmatic tool, rather than a political statement.

Prefigurative praxis, for the IWW, takes the form of a range of autonomous practices – from directly confrontational national or international campaigns and actions, to subtle relationship-building at a micro-scale. This encourages a range of prefigurative practices to emerge, such as direct-democratic structures, solidaristic relations or practices of mutual aid. We have seen how, beneath the often reactive campaigns enacted by the IWW, there are myriad forms of spatial strategy being undertaken by members, seeking to tailor their practices to the specificities of their particular struggles. It gives further credence to concerns with the discourse of ‘resistance’ within critical geography discussed in chapter two, as well as Katz’s (2004) unpacking of politics as a notion that encompasses a range of tactics. However, where Katz seeks to develop a typology of different ‘resistances,’ I argue that the term ‘resistance’ is problematic for its institution of capital as the primary agent of change. We therefore need to think of other ways to explain the myriad practices of struggle taking place, most of which are not responses or reactions to the actions of employers or capital. This will continue to be discussed in later chapters.

Understanding autonomy as a practical means of making space for prefiguration, rather than as an end in itself, can help explain broader dynamics within the IWW. Given their emphasis on autonomy and networking, a great deal of localised IWW practices are discussed and disseminated around the union internationally. This means that, for example, NBS activity at a UK scale has directly influenced the development of national-scale strategies in the USA among freight truckers and bicycle couriers. Likewise, tactics developed within the Starbucks Workers Union in North America have influenced UK-based IWW campaigns, such as the Showroom Cinema campaign. These relational connections between militant particularisms can be seen as being facilitated directly by the autogestion that lies at the base of IWW spatial strategy.

The practices of everyday IWW organising also shed light on the geographies of contentious politics more generally. There is a pronounced difference between the nature and purposes of large-scale networks that

mobilise around a place-based grievance or struggle, and those of the networks that operate within that place. In this sense, I respond to Nicholls' (2009) call to pay closer attention to how different spatialities – or different manifestations of the same spatial form – mobilise in concert and entangled within one another in practice. At the Showroom Cinema, a single *place* acted as a locus for action, while formal *scalar* arrangements of IWW organisation and *networks* of solidarity mobilised around it. Importantly, this suggests that place is central to an analysis of the politics of the everyday, and that one need not solely organise *in place* to enact a place-based politics.

Networks are also key elements in the IWW's spatial strategy, and it is clear from the IWW experience that their efficacy to mobilise around certain issues cannot be fully understood without also exploring how the connections that constitute them are charged with social relations. The ways in which IWW members consciously or unconsciously mobilised their connections in ways that were tailored to the specific context or audience demonstrates the importance of the qualitative aspects of networks. IWW members mobilised broader networks of solidarity through interpersonal connection, rather than formal inter-organisational collaboration.

The practices of the IWW at Harlsbury NBS and the Showroom Cinema show how class-struggle ideas and practices of radical unionism can spread organically at the base through the cartographies of everyday social interaction in the spaces of the workplace. Elsewhere, efforts at organising in London's construction industry were facilitated through a form of organising that mobilised both single- and dual-card members, in different sectors of the industry and in a range of ways, according to their context. This strategy of adaptation and refinement was in fact frustrated in part precisely due to the highly diverse membership that made such a strategy possible.

The London construction workers and the NBS campaign expose the interpersonal connections that lie at the centre of IWW networks of support

and action. The IWW carefully situates itself spatio-temporally within broader political terrains in order to maximise political impact and capacity for action, but also in order to maintain ideological non-alignment. When enacted in specific workplaces, these practices are both embedded into, and reinforced by, the fabric of everyday workplace experience, rather than the propagation of political ideals. In turn, the IWW challenges trade union orthodoxy by suggesting that neither contractualism nor top-down control is necessarily synonymous with effective workplace organising.

If the autonomist Marxists are correct, then the social factory does not respect the boundaries between spaces and times of work, and those outside of it. Production, for them, takes place in all spheres of capitalist life. Similarly, Debord's (ND [1961]) problematisation of "wasted time" also disrupts the boundary between productive labour and the social reproduction of capital outside the workplace. The next chapter considers community politics, one major element of the realm of struggle outside of the spaces of work. In it, I pick up on similar debates and questions as those discussed here, exploring two social centres' efforts to create a radical politics of everyday life in community and neighbourhood spaces. Their efforts at everyday radical organising bring with them their own specificities, idiosyncrasies and complexities that shed more light on anarchist/ic efforts at developing a prefigurative, everyday politics.

# V

## SOCIAL CENTRES: OCCUPYING EVERYDAY SPACE

*I joined a couple of Czechs who were clearing out one of the big rooms downstairs. There was so much junk it was incredible. The room must have been about 40m long, 15m wide and almost the same high. About a quarter of the room was strewn with all sorts of junk, like cardboard boxes, broken beer mugs, condom packets, beer mats, books, cassette tapes, bits of wood and metal, rusty old nails, electrical bits and bobs, thousands of old vinyl records, raggy old bits of carpet, and goodness knows what else. It was a total death trap, with a number of foot-sized holes in the floorboards and wires dangling all over the place. What's more, it was very dark and damp, with the whole room lit by a single 120W bulb that occasionally flickered and went out when someone moved the wires. It gave the place a rather eerie and gothic, almost post-apocalyptic feel, especially when dust was unsettled and clouds of it were illuminated by the dim light. It really felt like we were beginning again from the ruins of an old civilisation. (fieldnotes 20/1/2008)*

In some respects, the steady growth in popularity of social centres in the UK does indeed stem from “the ruins of an old civilisation”. The decline of the so-called anti-capitalist movement in the early-to-mid 2000s forced a new generation on the libertarian left to come to terms with the immensity of the task that lay ahead of them. The carnivalesque party and protest tactics that served them so well during the previous decade were shattered by increasingly sophisticated policing and surveillance techniques, continued

ghettoisation, stagnation, and a recognition of the relative failure of the movement to effect real social change. Some drifted away, and those that remained began to seriously re-think the effectiveness of different modes of struggle.

One result of this reappraisal was an increased emphasis on social centres as spaces for developing and sustaining anarchist/ic political praxis, perspectives, movements and networks. This chapter investigates two London-based social centres in which I participated during 2007 and 2008, and their attempts at creating a community-based, everyday radical politics in their respective areas. Whereas the previous chapter examined the IWW's approach to the spaces of *work*, this chapter approaches *community* spaces as loci of everyday politics. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, and discussed below, 'community' is understood here as a political-discursive tool for mobilisation, rather than an accurate description of a spatial phenomenon.

This chapter considers how two social centres in Hackney, East London, have attempted to develop a radical politics of everyday life in their localities. Throughout, I examine the political geographies of social centres, and how their practical deployment of concepts and practices like place-framing, autonomy and bordering contributes to their project of creating alternative forms of everyday politics. I first briefly explore the nature, extent and history of social centres in the UK, emphasising how they developed out of both a continuation of, and break from, a number of political traditions. I then explore the everyday politics of the centres, focusing on how the two social centres in question attempted to 'place' themselves and mobilise in their localities, as well as their networked and material everyday practices. Secondly, I explore the second research question, considering the spatial strategies of the social centres, particularly geographies of bordering and networking strategies, and the forms of security and democracy enacted as part of their spatial strategies. The third section investigates social centres' prefigurative practices, such as their work regimes and socialities. Through



these sections, I interrogate the possibilities and implications of developing an anarchist/ic community politics.

## **SOCIAL CENTRES TODAY**

Social centres, in their current form, are a relatively new phenomenon in the UK. Their origins are myriad, with a range of political approaches contributing to their current place in contemporary left-libertarian politics. There are in the region of fifteen to thirty social centres in the UK and Ireland at any one time, each with its own particular political identity, target area and priorities. Many are housed in squatted buildings, although an increasing number of collectives are renting or buying buildings where possible.

Although they constitute a broad spectrum of approaches, it is possible to divide social centres into two general categories, according to the ways in which they approach the role and definition of a social centre. The first type of social centre caters largely or exclusively for the already-politicised activist community in a certain town or city. These are often inspired by the People's Global Action (PGA) hallmarks (PGA-AGP, 2001), and advocate for the creation of autonomous spaces as convergence centres for activists and groups to skill-share, interact, cross-fertilise and organise. The other category comprises social centres borne largely from the desire to engage in the political life of a certain community or neighbourhood. These social centres tend to present themselves as hubs for the surrounding communities to participate in a range of political and non-political activities, and tend not to actively encourage participation from traditional political groups.

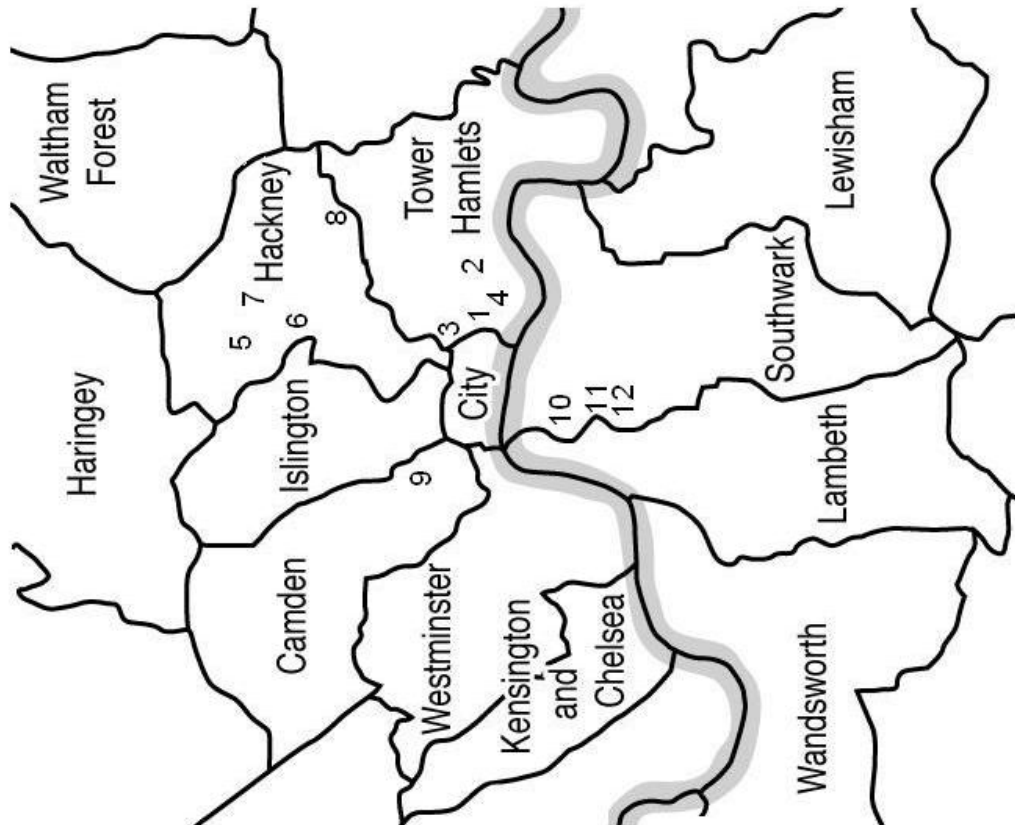
Of course, there is a notable amount of cross-over between the two, and most centres engage to a greater or lesser extent in both community outreach and political networking among anarchist/ic milieux. There is also a

certain amount of networking between social centres themselves, discussing tactics, practices and ideas for co-ordinated campaigns, largely via email and occasional gatherings at large events such as the London Anarchist Bookfair. Thus the politics of social centres tend to focus on local issues and conditions, but their approaches are often translated between spaces and times. Indeed, the coming and going of participants in any social centre project creates a flux of identity and focus that can create notable shifts within the same centre during its lifespan.

This chapter focuses on two squatted social centres that attempted to enact a community-based approach within two neighbourhoods that are located close to one another, but different in a number of respects. During the fieldwork, a number of social centres came and went in London alone, and the map, below, documents the number, longevity and spatial distribution of social centres in London during this period of time:

**Social Centres in London, 2006-2008**

- 1 Freedom Press and Autonomy Centre, 1886 - Present
- 2 RampART, 2004 - Present
- 3 Bowl Court, April - August 2008
- 4 London Action Resource Centre, 1999 - Present
- 5 Ex-Vortex, December 2006 - April 2007
- 6 Everything 4 Everyone, late summer 2006 - spring 2007
- 7 Hackney Social Centre, February - May 2008
- 8 Wominspace, March - May 2008
- 9 The Square, January - July 2006
- 10 56a Infoshop, 1991 - Present
- 11 The Black Frog, February - August 2007
- 12 Library House, October 2008 - Present



**Fig. VIII: Social Centre Distribution in London, 2006-2008**

The majority of social centres are located in the radical heartlands of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, whose histories are replete with struggles dating back to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 ('Peggy, Phil and Grant', 2008). On a practical level, much of this lies in the long-standing *domestic* squatting scenes in the areas, bringing with them a good working knowledge of the local councils, local opinion, and a pre-existing network of support from local squatters. As relatively deprived areas of London, many young, low-waged or unemployed anarchists already live there, there is a wide availability of suitable empty buildings for social centre collectives to utilise, and a relatively high level of political awareness and activity among many of the communities therein.

A cursory glance at the time-frames of the social centres marked on the map shows that their life-spans can vary significantly. As social centres have developed over the last few years, a number of central questions and debates have arisen within the milieu. One of the most prominent debates concerns whether or not social centre collectives should squat spaces, or acquire them through more legal, and therefore more stable, means such as renting or even buying buildings. Put very simplistically, the question surrounds a number of seemingly clear bipolar options: should the project be long term or short term? Should anarchists own property or not? Is symbolic defiance of authority better or worse than strategic acceptance of authority?

This debate has already taken place in countries such as Italy, where social centres have a far longer history. Unfortunately, very little has found its way into the Anglophone activist literature (however, see for e.g. El Paso Occupato and Barocchio Occupato, 1995) and, likewise, very little has been written by activists in the UK on the subject. However, some relevant Anglophone texts do exist (e.g. Rogue Element, 2004; Text Nothing, 2004; Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006; Gastone, 2008).

The way in which debates such as this have unfolded has varied across time and space, with different perspectives gaining the upper hand at

different times and in different places. In larger cities, especially London, there is a far bigger activist base, allowing for a greater number and diversity of social centres to emerge according to the political priorities and geographical locations of individuals. In smaller cities, the debate over social centre tactics and approaches can often become more intense, with a smaller activist base. In these cities, the debate has been intensified due to fewer opportunities for groups of activists to 'go it alone' if they do not like the approach taken by their local social centre. Historically, squatted centres were far more popular during the high years of anti-capitalism between around 1999 and 2004, with its optimistic outlook and emphasis on the creation of *temporary* autonomous zones, following the then-popular ideas of Hakim Bey<sup>31</sup> (1991). Responses to activist 'burnout' and immense power asymmetry between centres and the authorities have seen a greater concentration on creating longer-term centres that can overcome some of these problems. However, long-term centres bring with them their own problems, such as fatigue and burnout, and, as we shall see, this debate runs through some of the other issues that are discussed here more explicitly.

A central element of contemporary social centre debate concerns the role of social centres in breaking out of the subcultural anarchist scene in which anarchists have found themselves. This "activist ghetto", as many call it, has been increasingly perceived to be one of the central obstacles to the return of anarchism as a political perspective that takes itself seriously and productively engages with the everyday experiences of the majority. In the inter-war years – the height of anarchism in the UK – anarchism was seen as a radical, mass working class movement that rivalled the dominance of the Communist and Labour Parties on the left. Its disintegration after 1945, subsequent adoption by punk and hippie subcultures in the 1960s and 70s, and the reaffirmation of its place in these subcultures in the 1990s, cemented its contemporary identity as an underground scene for young,

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<sup>31</sup> Bey has recently fallen out of favour among many anarchists for a number of reasons, some unrelated to his ideas themselves. In particular, many have distanced themselves from him due to his use of anarchist thought as a means of attempting to legitimise pederasty (see, for e.g., Helms, 2004).

principally middle-class rebels. The rise of social centres as they are today is, in part, an attempt to practically address these problems and reach out to the mainstream working class once again.

Although this issue of breaking out of the anarchist ghetto is central in many anarchists' minds, many people still come to anarchism through subcultures. This battle to 're-brand' anarchism is therefore sometimes met with a combination of resentment and confusion among some radicals. Cultural and organisational inertia, and the cycle of youth radicalisation through subculture, therefore, can often be perceived as threats to the gains made by more experienced anarchists, while the latter can be turn-offs for new anarchists, seeking in anarchism partly an opportunity for excitement and danger.

### **Convergent and divergent histories**

In order to better understand the political identity of social centres, it is necessary to briefly explore the various histories and traditions from which they draw inspiration. The organisational traditions of social centres tend to be passed from one generation to the next through verbal or practical means, meaning that the temporal flow of traditions is mirrored by a highly material praxis, emphasising the immediacy of spaces of face-to-face interaction (cf. Boden, 1994). This practice is further spatialised by widespread and constant inter-local, interpersonal, networking and skill sharing in both material and immaterial (e.g. online) spaces. Much of the communication is verbal as a result of the short life-span of many centres, since written documentation on paper or the Internet is a largely inefficient means of information dissemination when there are more pressing issues to be addressed.

Participants from a range of movements and traditions have converged to produce the contemporary social centres movement in the UK. Politically, the most influential have been the autonomist movements in Europe, especially in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark. Their rejection

of the 'fetishisation of work' as the primary terrain of struggle led to their tactics of autonomous community-based organisation and the Italian *centri sociali*, or social centres (Katsiaficas, 2006). This shift away from workplace activism, or at least away from the institutionalised spaces of engagement such as trade union relations, was in part due to youth disillusionment at the full range of traditional institutions of political activity (Cleaver, 1979).

These young radicals turned to their streets and communities as alternative spaces of anti-authoritarian political engagement. Although the autonomists still participated in grassroots workplace organisation, their spaces of praxis shifted dramatically towards spaces that were not imbued with what they saw as the corrupt and impotent world of institutional politics (Berardi, 1980; Mudu, 2004). This included informal workplace resistance networks, communes, squatted houses, co-operatives, arts venues and social centres.

The radical feminist tradition has also had a profound impact on UK social centres. The feminist legacies of consensus decision-making, self-help and mutual aid have all become normalised in the broader activist networks within which the core of social centre activists tend to operate. Although many social centres tend to have strong feminist principles, especially among those with a high proportion of women activists, those with a less explicit feminist presence still find themselves enacting these radical feminist techniques nonetheless, as established norms that are rarely questioned. Indeed, more generally, feminism and anarchism have been in symbiosis virtually since the inception of both (e.g. Goldman, ND [1910]; Willis, ND [1975]).

Another tradition out of which the contemporary social centre movement arose is the British culture of environmental direct action (EDA) that emerged in the late 1980s and sowed some of the seeds of the anti-capitalist movements and mobilisations in the 1990s and early 2000s (see McKay, 1996; 1998). The EDA movement itself was partly a by-product of the free spaces and travellers' movements of the 1970s and 80s and, as such, had deep roots in this hippie past. Its unpredictable and mobile

lifestyle necessitated self-reliance and resulted in a lack of impetus or inclination towards participation in wage labour. Furthermore, in the eyes of many involved in the EDA movement, the workers on the building sites and in the logging companies against whom they were fighting were necessarily implicated in the whole process of ecological destruction. As such, whereas some environmentalists eventually turned towards class politics as a mode of more integrated environmental and political mobilisation (see, for e.g. Shantz and Adam, 1999), much of the EDA movement was at best ambivalent towards the workplace as a site of struggle.

As the EDA movement fused with the newly-politicised<sup>32</sup> free party scene in the mid-1990s, a colourful and creative force emerged in radical politics that also drew on anti-establishment punk aesthetics and attitudes of the 1970s. The politics of this newly-emerging movement, although also broadly related to more traditional radical perspectives, involved a recognition that social and environmental justice were bound up in the same struggles. This was a radical notion in itself, and various anarchists have written on this subject (e.g. Bookchin, 2005; Reclus in Clark and Martin, 2004). It included hippie, punk and rave aesthetics and sensibilities, and at one point threatened to become a new mass youth movement similar to the European autonomist movements before it.

As this new movement became increasingly politicised and engaged with mainstream political discourses (partly through its involvement with broader alter-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements and networks), many participants began questioning the subcultural 'ghetto' that it had become. Many anarchists and the more radical elements of the EDA movement both focussed strongly on the creation of spaces for struggle and for experimentation with other new forms of non-exploitative social relations. These older, wiser and often less mobile anarchists and libertarians began looking to the autonomist social centres of Western Europe – and the few

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<sup>32</sup> This politicisation was very much developed through the massive repression of the free party scene, culminating in the riots and confrontations around the 1994 Criminal Justice Act that was designed specifically to combat these free parties. The Act in fact also united other disparate struggles and tendencies.



early UK social centres in the 1980s (see Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006) – as potential models of concrete and practical everyday political organisation.

Thus there is a range of traditions that constitute the contemporary social centres movement: autonomist Marxism, radical environmentalism, classical anarchism, punk and free party subcultures, radical feminism, and probably more at local scales. Importantly, however, it cannot be said that these traditions have converged without conflict. On the contrary, as much of the preceding paragraphs have hinted, many convergences and synergies have come about as a result of disagreement and disillusionment with the orthodoxy of the time. In a similar vein to Thomas' (1992) anthropological idea of the "inversion of tradition" in which individuals and groups often consciously and actively accept, reject or adapt traditions, the way in which these traditions and cultures converge and diverge cannot simply be seen as "conflict-free transfers of knowledge" (Chamberlain, 2006: 39). Indeed, as will be discussed in the following chapter, conflict itself can be seen as a central element of producing spaces for the productive development of future strategies.

### **The places and practices of two social centres**

This section introduces the social centres in which I worked, and explores how they initially attempted to embed themselves into the political fabric of the areas in which they were based. The first social centre in which I studied and participated – *the Ex-Vortex Occupied Social Centre*, or *the Vortex* for short – was occupied in late December 2006 and was functioning as a social centre from January to April 2007. It was based in a building that formerly housed a jazz club and charity shop, in Stoke Newington, North-East London. Stoke Newington is populated largely by working class white, Turkish and Kurdish communities with relatively high levels of organised crime and unemployment, particularly among the young male population. There is also a large and growing minority of young professionals and

ongoing processes of gentrification in the area, as well as a smaller artistic, left-leaning 'hipster' population.

The second collective – simply called the *Hackney Social Centre* (HSC) – was based in a former nightclub a mile or so south-east of the Vortex, from February to mid-May 2008. This area, Clapton, is an economically deprived, predominantly black African and Caribbean area with high unemployment, and widespread black market and drug economies. With low rents, large numbers of disused buildings and its proximity to more affluent areas and the future site of the 2012 Olympic Games, Clapton is a prime target for the early stages of gentrification.

Every social centre tends to be comprised by a different group of participants who, as we shall see, bring with them their own histories, skills and knowledges that in turn play a part in constituting the identity of a centre. However, both centres – and the majority of others in the UK – operated under similar principles in certain key regards. Their principles can be identified as premised primarily on a clear rejection of all forms of inequality and oppression.

This rejection necessarily included a rejection of capitalism as an economic system that institutionalises economic inequality between individuals and power inequality between economic classes. It also meant that both centres operated around a *de facto* 'no platform' policy for all forms of oppression or discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexuality, dis/ability, race, ethnicity and so on. Finally, this rejection of inequality and oppression within the spaces was also manifested in an effort to practice participatory and direct forms of democracy and decision-making.

Although their articulation of these principles differed, the collectives also centred on an affirmation of self-organisation and self-reliance. Self-organisation – the central facet of autonomy – was manifested in various elements of social centre organisation, as we shall see later in the chapter. From "skipping" for free food and material resources such as furniture, to

designing and printing their own propaganda, to using skill-shares to support the do-it-yourself upkeep of the buildings and even supporting activists with their emotional and medical problems outside the centre. These autonomous practices were consciously linked at all times to the development of a much broader prefigurative framework.

A key element of this is the way in which the centres organised themselves democratically. Stemming partly, as we have seen, from EDA and radical feminist traditions, consensus-based decision-making practices were the norm. This rejection of simple majority voting practices of democracy has been developed in an attempt to undermine the potentially polarising dynamics of traditional democratic practice, where the 'winning' 50%+1 can dominate a very large minority and cause friction within a group (Seeds for Change, ND). The consensus process thus seeks to create an atmosphere of collaboration, co-operation and participation. It centres on a facilitator (rather than 'chair') who co-ordinates the discussion, encourages quieter participants to speak and ensures that the meeting is amicable, timely and does not get side-tracked. A number of hand signals are used by participants in order to minimise people talking over one another, and these can take the form of making a point, making a point of information, making a proposal, registering agreement or disagreement with a certain proposal, or – in extreme circumstances – block a proposal outright. There are a number of variations of this form of decision-making, and no two social centres will necessarily practice it in the same way.

Both the HSC and Vortex had weekly executive meetings of the entire collective on one day, and sometimes smaller sub-collective meetings concerning specific issues or events on other days. However, since squatted social centres – on which this chapter is based entirely – rarely survive for more than six months, many decisions must be made between meetings. It means that decision-making is not confined entirely to the formal democratic spaces of meetings, and often takes place informally.

The *ad hoc* decision-making structures of the social centres was structured partly by the forms of domestic arrangement in the two centres. Most of the activists at the HSC lived in the building permanently, with anywhere between eight and fourteen collective members staying overnight at any one time. On the other hand, the Vortex had strict rules – that were implemented to a greater or lesser extent according to personal factors – to ensure that no person stayed there for more than a few nights in a row. As we shall see, these differing arrangements caused different configurations and understandings of democratic practice, participation and work regimes.

Finally, the Vortex and HSC collectives both believed that the social centre project is primarily an effort to develop their autonomous, anarchist/ic politics in a *community* setting. This meant that the collectives strived to embed their broad, over-arching principles into the conditions of community politics in general, and the politics of the specific communities in which they were based in particular. The next sub-section considers how the two centres sought to do this in practice.

## **EVERYDAY SPACES OF SOCIAL CENTRE ACTIVISM**

This first substantive section of the chapter engages specifically with the first research question of the thesis. I explore the significance of everyday life to social centres' efforts to develop an anarchist/ic politics in community and neighbourhood spaces. I begin by exploring the ways in which the two social centres sought to embed themselves within the matrices of everyday place-based experience and discourse. This is followed by a short section considering the everyday experiences of participating in a social centre in relation to pressures of everyday life such as work and family commitments. Discussions in this section then feed into a section focussing on the everyday constitution and development of social and political networks that shape social centre practices and identities. Finally, I consider social centres as material spaces, and how the everyday formation of identity and strategy relates to the material culture of a centre.

## **Placing local political histories in the present**

In introducing the case studies in more depth, I now turn to discuss the ways in which the two social centres sought to embed themselves within the everyday political, social and cultural fabric of their neighbourhoods. As geographers and social scientists with spatial imaginaries have long known (e.g. Castells, 1983; Martin, 2003), at the community or neighbourhood scale it is crucial for any political organisation to develop a good working knowledge of the issues, groups and demographics specific to that area. This fact was not lost on either social centre collective, and both spent some time developing an understanding of the local conditions in which their social centre was situated. Indeed, most members of both collectives lived in the areas in which the centres were based, which made this process much easier.

The HSC was based in Clapton, an area in the depths of decline, social exclusion and deprivation. Located close to more affluent neighbourhoods and the 2012 Olympic site, the area was beginning to feel an impact in the cost of living, especially rising rent. At the same time, police harassment and surveillance of locals was on the increase in an attempt to curb 'anti-social elements' (in practice, young black men), and the numbers of evictions and repossessions by bailiffs was rising in concert with the rising living costs. As more and more of East London was bulldozed to make way for the Olympic site, and Clapton residents began to feel the effects of this intersection of forces, HSC activists sought to utilise these broader dynamics of capital to put forward their approach. Initially, this was articulated through a widely-distributed leaflet introducing the social centre in early 2008. On this introductory leaflet, HSC wrote:

After sustaining three weeks of violent attacks and attempted illegal evictions – twice by the landlord, and once by the police – the Hackney Social Centre is ready to open. It is ready to open because we're tired of yuppie maisonettes forcing up housing prices..., it is

ready to open because we're set to resist and oppose threats posed by gentrification, capitalism, and the upcoming Olympic Games. It is ready because Clapton needs free spaces to escape the profit-hungry rat-race that alienates us from one another.

[...]

It is a non-commercial social space for activists, community organisers, and members of the public – a place to imagine and build alternative futures for our neighbourhood. (HSC, 2008)

In this leaflet, the HSC attempted to engage with feelings of discontent within its locality: police harassment, rising rents and the threat of eviction or repossession, and the imposing threat of gentrification due to Olympics-related redevelopment. In turn, they sought to draw attention to the injustices of authority, property, and transnational capital, respectively. Central to the above passage is its sense of empathy; that the collective had experienced similar problems to other residents of the area.

The building itself had previously been a nightclub, but the council had closed it down due to a number of violent incidents inside and outside the club, related to drugs gangs. It was located at the very centre of what has locally become known as “The Murder Mile”, and not without good cause. As such, the building, and its central location within the local cartographies of violence and deprivation, had a powerful representative resonance in the surrounding communities. For many years it embodied the local history of deprivation and division that Clapton had experienced, and its enduring presence on the landscape was a reminder of this history's continuation in the everyday lives of residents. The adjacent building was a former cinema, closed in 1979, before becoming another nightclub, equally dogged by gangland violence. A local group had been attempting to renovate the building and turn it back into a cinema for two years before the HSC collective was formed.

Likewise, the Vortex, centred at the intersection between gentrifying professionals, young bohemians, recent migrants and established working class communities, attempted to associate itself with the particular demographics and history of the area. Usefully for the collective, the Vortex building once housed a famous underground jazz club and a long-standing charity shop, both of which acted as central points for community interaction and cohesion. Harriet, a Vortex activist who had previously worked in the charity shop, explains:

I had been to the Vortex, I am a jazz fan and it had a really rich history, like as a music venue... [T]hat building was partly a charity shop, and it partly had books next door, for the same charity, but through its various incarnations it had always maintained its, like, community access... [W]e got to befriend a lot of the community, you know, because we were a sort of social centre before it actually became the Vortex Social Centre. We had these, you know, people telling us everything about their life story, old people, mothers, all the people who kind of felt marginalised, you know, maybe people who aren't working, all sorts... People would come from all over just to have a chat... The place had something very human about it. (Harriet interview, 15/08/2008)

The mixed use of the building gave it a somewhat ambiguous class identity. On one hand, the Vortex jazz club was a chiefly middle class venue, and was sometimes seen as a symbol of gentrification. On the other hand, the charity shop was a space frequented by marginalised populations such as the unemployed and pensioners. The forced eviction of the building by the notorious local property developer, Richard Midda, was widely perceived as an injustice to the whole fabric of the community – cutting across cultural class barriers – and further augmented the prominence of the building as a specific site of grievance. Thus place is central, not only in terms of location but also the building itself. The symbolic identity of the building was 'pre-packaged' for a successful social centre, with long-standing local traditions of the building acting as a social hub for the community, especially some of its more marginal members.

In order to retain a sense of continuity between the previous uses of the building – along with their local social and cultural connotations – and the new social centre collective, it was quickly decided that the centre should retain the name of the old jazz club. In doing so, the centre sought to evoke the tradition and identity of the building as a means rooting itself at the centre of local social and political life. Although the research did not explicitly seek to explore external opinion of centres, there appeared to be a generally positive reaction in the area, as I mention in my fieldnotes:

During the course of the day quite a few people came in, wondering what was going on, or offering to help out. People seem generally happy with us being there, especially because we planned to keep the original name... One man spent some time recounting his fond memories of the Vortex. (fieldnotes, 10/1/2007)

The positive tradition evoked by the Vortex stands in stark contrast to the almost exclusively negative traditions surrounding the building and location of the HSC. Nevertheless, in a similar way, the HSC building acted as a symbol of both the potent realities of the past and present, and the latent possibilities for alternative futures.

The prominence of these places in the everyday experiences of the communities surrounding the Vortex and HSC is quite clear. The act of situating centres within the matrices of local politics is an acknowledgement of the centrality of everyday life and place to the politics of social centres. The care that both centres showed in their application to local conditions is testament to this. What is also interesting is their use of the buildings in which they were located as politically significant, and the way they tried to work the history of the building into their overall approach. It suggests that place can be conceived as operating at a variety of scales, in this case between the neighbourhood and the building. These different scales of “place-framing” (Martin, 2003) demonstrate how identification with place is



likewise constituted at different ‘scales of place’. The particularity of place also suggests that a crystallisation of solidarities can occur around collective *histories* – of attending jazz concerts, experiencing gang warfare, or simply frequenting a friendly charity shop – as well as spatialities. The geography of place, then, is located at the intersections of a variety of spatialities, and in the “sedimented” (Nelson, 2003; Barnett and Scott, 2007) histories of places themselves. Crucially, for this research, place acts as a locus for structuring and shaping everyday experiences and subjectivities, strongly reflecting the significance of the everyday to radical politics as espoused by many of the thinkers discussed in chapter two.

It is worth considering a ‘typical’ week’s activities for each social centre, in order to better grasp the nature and intensity of work undertaken by each collective. With a core collective of around eight to ten members, the HSC was unable to remain open during most daytimes. A typical week at the HSC involved the following<sup>33</sup>:

| <b>Day</b>       | <b>Time</b>                   | <b>Activity</b>                                                                            |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Daytime<br>Evening            | Closed<br>Introduction to electrical maintenance                                           |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Daytime<br>Evening            | Closed<br>Closed                                                                           |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Daytime<br>Evening            | Closed<br>Film screening and potluck dinner.<br>Proceeds from donations to Food Not Bombs. |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Daytime<br>Evening            | Closed<br>North East London Squatters Network meeting                                      |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Daytime<br>Evening            | Closed<br>Closed                                                                           |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Daytime<br>Evening until late | Graffiti workshop<br>Benefit night for local charity supporting rape victims               |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Daytime<br>Evening            | HSC collective meeting<br>Closed                                                           |

**Fig. IX: HSC Weekly Activities**

<sup>33</sup> The timetables that follow are developed from a number of sources, including interview material, flyers, email archives, and personal memory. Timetables varied from week to week, but here I have tried to build an approximate representation of the range and nature of activities taking place on a regular basis.

With a larger and more experienced collective, the Vortex collective was inevitably able to manage larger and a greater number of projects than the HSC. A typical weekly timetable of regular events looked like this:

| <b>Day</b>       | <b>Time</b>                       | <b>Activity</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Daytime<br>Evening                | Café and gallery space open<br>Vortex collective general meeting                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Daytime<br>Evening                | Café and gallery space open<br>“No Starbucks in Stokey” campaign meeting                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Daytime<br>Evening                | Parent and baby group<br>Radical theory reading group                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Daytime<br>Evening                | Café and gallery space open<br>Film screening, food and discussion                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Friday</b>    | All day and night                 | International Women’s Day – discussions, workshops and social event. Women only.                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | Daytime<br><br>Evening until late | Skills workshops for new activists – meeting facilitation, teamwork, campaigning, DIY.<br>Benefit evening with live music and films – proceeds to support striking Brixton Ritzy Cinema workers. |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Daytime<br>Evening                | Closed<br>Kurdish folk music and food, organised by local Kurdish community centre                                                                                                               |

**Fig. X: Vortex Weekly Activities**

Running different activities, workshops and events at different times led the two centres to have different types of people in the space at different times. As will be discussed throughout this chapter, the HSC eventually acquired most of its ‘custom’ through existing social and political networks. While the Vortex was more successful in drawing into the space a good range of people from the local area, some of their events inevitably drew from activist networks too. These differential uses of the Vortex made them rather culturally ambiguous, attracting large numbers of working class and middle class locals as well as political activists from around London. Rarely, however, did the centre manage to attract a diverse range of people to a single event or initiative.

Some projects undertaken by the Vortex did, however, have some qualified success at cross-cutting the various class, cultural and political constituencies in the area. Stoke Newington's unusually large population of young families, and the Vortex's prime position near a number of children's shops, provoked the creation – and popularity – of a weekly parent and baby playgroup at the Vortex. This was a free and self-organised alternative to the costly commercially available playgroups in the area, and participants organised discussions and feminist film screenings on issues such as childcare and education. For families with older children, the collective organised a handful of one-off events, including a day of making musical instruments out of junk, encouraging them to “[l]earn how to create musical instruments in the original home of one of London's oldest jazz clubs” (Vortex Occupied Social Centre, 2007).

The Vortex thus sought to fuse two prominent elements of the locality – its fertility and the history of jazz – that were well-known and affirmed by residents' everyday experiences of their neighbourhood. In another example, the Vortex launched a campaign to block proposals to open a new Starbucks coffee shop in the Vortex building itself, attempting to unite and mobilise the traditional working class demographic against gentrification alongside the younger, artistic demographic in favour of creativity and independence. Vortex propaganda attempted to unite these disparate groups under a collective vision of the locality that all could understand and appreciate, while linking it with a critique of speculative property development.

This campaign largely involved leafleting, holding public meetings and compiling a petition in opposition to the plans. The lack of creative direct action – in which many Vortex participants were highly skilled and experienced – was chiefly a result of Starbucks' swift withdrawal of interest, and a recognition that action needed to be escalated gradually. The act of collecting signatures was also used as a means to introduce the social centre to greater numbers of people, and ensuring that many people's first impressions of the social centre were positive and related to an issue that

was specific to the local area. Following Starbucks' decision not to pursue their plans to open a store, the Vortex collective noted in an online news story that

[w]e see this as a victory not only for the social centre [and] the campaign to keep Church Street free from the further encroachment of corporate chains, but as a positive step when ordinary people can join together to have an impact on those things that directly affect us and the way our environment is used. To date Richard Midda has refused to specify what he intends to do with the ground floor of the property.

We will continue to campaign against the closure of the social centre and support any self-organised community campaign that prioritises community need over private greed. We urge you to continue to sign the petition to keep the building a community space. (Ex-Vortex OSC, 2007a)

This unusual alliance continued for a while after the success of the campaign as the 'Church Street Community Action Group', with between ten and twenty attendees at meetings, many of whom were not activists in the core Vortex collective. Due to the eviction of the building a month later, and a lack of focus for the group, the Church Street Action Group petered out of existence after a couple of months. It raised the problem of longevity in squatted buildings, forcing activists to consider how to make such projects sustainable and extend them beyond the short life of a squatted social centre (cf. Mudu, 2004; Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006). The collective attempted to find a new building in the area, but the only one secured was evicted with threats of violence from the owner within a few hours of activists entering the building. This physical threat shook a number of collective members, and energy for the project waned.

Although the Vortex saw some level of popularity among local residents as a result of the way in which they placed themselves within the matrices of local politics, the same cannot be said for the HSC. The collective was

made up of a dozen young activists, largely from continental Europe and North America. The building was very large, with a notable amount of structural damage leaving parts of the building constantly cold and damp. Bearing in mind these limiting factors, the collective did well to make the space usable and relatively accessible during the short time that they remained in the building.

Initial efforts to bridge the gap between establishing an identity that was linked to local political discourses and actually following through on these politics of place were thwarted early on in the life of the HSC. The collective saw an opportunity to undertake meaningful local engagement via the campaign to re-open the old cinema in the adjacent building but, despite numerous attempts to contact the campaign by telephone and email, there was no response. Rather than continue to seek new issues over which to mobilise, in their frustration the collective turned to a somewhat more insular existence. As a result, the collective became unable to secure much, if any, support from the neighbourhood in which it was based. The various factors affecting this are discussed below.

Perhaps strangely for Clapton, with such a high proportion of disenfranchised young black men and women, the HSC did not make any explicit efforts to reach out to this population during its life. The almost exclusively white collective's debates around community engagement rarely turned to race or ethnicity, and as a result a key group for potentially very positive engagement was not approached. The issue was largely unspoken, but various reasons for this could have militated against a decision to engage with them. Concerns about not knowing a great deal about street gang dynamics in the area and not wishing to reproduce colonialistic or paternalistic forms of white activism are two of the more prominent possibilities. In response to their inability to embed themselves within the fabric of the community, the collective organised a range of activities, largely focussing on skill-sharing and fundraising for various causes. Practical workshops on conversational Polish, self-defence, electrical maintenance, vegan cooking and other skills were run, alongside a large feminist

gathering, and a number of film nights and music events to raise funds for, and awareness of, various causes.

Despite these shortcomings, especially problems at the HSC, the mobilisation of everyday local knowledges, framed the terrain of praxis for the two social centre collectives. Rather than symbolically subverting or rejecting accepted local norms and traditions, the two centres sought to embed themselves into the locally-accepted general intellect of their neighbourhoods while proposing workable alternatives based on the anarchist/ic practice of autonomy; the synergy of individual freedoms and collective self-organisation.

Nevertheless, a discursive re-casting of local values meant very little without practical implementation. In attempting to shift from their initial placing to concrete action, the two centres faced a choice. This involved deciding which tactics would be most likely to achieve three key things: reinforcing their position as 'belonging' to the particular area; making concrete, everyday impacts in the area; and proposing and enacting radical alternatives along anarchist/ic lines. The clear options for the Vortex and HSC at the outset – of anti-Starbucks agitation and support for the cinema campaign, respectively – presented the collectives with such an opportunity. Inaccessibility of the cinema campaign in the latter case, however, marked a point at which a divide grew between the collective and the everyday community politics that they wished to enact. The Vortex anti-Starbucks campaign, however, provided a locus for community engagement, while also mobilising ways of doing politics – such as direct democracy and self-organisation – that embodied anarchist/ic principles in practice, as discussed later.

The process of enacting this transition appears therefore relatively straightforward, but also prone to unexpected shifts or barriers. Everyday life, although claimed to be “the measure of all things” (Debord N.D. [1961]: no pagination) is rooted in a multiplicity of shifting terrains and relations that are not always easy to negotiate. Certain manifestations of politics clearly

act as gateways to others, especially when embedded in place. This transition from *articulation* (of political principles and identities) to *mobilisation* (of bodies and initiatives in practice) is therefore unpredictable and sensitive to contextual factors often out of the control of the collectives. The HSC found that existing campaigns could be highly unreliable, whereas the Vortex's creation of a campaign from nothing provided a number of direct and indirect benefits to the centre's well-being and popularity. When the Vortex was due for eviction, many people who had been involved in the Starbucks campaign participated in blockading the building and successfully resisting eviction. On the other hand, when the HSC was due to be evicted, many locals did not even know it existed and the collective was forced to rely exclusively on their social and political networks to resist the bailiffs and police. The fortunes of the social centres were therefore by no means set in stone; indeed, outcomes of events and processes were somewhat unpredictable throughout their short lives.

### **Everyday life-spaces**

The unpredictability of everyday life is also manifested in everyday experiences of participation. This section briefly discusses the relationship between everyday life within and beyond social centre activities. Due to the intensity of activity in squatted social centres, with their life-spans often crammed into less than six months, one of the most obvious elements of the social centre experience is the corporeal and psychological ways it impacts on activists' lives. Social centres being volunteer-run collectives, their effect on the working and family lives of activists is especially notable. Harriet, a single working mother, was particularly affected by this:

A: How did you find balancing the whole social centre thing with the rest of your life?

H: The rest of my life? I didn't. I think I went a bit insane [laughs]... It, um, it was quite an intense time. I mean, I lived and breathed the Vortex throughout that time (Harriet interview, 15/8/2008)

Adam agrees, noting that

the Vortex was where I was putting my, er, all my physical energies into... Usually when you have a social centre then you throw all of yourself into it (Adam interview, 26/2/2008).

Even when living in a social centre, without a job or dependents, it can take a great deal of energy, as Charlotte explains:

The complexity of the [HSC] "experience" was increased by... the often overwhelming amount of energy that had to be spent maintaining the physical security of the space and its occupiers. (Charlotte email interview, 9/4/2009)

The intensity of labour impacts significantly on activists' everyday lives, requiring a significant investment of time, resources and energy. This also impacts on the way social centres organise and strategise, since collectives must work quickly, yet within the limits of the activists of whom they are comprised.

Despite this intense everyday tempo of organisational development, the relative informality of organisational structures brings up the question of how groups can maintain continuity over time. This has been addressed in the management studies literature (e.g. Srivastva and Fry, 1992; Jarzabkowski, 2003) but rarely in academic geography regarding radical groups or such a loose-knit community of individuals, social networks and the voluntary and often transient membership of social centre collectives. Some anarchist writers, most notably Hakim Bey (2003 [1985]), have discussed longevity in terms of political strategies, but the question of how groups maintain organisational coherence and continuity is often overlooked or, in Bey's case, frowned upon. Bey sees power in short-term, temporary ruptures, understanding them to be creative sites of struggle that can not be recuperated or repressed by capital, the state or mainstream culture



precisely due to their temporary nature and rejection of quotidian practices. However, for the theorists discussed in chapter two, practices over time are what galvanises radical politics to the relations through which everyday life is constituted and reproduced (Perlman, 1992 [1969]). For social centres, likewise, long-term presence in one building is valued because it creates a stable base from which to organise and network.

Within social centres, continuity is highly fragile, usually dependent on a small core of committed individuals, their everyday routines, availability, and whereabouts at particular times. Without these individuals, or with the arrival of new ones, a great deal can change very quickly. At the HSC, for example, the departure of two of the most committed members of the collective shattered this fragile balance. As I explained, somewhat heatedly, in my fieldnotes,

Cindy and Tom have now both left, and the collective is feeling the strain. Without them, the whole fabric of the centre has crumbled in the last couple of weeks. They were the only residents who seemed to take the project really seriously, and without their influence over the other residents, the centre is increasingly untenable and nothing is getting done. On the rare occasions that something is organised, it is messy, late, understaffed, under-equipped and desperately lacking a productive political focus. As a non-resident and a part-timer, I'm pretty helpless without those guys. (fieldnotes 23/2/2008)

The break from the continuity provided by Cindy and Tom caused a significant shift in organisational culture because their activities and the products of their work at the centre were no longer present or visible. Moreover, due to the centrality of verbal and practical translation of organisational culture, practice and tradition over time, and the concomitant lack of written records, their 'legacies' were soon lost. The abruptness of knowledge longevity that are produced by these systems of knowledge

transfer causes a further obstacle to successful organisational continuity from one time-space to another.

Within days of Cindy's departure – a few weeks after Tom's – changes were already becoming apparent:

[T]he anarchist ghetto is taking its grip on this space...Very little has been done, except for the sterling work of Cindy, to really engage with the local communities. Since she left when the issue has come up it has either been treated as a theoretical question ("well, it depends on how you define 'community'") or as a security question ("but what if strangers turn up unexpectedly?"). (fieldnotes, 27/2/2008)

The role of everyday life as a political terrain is therefore a fragile one. Changes in individuals' everyday lives can have major impacts on collective projects, especially when these projects are premised on maximum participation, horizontal organising and self-management. In this sense, everyday life not only acts as a terrain on which to 'place' politics, but it is also an active participant in the constitution of organisational dynamics.

### **Agency, networks and change**

Building upon the previous section, this section discusses other elements of everyday life – notably social and political networks in and between spatio-temporalities – that serve to shape the way social centres are constituted. In the early days of the centres, a theme arose most vocally among the better-organised Vortex collective. It was usually expressed and debated as a conundrum, as the minutes of an early Vortex meeting explain:

We had a bit of an argument about whether we need to talk about the politics of the space. Some people said it will emerge in the context of more people getting involved etc and others thought there was a need to establish fundamental aims which give us some parameters to work with (Ex-Vortex OSC, 2007c).

In other words, which ought to come first: identity or activity? Is it artificial to impose upon a space a set of political identities before it has been opened to the public, or is allowing it to develop its politics freely over time endangering the space to exclusivity, ideological confusion and a lack of focus? In both cases, the collectives opted to allow their politics develop over time. The two very different outcomes of this same choice give us an opportunity to explore the role of individual and collective histories and identities and the way collective agency is (re)constituted through everyday experiences and practices.

What is notable about both collectives is that a number of the most active participants already knew each other very well. At the Vortex, this was represented by a group of former members of the Wombles anarchist collective, whose political perspectives had developed more or less in unison with one another. The HSC collective was comprised partly of friends who had been politically active and had squatted houses together for a number of years, and whose political perspectives were very similar as a result. Other activists who joined the HSC, if not directly linked to this socio-historical bond, were generally drawn from broader social and political networks associated with the central members of the HSC.

The group of former Wombles and their acquaintances at the Vortex had a long history of running squatted social centres, having played a role in running five other centres since 2002. As such, their accumulated collective experiences of the various different centres – all of whose contexts and situations had differed somehow – contributed to a highly nuanced understanding of most aspects of running a social centre. Although they too had some similar experiences, and of course the group was not homogeneous, many of the HSC collective had largely focussed their previous activism on domestic squatting activity and advocacy, animal rights activities, and environmental direct action. As such, their material knowledge of entering, refurbishing and squatting buildings was extensive and detailed, whereas their direct experience of running a social centre or

community campaigning was almost nonexistent. As I wrote in my fieldnotes after a HSC meeting early on in its life,

As soon as I got to the living area, I got an immediate impression of the demographics of the place... [b]ut what shocked me most was that I knew absolutely none of them. As the evening went on, I realised that, until now, they had been distinctly residential squatters.

[...] Although I am not especially well-versed in the art of running social centres, I quickly got the impression that, relatively speaking, I was a bit of an expert since I had the most experience. (fieldnotes, 20/1/2008)

Five weeks later, in my frustration at some of the events and dynamics that have been noted above, I drew a much more direct comparison between HSC and the Vortex:

The (ex-)Wombles have extensive experience of running social centres and have made all the mistakes, and more, that the HSC collective are making now. These guys know what they're doing and have taught me everything I know about how to run a good centre. I have tried telling this to the HSC people, but it seems that they want to learn the hard way. (fieldnotes 27/2/2008)

Although HSC activists were confident with certain elements of running a social centre, such as securing a building, decorating, electrics and plumbing, most demonstrated little knowledge of actually how social centres should operate. Thus, individual and collective life-histories of participants – and the activist traditions from which they come – have a major bearing on how people relate to particular activities and spaces. We can see how individual and collective identities mediate relations in these spaces on a practical level, in terms of the way activist traditions, histories and practical knowledges are entwined and play out in everyday practice. This structures perceptions of how a certain space – in this case, the social centre – can or

should operate, as well as the skills and experiences necessary to achieve this. Adam, an activist at the Vortex, puts this explicitly when he notes that

I don't know if I'd be able to say how working with one social centre, or social centres as a whole, has affected me, but definitely the people I've met, the activities I took part in, the new skills I've learned – they're all, well, they're my experiences. They've all affected me in some way. (Adam interview 26/10/2008)

Thus experiences and knowledges gained from everyday participation in social centres stay with people over time. The transferral of experiences and knowledges from one place to another in this fashion reasserts the importance of place as a “way of knowing” (Cresswell, 2004), in this case, organisational practices. By adhering to a praxis that emphasises running social centres as a significant component of revolutionary change, the core activists at the Vortex became accustomed to the everyday activities and skills that are developed through these activities in the different places in which they were located. Similarly, many HSC activists' ideological commitment to the importance of residential squatting necessitated their development of certain knowledges and skills necessary for that activity. The social, political and informational forces that intersect within a social centre are borne directly out of a multiplicity of individual and collective histories. As much as the convergent histories of activists, the traditions and histories embedded within the everyday fabric of the locality also partly underpin the structuring of collective knowledges, since the projects and activities undertaken by centres – often directly shaped to the political terrains of the locality – necessitate certain skills. For example, experienced activists at the Vortex ran trainings for those less experienced in campaigning during the anti-Starbucks campaign. This skill-sharing was part of a direct effort to embed the centre into the local political fabric of the area. Thus, the convergence of knowledges and experiences is produced through the cumulative effect of ongoing everyday rhythms; primarily of place (and the shape of its political terrain), and of individuals moving between places

(transferring knowledges from one political project to another). As such, place is partly constitutive of both practical knowledges and political identities, relationally, across spaces and times.

This autonomous production and transferral of knowledge, however, comes with problems. The translations of practical knowledge concerning how to run a social centre across space and time are not well documented, and codes of good practice and warnings of bad practice tend to be passed from one centre to the next by word of mouth and direct participation. Lengthy, written analyses of centres are often cast aside in favour of more immediate, pressing issues of running the centre itself, since the time-frame of any squatted centre is likely to be between two and six months, giving little opportunity to reflect critically.

Since many activists participate in a number of different social centres over the years, social and informational networks have emerged through these connections forged at previous centres and through other political projects. As I explain in my fieldnotes,

[i]t's all one big tangle of interrelations... Individuals involved in a few different things, accidentally meeting here and there, priorities and paths overlapping. It is a sort of self-organisation that happens quite organically along mutual aid lines. People meet, they discuss their priorities and skills, they sometimes decide to help each other, and sometimes end up working on the same project anyway. They go away, meet other people and the same happens. Eventually it becomes socialised and more concrete as more and more links are built up. (fieldnotes 20/1/2008)

These entanglements of multiple individuals' spaces and practices represent a highly practical and material flow of practices and knowledges from one spatio-temporality to another. They are predominantly located in a single city – in this case, London – but can have wider-scale dimensions in cases where participants have migrated to the UK or have spent time living

in other cities. The majority of HSC activists were not British, although it is somewhat of an anomaly compared with most other social centres, and most had lived in the Clapton and Dalston areas of Hackney for several years. The Vortex drew its membership largely from long-term London-based anarchists who lived in the Stoke Newington area, and also included a number of anarchists who had become politically inactive until the Vortex was opened in their neighbourhood. Through these everyday social networks, collective and individual experiences of past struggles and events galvanise connections in the present and can give rise to future co-operation. This future collaboration may be through a social centre, although a great deal may take place in other projects, campaigns and actions. This punctuation of space and time with (often coincidental) convergences and divergences reinforces the informal nature of knowledge transfer, and provides space – for better or worse – for traditions and knowledges to be passed on through individuals’ own selective memories. This socially-mediated informality allows, in Raymond Williams’ (1977: 115) words, the creation of “selective tradition”, understood as a

selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification.

In the context of these informal systems of knowledge and tradition dissemination, multiple selective traditions may exist at any one time. In some cases, social centres run email lists for supporters and collective members which inevitably live on for some time after the centre itself has disappeared, leaving a prefabricated information network for future social centres and other radical projects. At the scale of the British Isles, there is a co-ordination email list that connects activists from many of the social centres around the UK and Ireland. As such, the largest pool of written, archival information lies in the archives of these email lists. However, these are often very superficial and fragmented since many of the decisions and discussions within social centres are undertaken verbally, with meeting minutes and other documents recorded manually, and many of the micro-

level everyday decisions being made unofficially, outside the formal decision-making structures of the collective.

The selective informality of these transferrals of knowledge and experience has the effect of potentially making the concept of relational militant particularisms as advocated by Featherstone (2005) rather less clear-cut. It suggests that relations between spatio-temporalities can be shaped and skewed by the subjectivity of the individuals who make the connections. This means that further development of the concept of relational militant particularisms requires greater emphasis on the informal, selective and haphazard factors in their constitution. This relationality can also be shaped by unspoken practices and habits, further emphasising the unpredictable and non-linear way in which relations function between spaces and times.

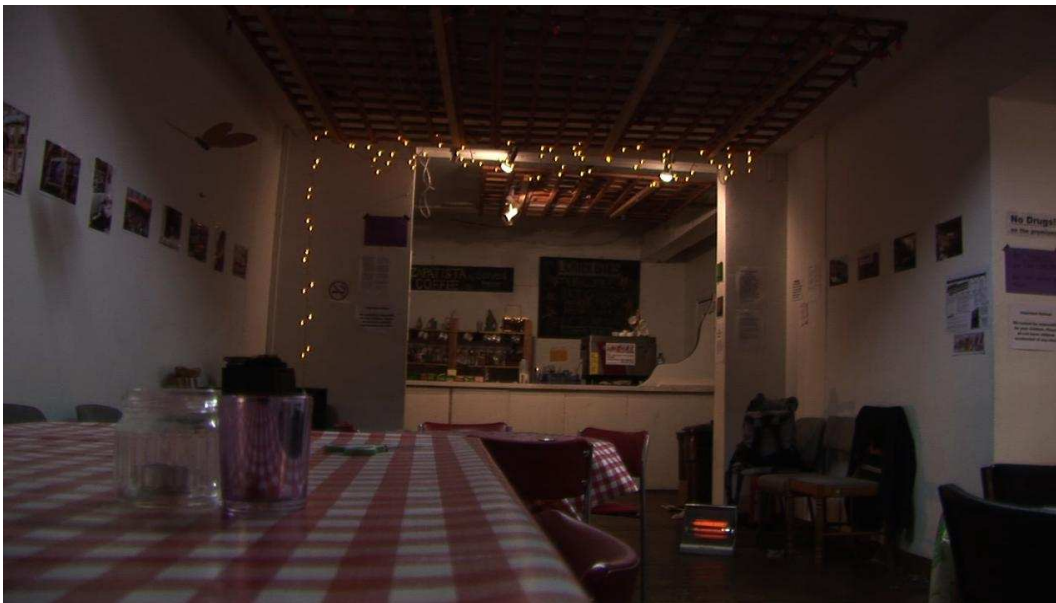
### **Everyday identities and materialities**

The material culture of the space, and the decisions and discussions that influence it are, likewise, partly shaped by the collective histories of participants and the everyday political terrains of the locality, and are therefore also important. This section considers the role of the material spaces of centres and their effects on the everyday identities shaped, and practices undertaken, within them.

With an over-arching emphasis on inclusiveness, activists at both the HSC and Vortex discussed the materiality of the spaces when they first occupied their buildings. The Vortex, with its large numbers of experienced social centre activists, approached this question from a perspective of maximum inclusion. As such, whitewashed walls, tidiness and order were crucial elements of making the space socially and culturally accessible to the local communities. At the same time, neatly-displayed exhibitions of radical art, such as photographs of riots, squats and other political events, attempted to



retain a radical angle to the aesthetic. The pictures<sup>34</sup> below give an impression of the material space of the centre:



**Figs. XI and XII: Images of the Vortex Interior**

On the other hand, the HSC maintained only relatively low levels cleanliness and tidiness. The space was very large and, with a core group of less than a dozen, maintaining such a large building to similar standards as the Vortex – with a smaller building and larger collective – was very difficult. The walls of the centre were also dark, and liberally spread with graffiti and murals. Many of the murals were artistically sophisticated and politically-charged,

<sup>34</sup> Video stills, courtesy of Simon Drew.

but their presence served to exaggerate the material disorganisation of the centre. The pictures below give an impression of the interior of the centre.



**Figs. XIII and XIV: Images of the HSC Interior**

One activist at the HSC (fieldnotes 13/2/2008) suggested that they were fond of the “squat chic” style, and that the local youth would enjoy having space to make a mess and be creative without worrying. To an extent, this was true, as a well-attended graffiti workshop demonstrated. However, the presentation of the space continued to reproduce dominant stereotypes about squats, rather than dismissing the stereotypes and developing a more inclusive atmosphere.

Materiality, although not exactly replicating the imagined space that collectives seek to create, does reflect the way in which social centres use the physical space to represent different identities, strategies and outlooks. The many other social centres around the UK display a similar trend of projecting their unique perspective on the social centre idea onto the material spaces of the centre. It could be argued that in an everyday world mediated increasingly through spectacle and images (Debord, 1995 [1967]), the physical attributes of a space have never been more central to the construction of its identity in relation to other spaces (cf. Gram-Haansen and Bech-Danielsen, 2004; Edensor, 2005). As mentioned previously, while HSC activists had extensive knowledge of the skills for renovating and running domestic squats, their relative lack of experience in the techniques of presenting a squatted building to the public was clearly noticeable.

If a close reading of and response to the local context of the centre is important, and knowledges are accumulated and articulated through everyday practice, then longevity is also a factor in the development of a centre's identity and its place in the local context. Long-term exposure to the nuanced skills, experiences and knowledge required to lay the groundwork of a successful centre seems to suggest that the habituation of these practices – the act of turning them from techniques into habits, in a sense – is itself important for successful praxis. As such, everyday life is a sustainer, propagator, distributor and medium for these knowledges and skills and the identities to which they contribute, and has the ability to be shaped and receive form over time. This provides a deep and habituated – albeit also selective, patchy and informal – pool of everyday material knowledges.

The temporal dimension of everyday social centre activism is therefore rather peculiar and hard to pin down. The traditions that can be traced are myriad and lacking in easily visible connections, aside from histories passed on through this broad and loose alliance of social centres and their activists that come and go. This has a knock-on effect on both political and material aspects of social centre identity, torn between proposing a radical alterity and embracing local cultural and historical morphology.

This discussion of place-based specificity brings the chapter back to the 'placing' of the centres in their local political context. This section has discussed the everyday practices and politics of the Vortex and Hackney Social Centre, and I have argued that a central element of understanding the operation of social centres is linked to a convergence of participants' subjectivities in place, alongside the political specificity of that place in the political culture of the local area. It further emphasises the centrality of place and networks to the constitution of everyday politics. Importantly, however, it is not possible simply to perceive the autonomous politics of social centres as the haphazard sum of their constituent parts. Connections between places or times can be manifested differently according to the selective transferral of individuals' knowledge or experience, muddying the clear lines of connection that the relationality between militant particularisms (Featherstone, 2005) implies. These selective, informal connections are nonetheless rooted in everyday experiences of political organising and, although they are often unreliable, may represent a raw, unrefined form of autonomous knowledge production that is rooted in a commitment to self-education and practices of gift economics.

## **BUILDING RADICAL STRATEGIES IN COMMUNITY SPACE**

In this section, I explore the second key research question considering the spatial strategies of the social centres. I begin by discussing networked

spatial strategies of social centres in place, before developing these themes by a discussion of the security and territoriality of the centres. Through this discussion, practices of inclusion and exclusion give rise to dilemmas concerning the contested geographies of decision-making and democratic processes within the social centres.

### **Place-based strategies of bordering and networking**

Throughout their lives, crucially, neither the HSC nor the Vortex ever attempted to define or demarcate what 'community' actually *is*. Instead, community was posed as a vehicle through which to articulate and mobilise certain values and practices that correlated with the participatory, self-organised and solidaristic bonds that they sought to create. Not only can this be understood as a simple means of mobilisation around certain issues, but also as alluding to a form of prefigurative politics, emphasising the way that community can potentially be re-cast in the present as a terrain for emancipatory practices and relations.

From the beginning, in both social centres, clear boundaries were demarcated on geographical lines. As centres specifically oriented towards their local political context, membership from far afield was generally not encouraged, unless people were invited to run an event or workshop, or were supporting the continuation of the space in other ways such as offering skills or resources. In both centres, although they kept a modicum of contact with other centres and groups elsewhere, they undertook only a minimal amount of networking outside of the perceived area in which they operated. Thus 'authenticity' – based partly on local membership – was a central element of this community politics that intersected with the more radical class approach that is discussed below. This reflects the anarchist prefigurative call for subjects to organise and liberate themselves (e.g. Graeber, 2004), with political action encouraged from the residents of their specific localities. Events that the social centres organised tended to involve a great deal of participation, and were often focussed on encouraging people to play an active part in the centre or one aspect of it or its projects.

Early on in the HSC's life, however, things changed, with an increasing sense that the collective was selectively recruiting from its own social networks around London:

The place was pretty full, although I recognised the majority from other political events and groups. I got chatting to a large group of friends whom I didn't recognise, and it transpired that they all knew a number of the residents. They told me that they had been invited to participate in loads of events like this, and knew how they ran. Naively, I asked if they had therefore been involved in social centres before, to which they responded in the negative. One of them said "we're just helping out our mates, we always do, and they help us. It's a big network."<sup>35</sup> (Fieldnotes, 18/3/2008)

While I praise networks for their efficacy elsewhere, and the passage above outlines important practices of mutual aid being enacted through these networks, organic social networking practices can have negative connotations in terms of their role in the reproduction of the 'Anarchist Ghetto'. With an ongoing need to ensure that sufficient bodies pass through the doors of the centre and participate in the collective, and the failure of the collective to involve itself in existing local politics, the automatic reaction was to rely on pre-existing networks. Inevitably, such networks fall outside the target group of a centre, not only geographically but also in terms of the political priorities of the collective, such as encouraging community participation or outreach to marginalised groups such as black working class youth<sup>36</sup>. Entrenchment and solidification of these activist networks over time produces dynamics that can reinforce the inward-looking subculture that many social centres were partly created to challenge. As such, while radical academics rightly continue to praise the network form for its utility in political mobilisation (Waterman and Wills, 2002; Routledge, 2003; Juris, 2005;

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<sup>35</sup> Although this is approximately what was said by the individual in question, it should not be considered an exact quote.

<sup>36</sup> However, as I discuss above, outreach that was specifically targeted at the young black population in the area was not enacted at the HSC.

Routledge *et al.*, 2007), we must also remain aware of its limitations (cf. Cumbers, *et al.*, 2008a).

The Vortex, likewise, encouraged participation from their established activist networks. The difference was that the collective did not *rely* on these networks as central to the centre's success. A combination of hard work and luck meant that the Vortex was able to attempt a balance between operating as a community space for local campaigns and a convergence space for broader activist concerns. These two elements, however, have different geographies. As Adam, a Vortex activist, explains,

The thing that defines radical politics [is that] they have their community that is structured in a completely different way to a local community. On a physical level, that community becomes communal because they live together, not because they have the same ideas. You know, there's an 'anarchist community' because it's made up of anarchists, not because people live in an anarchist area... So [we at the Vortex decided that] if we want to have a stable activist base, you know, have a group of people living in one area and doing one project (Adam interview, 26/10/2008).

At the Vortex, then, membership drawn from the locality was highly prized, with a recognition that, although activist networks were useful, their geographical make-up was not necessarily conducive to the place-specific political activism that was necessary for a successful centre. Thus, on this level, the criteria of membership were pragmatic and based around concrete priorities that once again emphasise place as a central element in the constitution of political action.

Place is understood as central, but since the Vortex also drew partly from broader activist networks, we can also understand place, following Massey (1993), as fundamentally constructed alongside other places. For example, the Vortex café, which became a central focal point of the broader Vortex

project as well as a key fundraising tool, centred around a professional coffee machine that had been used at the Square social centre in 2006. Through the interpersonal ties between activists at the Vortex and former activists involved in the Square, the coffee machine was donated to the Vortex. In turn, this simple relation had a significant influence on shaping the nature and purpose of the space. Not only was this a demonstration of anarchist gift economics in action – of giving without the expectation of receiving (Graeber, 2004b; cf. Mauss, 2002 [1954]) – but it also emphasises what Featherstone (2005) would call the *relational* construction of militant particularisms. As Featherstone notes, this relational dynamic between place-based struggles can also be manifested between *times*. By donating the coffee machine to the Vortex, former participants at the Square were shaping the way the Vortex operated and acted in relation to its own locality.

However, the community-based class politics of the social centres was not straightforward in practice. In one instance that set a precedent for the future course of the centre, a participant invited a number of local business owners to one of the weekly meetings. The response was almost unanimously critical, and set clear class demarcations for membership. Another activist noted that there were a few people

who [were] like “well, work with the bakery and the business down there” and we’re like “we don’t work with fucking business. What’re you talking about, going about courting businesses? That’s not a social centre!” (Harriet interview, 15/8/2008)

While the level of community engagement at the HSC never reached the point of new people from the locality attending meetings, for the Vortex, attendance by previously unknown local people was a fairly regular occurrence. The fast and rather brutal response from participants at the Vortex clearly established the class composition of the centre – who was welcome, and who was not. These practices of bordering (Van Houtum *et al.*, 2005) – of establishing demarcations, physical or otherwise, as means



of forging a certain collective identity – are therefore a central means of anchoring collective class identity and maintaining continuity over time. This can be seen as a not insignificant element of the translation from the rhetorical placing of the centre, towards an attempt at ongoing inclusion and participation from the centre's target group(s).

Although the example above appears rather clear-cut, there remains a tension surrounding how to enact a politics that is premised on maximum inclusion while retaining a relatively coherent identity with explicitly confrontational attitudes. Given the self-organised nature of the borders imposed by social centres on their membership, these borders are sources of contention, with individuals, groups or events that fall around these borderlands receiving close consideration and discussion, and with changing circumstances necessitating re-drawing the lines in the interests of solidarity or practicality. In all cases, events run at either social centre by or for external groups were subject to close scrutiny in terms of their politics and activities. The precedent set by previous events being allowed to take place, or not, modified the centre's criteria for participation over time.

Thus, as with the IWW, the borderlands of social centres were constantly contested, from within and without, as part of ongoing democratic processes that are discussed in more detail below. The spaces produced were participatory in nature, with activists negotiating and renegotiating terms of membership and participation, and developing a 'DIY' approach to local class and cultural dynamics in practice as a result. Their bordering practices (Häkli, 2008) can be seen as producing a form of spatial strategy that is highly flexible and, looking back to the previous section on everyday life, linked to a careful observation and placing within the matrices of everyday place-based political terrains. Taking a careful approach to the geopolitical tensions between Turkish and Kurdish communities near the Vortex is one such example. This emphasis on local knowledges, particularly at the Vortex, was at once generated by and reinforced the centre's understanding of its positionality within the matrices of local community politics. Therefore, this affected everyday strategy as well as political identity.

## Securing spaces / democratising spaces

I now turn to discuss the spatial strategies linked to securing the social centres against external threats, and the forms of inclusion and exclusion that develop out of these strategies. This raises concerns about the geographies of democratic practice in the centres, which are discussed towards the end of the section. The organisational fragility of social centres is also related to the nature of the space as a bounded political entity. One major example of this surrounds the highly emotive and politically-charged issue of the security of the space. Without a doubt, it is necessary at once for the space to remain secure physically (from eviction or violence), and socially (from abusive or discriminatory behaviour). As fundamentally libertarian spaces, the issue of exclusion from social centres is a powerful debating point, and provides insight into their spatial strategy and the politics thereof.

A number of core members of the Vortex collective had been involved in the Square social centre (early to mid 2006), which had created a security policy for public events. This was an extensive list of conditions for ensuring the security of the space and people within it, and was adopted by the Vortex early on, as a basic code of principles. A glance at this document (see Appendix 1) provides a clear illustration of the spatial strategy of security at the Vortex and the Square. Two forms of security become clear from the document. Firstly, *territorial* security concerns protecting the integrity of the building and preventing unwanted others from crossing the threshold from outside to inside; secondly, *corporeal* security against the violation of the wellbeing of those inside the building.

In defining the legitimate inclusions and exclusions of the social centre, the collective was also partly defining its spatial politics. Exclusion of troublemakers such as police, verbally and physically aggressive individuals, for-profit initiatives, and those who do not abide by democratically-agreed rules links physical boundary-making and political

boundary-making in a very clear and concrete way. By failing to draft any documents like this one, the HSC collective did not explicitly define its boundaries, and therefore its identity, purposes, and parameters. Despite this, their collective experience of domestic squatting provided a basis for a binding of collective identity to an extent. This arose most explicitly during negotiations with the landlord on one particular day. Aware that the landlord was linked to organised crime in the area, the collective feared violence could erupt at any time:

[W]e had no option but to draw demarcated boundaries... [F]or the safety of the building, negotiations took place outside in the car park. It was a big risk to [the three negotiators'] personal safety [but] we had a group of big lads who were outside the building, out of sight, and a phone call away at all times... All external doors were checked, and some doors that weren't currently in use (e.g. the ones opening right out onto the main road) were further barricaded with wood, metal poles, and heavy objects like an old fridge-freezer. An extra layer of barricading was added to the gate... and the barbed wire on the top of the garden wall was secured.

[...] A number of lookouts were positioned at first-floor windows for most of the day. One lookout for the main road side..., one or two lookouts overlooking the car park where negotiations were taking place, and one lookout looking down from the bathroom window onto the gateway... On top of this, we maintained people in all major rooms of the building... and possible projectiles were identified to repel or delay any siege that may happen. This may have seemed over the top, but it was all necessary to ensure a continued physical occupation of the building... [W]hen the law isn't on your side, you must expect the worst. (Fieldnotes 4/2/2008)

Although the security or political strategy of the building was not formalised in a document, members mobilised their practical knowledge of building defence as a territorial means of protecting the project. Failure to protect the

building from attack would mean the destruction of the social centre and, in turn, what little organisational and strategic unity the collective had forged.

The practice of imposing rules upon an explicitly libertarian space such as a social centre is always a politically contentious decision (Mudu, 2004; Chatterton and Hodkinson, 2006), and is a major reason the HSC did not formalise such rules. The various negotiations that took place at the Vortex surrounding their implementation of formal rules are, however, worth considering. These rules were implemented largely as guidelines, with some level of flexibility according to the context. Nevertheless, as one HSC activist admits, "I had to be pretty bossy to make sure stuff got done" (Charlotte email interview, 14/4/2009). Indeed, one of the elements of the Vortex that brought one activist to accuse certain others of being a "managerial class" was that people were sometimes considered to be too strict with their implementation of the centre's rules and procedures. In response, Harriet felt morally "terrible" (interview, 15/8/2008), torn between her libertarian views and her commitment to the territorial and social integrity of the building and those within it, and this sentiment is also echoed in conversations with others. In another incident, she recalls that

one of the arguments I heard was about this issue of troublemakers, and someone came up like "well you know, you should handle these people with more compassion". And I was like "okay, well you take over that, you take over that section," and I think I was proved right because when they did it, it was just total chaos and they called the police, and you know, the whole bloody squat, the whole social centre was under threat!... Sometimes you have to be tough, but it's an uncomfortable situation... it's never going to be easy. (Harriet interview 15/8/2008)

The line between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is a rather vague and subjective one, but when considered in the context of territorial integrity, it takes on an extra level of importance. In this instance, a 'soft' approach

towards people overstepping agreed boundaries of acceptable behaviour resulted in endangering the space and, far more crucially than the space itself, the people inside and projects enacted through it. Exclusion, therefore, is not only acceptable within a libertarian spatial strategy; it can also be necessary. By ordering a space, organising it and structuring it, the collective necessarily creates exclusion on both intra-centre and extra-centre scales.

Moreover, by excluding certain actors or behaviours, social centres can *include* certain other actors and behaviours, and developing a spatial identity that is distinct from other buildings in the local area shaped by people's everyday practices and relations. By refusing entry to police, for example, the social centre marks itself as different to, say, shops or state-run buildings such as libraries. Thus the practical necessity of exclusion is deeply connected to the political ideology of the space, while lending a further hand in carving out a place for the social centre in broader local politics and developing class-based approaches to community. This assertion relates closely to work in geography re-examining exclusion as part of a potentially progressive, critical or subaltern approach, and deconstructs the idea that inclusion is positive or progressive *per se* (e.g. Jones, 2000; Parr, 2000; Häkli and Paasi, 2003; Brown, 2007). In this vein, Häkli stresses that "a broad understanding [has emerged] of the role of boundaries as constituents of collective identities... through the social construction of boundaries" (Häkli, 2008: 478). As seen with the IWW in the previous chapter, autonomous strategy often involves the negotiation and regulation of borders to strategically include and exclude.

Some exclusions, however, can still be negative to a prefigurative project. In the decision-making functioning of both centres, many – if not most – decisions were made on an informal basis between formal meetings. This represented a democratic deficit that made the participatory consensus-democratic process rather vulnerable to knowing or unknowing abuses of power. There are a number of different modes of facilitating these non-meeting decisions, including 'to do' lists, informal meetings outside the

general meeting, or simply making decisions on an ad hoc basis. At both the Vortex and HSC, all three, and more, were utilised at some point. In most cases, however, the core group took the lead in what decisions to make, when and how, simply because they were most regularly in the space. In the case of the Vortex, there was a perception among some participants that a dual process of 'managerialisation' of the core group and marginalisation of more peripheral participants was taking place. As Harriet, one of this core group states,

You know, one day, it can all go to shit in one day, it's amazing. Social centres, you have to be there... When you're so centrally involved hands-on, you are, weirdly enough, ironically and perversely, you become managerial in a sense. I would go in and I'd be like 'has this been done?'

[...]

If decisions were made outside of the meetings it was because things were happening there and now; it was an immediate tempo, you know, makeshift decisions... But at one of the meetings [another participant] literally accused us of not being a collective and accused us of being... a 'managerial class'... You see, I don't take offence at that. It was just necessary stuff we had to do at the time, and he would, er, he'd do the same... [I]t's made me very realistic. (Harriet interview 15/8/2008)

Without a doubt, the core group at the Vortex was at odds with a number of activists at the margins of that core group. Rather than the stark contrast of managerialisation and marginalisation, this process was more a case of increasingly close-knit organisation and fragmentation, respectively. Nevertheless, decision-making remained largely in the hands of this core group, since they occupied the space for a greater proportion of the time than others in between meetings. As such, their commitment to the space – and other factors such as short or flexible working hours, or lack of family commitments – inadvertently ensured that participants in this core group were more likely to be present at the times when these informal decisions needed to be made.

As Harriet implied above, the “tempo” of everyday organisational space is on a different plane to that of meeting space. The latter does not require a large amount of free time and takes place on a structured, regular basis, rather than an *ad hoc* one. The rhythms of these two spheres of decision-making are fundamentally different, punctuated and accented differently according to their specific spatio-temporalities. Although the space they occupy is – in an absolute sense – approximately the same, the formal and informal decision-making spaces’ tempo and regularity are not.

To complicate matters further, the formal spaces of decision-making are never truly formal and ordered, and some decisions are not made at the meeting and are devolved into the everyday decision-making spaces between meetings. Indeed, at the HSC, the boundary between formal meetings and informal everyday decision-making practices was so blurred that these phenomena were extremely fragile, as my fieldnotes explain:

It seems that most decision-making continues to take place outside of general meetings. This has been exaggerated because of two events over the last fortnight taking up the usual Sunday afternoon meeting slot... Anyway, it is unlikely that the meetings greatly affect the everyday running of the space, since so much is bound up in the plethora of tiny decisions and informal discussions that take place each day (mostly between residents). (fieldnotes, 16/3/2008)

Due to the very loose organisational culture at the HSC, I imply, perhaps a little unfairly, that the collective could do away with its meetings altogether since most decisions were informally made by residents. This raises another crucial element to understanding the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion of these social centres, and no doubt many others. In any squatted social centre, it is imperative to maintain people inside the building at all times. This requirement is both a legal and physical necessity to ensure the continued occupation of the space. At the Vortex, it was

stressed from the beginning that there would be no 'residents' of the social centre, and that no-one could stay there for longer than a few days. The HSC, conversely, was run largely by a group of around ten residents who lived there permanently.

From the start, then, the nature of the two spaces was markedly different, insofar as one was very explicitly someone's *home*. It is worth noting how the concept of 'home' is heavily saturated with notions of 'belonging' and 'ownership' (e.g. Nash, 2002; Blunt and Dowling, 2006). Although a number of scholars have challenged assumptions about its nature (see Domosh, 1998), it is often accepted that the home tends to be a space of comfort, identity affirmation, and security. In the case of the HSC, the residents had been living in the building for a number of weeks before they opened the ground floor as a social centre. Thus, despite its nature as a squat, and therefore somewhat more precarious than a rented or owned home, the HSC had pre-existing qualities as a domestic space distinct from a social centre.

This factor was soon noticeable, as I explain:

A large minority dominated discussions at the meeting... It was not the experienced experts who were dominating; rather it was simply the people who felt most comfortable to contribute: the residents... There are also some tensions among the residents, which are having negative knock-on effects on the social centre side of things... I don't feel like I am able to wade in or raise issues about it, as I'm not a resident. I have spoken to some other non-residents, and they seem to feel the same. (fieldnotes 25/1/2008)

As time went on and the centre developed, it became clear that these social tensions and the power relations between residents and non-residents were geographically rooted:



Most people present during the afternoon were residents relaxing upstairs [in the residential area]. I feel a lot of them are not really doing much, but as they are residents it is very difficult to criticise them. Their 'ownership' of the space is significantly enhanced by this, and it means that residents have, and expect, far greater control over the space.

[...] As usual, the real space of decision-making was upstairs. This is where all the people 'in the club' converge, talk and decide upon things... [V]ery few non-residents who are not close friends or acquaintances venture up there... If the main everyday decision-making space (distinct from the *official* decision-making space, which is downstairs, during weekly meetings) is a residential area that is off-limits for most people coming into the centre, then how can the space ever be democratic? (fieldnotes, 27/2/2008)

Thus there are two geographical dynamics taking place. Firstly, the territorial dynamic of both residents and non-residents reproduced the logic – remarkably similar to the logic of capital accumulation and property (cf. Blomley, 2004) – of “ownership equals power”, albeit with ‘ownership’ conceived differently from that of property ownership. Residents operated as if they had a greater right to shape the course of the centre than non-residents. At the same time, many non-residents, lacking in any clear direction for their energies, drifted away from the collective. The second dynamic involves a lack of access to key spaces in the informal decision-making structures of the centre. Since the majority of everyday decisions take place outside of formal spaces and structures of social centres, the informal decision-making spaces take on a far greater significance. In the case of the HSC, the residential area acted as a physical, social and perceptual barrier to participation for many non-residents. Its presence was always felt, even when things were happening downstairs in the social centre area.

The way in which geography mediates relations in the decision-making practices of social centres is central yet subtle, and is a factor in the constitution of centres' spatial strategy more generally. By emphasising weekly meetings as 'the' space of democracy and decision-making, collectives risked failing to realise how these constitute a tiny spatio-temporal break from the norm of informal decision-making processes outside of this formal space. This identification of a specific place for democracy creates a clearly demarcated perceptual boundary that overshadows the plethora of other everyday spaces and contexts in which decision-making takes place.

It would be too simple to emphasise that this sub-section has outlined how everyday political space is complex and contested. Discussion of the pressures on, and discourses around, participation in social centres opens up to a more fundamental question of everyday autonomous strategy discussed in chapter two. It leads us to consider the harsh reality of enacting a politics that is developed largely "on their own terms" (Brown, 2007: 2696) and without pre-existing institutional structures into which centres can plug themselves. On one hand, the practices discussed above embody the very essence of autonomy – as self-organised, self-reliant and seeking to prefigure more communitarian, participatory worlds – yet on the other, they embody some of the more negative aspects of social centres, such as a tendency towards clique control and emotional 'burnout'.

The sort of tension that these dynamics exhibit is precisely the driving force behind an anarchist understanding of prefigurative spatial strategy, and in which revolution takes place in the "present tense" (Gordon, 2005). However, Mudu (2004: 936) warns that there is a danger that such "self-referential" approaches to the very real problems faced by social centres "will only make it easier to discourage, repress and marginalise the movement". This section has shown social centres' spatial strategies to be wracked with complexities precisely due to their prefigurative approach to politics. As such, although a prefigurative understanding of revolution is an important factor in shaping social centre projects it should not be used as a

means of shirking collective responsibilities to participants and patrons of centres alike. Autonomy, then, is also fundamentally underpinned by *responsibility* of the individual to the collective, and vice versa. Crucially, for a discussion of spatial strategy within a politics of everyday life, everyday spatial strategies become central facets of maintaining and shaping connections and exclusions in ways that (intend to) nurture collective respect, empathy and responsibility (Heckert, 2008). The next, and final, substantive section of this chapter critically explores the prefigurative practices of social centres in more depth.

## **PREFIGURING ANARCHIST/IC URBAN COMMUNITY**

The previous section explored the spatial strategies of social centres. The connection between spatial strategy and prefiguration is a clear one in which the two are linked by the practice of autonomy, which plays an important role in helping to enact anarchist/ic ideas in practice. This section begins by discussing the ways in which social centres negotiate the complexities of enacting a broad-based community politics through an antagonistic class-based political imaginary. I then move on to discuss what the spaces and practices of social centre activism can tell us about how social centres enact a prefigurative politics. The section ends with a short discussion of the significance of scrounging for materials; a practice that is common among most social centres as both a material necessity and a political statement.

### **Spaces of conflict and co-operation in prefigurative politics**

This section considers the ways in which social centres seek to build a broad and inclusive community politics whilst retaining firmly antagonistic and anarchist/ic political approaches. The practice of 'reaching out' to make connections to external actors comes with some difficulties when enacting a community politics based on class, as we have seen. Most social centres

operate through a directly antagonistic framework, perceiving actors such as landlords, employers and governments to be political opponents to be fought directly against. This form of politics brings up problems when attempting to enact a broad-based community politics since, when one thinks about 'community' or 'neighbourhood', one thinks of *all* people understood to be members, usually within or across particular geographical territories. As such, approaches to community politics are often conceived as cross-class and geographically-rooted, if not deliberately then in practice (e.g. MacLeavy, 2008).

An antagonistic, class-based community politics must therefore be enacted in a particular way in order to ensure that understandings and practices of 'community' do not include political opponents whose interests are understood as necessarily different from the broad spectrum that constitutes 'the working class'. In both areas in which the Vortex and HSC operated, this form of class-based community was already somewhat ready-made. In Stoke Newington, for example, Richard Midda, the property developer who owned the Vortex building, had already gained a well-deserved reputation among the population for being an enemy of the people. Indirectly, local government was also understood as being complicit with the way he conducted his business. Similarly, many locals in Clapton were openly antagonistic towards the police, government and local developers due to the way in which the area was economically neglected and aggressively policed. Thus, as part of their 'placing' process, both centres needed to position themselves within these already-existing, class-based community politics.

Many accepted norms and practices in the areas around the HSC and Vortex were far from liberatory. Gang violence in the Clapton area, for example, was an 'accepted' practice because of its deeply-ingrained presence in the locality, but if the HSC was to succeed it would have to distance itself from such practices. Likewise, the Vortex was at first met with

a great deal of NIMBYism<sup>37</sup> from small business owners in the neighbourhood. As such, the task at hand was not to accept local norms wholesale but to incorporate key elements of those norms – such as community spirit, self-help, and cultural diversity – that could be used to challenge politically negative or reactionary attitudes and practices with practical alternatives based on anarchist/ic principles such as communitarianism and self-organisation.

This selective incorporation of community values that could fit with an emancipatory political agenda is reflected in a discourse surrounding community within both centres' propaganda and discussions. Participants in both collectives recognised and emphasised the heterogeneous nature of the communities surrounding the centre, as I mention in my fieldnotes:

It was noted [during the meeting] that to talk of one local community is a misnomer. We have to recognise the plurality of the area in order to identify different interests and concerns if we are to have any meaningful presence. (fieldnotes 25/2/2008)

However, their utilisation of communitarian rhetoric sought to emphasise the common traits between communities that could constitute a self-empowered, self-organised anarchistic form of community. Faced with a highly diverse, and in some cases antagonistic<sup>38</sup>, range of ethnic and cultural communities, the Vortex sought to mobilise a similar broad communitarianism in its outreach materials. A retrospective press release and leaflet distributed after the eviction of the Vortex exemplified this approach:

As the market has been given free-reign to run the economy, we are increasingly losing any involvement and participation in what happens in our communities... How different our world would look

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<sup>37</sup> NIMBY translates to “not in my back yard”, referring to an (often socially conservative) opposition to new developments in a particular area irrespective of potentially positive social outcomes.

<sup>38</sup> In particular, there was quite some tension between Turkish and Kurdish populations in the area, reflecting broader geopolitical conflicts in their homelands.

if we had the capabilities to solve our own problems whilst removing the barriers that are placed upon us through the domination of the profit-driven market and the state structures which maintain it... We have realised that the Vortex was just the beginning of taking back control and creating a new meaning to community – based on real notions of social solidarity and self-organisation. (Ex-Vortex Occupied Social Centre, 2007b)

In making such statements, both centres envisioned a form of community that would incorporate the diverse currents within their areas but flatly opposed the incorporation into (their version of) community those whose actions or economic positionalities would shatter the form of community they wished to realise. Appeals to local community or neighbourhood as a territorially bounded category, as Harvey (1993a) has noted, are often imbued with a sense of place that rests on what Cresswell (2004) would term “a way of knowing” the world, despite being constructed on locational ties. In the case of the Vortex’s statement above, this sense of place, and therefore community, is partly structured in direct opposition to much wider-scale processes of capital accumulation and its agents operating in place. In a sense, the Vortex establishes its understanding of what community is, or ought to be, precisely through this opposition.

Both social centres consistently referenced certain local actors that embodied the opposition in this conflict and were therefore marked as the enemies of community itself. These were bailiffs, police, employers and landlords, and were sometimes accompanied by magistrates and the local petit bourgeoisie. The social centres’ vision of community therefore not only drew clear divisions between classes but also made exceptions for those members of the working class – notably police and bailiffs – whose role was to consciously enforce the laws and norms of the ruling class. As we saw in previous sections, these demarcations were not simply discursive and acquired a far more material, territorial quality.

The difficulties of asserting a class politics based on a diverse locational community are therefore significant. Existing everyday confrontations, such as with Richard Midda in the case of the Vortex, aided the collectives in their efforts to develop such a community politics. The discursive development of community as something embodying certain selectively-emphasised qualities was also a central element in forging a prefigurative understanding of community in both cases. While the HSC debated extensively about the nature and importance of certain community values, their apparent inability to engage effectively with community issues closed down possibilities to develop a prefigurative practice of community beyond a clearly antagonistic relationship with authorities and property owners. In this sense, they sought to build a community within the building that “had no owners” and was “a truly living space with unknown possibilities” (Cindy email interview, 9/4/2009) through the events and everyday activities that took place there. Particularly in relation to the broader social networks from which the HSC drew, community became an intimate performance of shared visions, cultures and collective exploration, rather than anything particularly specific to place or neighbourhood forms of community. This is what Lacey (2005), following Maffesoli (1996), has termed “the social divine”.

In a sense, this understanding of community is present in both social centres. The production of prefigurative community spaces – although, certainly in the case of the HSC, not as broad or popular as preferred – was, in part, a clear effort to ingrain certain forms of community into the everyday practices and organisation of the people involved in the two centres, irrespective of their location. At the same time, especially at the Vortex, community was particularly place-based, closely connected to the shared politics and cultures of the area in which it was based. However, in situating their politics within the matrices of local political histories, aspirations, debates and cultures, these social centres did not revert to reactionary forms of community – of claiming an ‘authentic’ historical lineage or tradition – but of creating a “differential” politics in relation to broader dynamics of gentrification and exploitation, whereby

place is not 'defended' as such; rather its political possibilities form the basis for thinking creatively about socially just and sustainable futures. (Mackenzie, 2006: 595-6)

As a result, a potential politics of community comes into view through the efforts to re-imagine community as not oppositional to wider scales *per se* – indeed, as I have mentioned, both centres drew from a range of social networks, traditions, ideologies which originate all over the globe – but as a vehicle for articulating and practising prefigurative approaches that do not exclusively attach themselves to a single definition of community. In the next sub-section, I explore some of the more 'micro-scale' prefigurative practices within the collectives.

### **Social centre 'work' and prefigurative practice**

While the question of forging a prefigurative politics within a neighbourhood-based community setting was a major strategic challenge, a key element of prefigurative practice was the way in which the centres themselves operated in a prefigurative fashion and produced what one might call "internal communities" within the centres. As a number of anarchists have emphasised (e.g. Malatesta, 1995 [1891]; Ferrell, 2001; Gordon, 2005), efforts to prefigure an anarchist future ought to be developed through relations, and especially in the way people organise. Because of the social structure of social centres and their networked, verbal communication systems, there was a social division of labour at both the Vortex and HSC. For example, at the Vortex, *Haringey Solidarity Group* – an anarchist collective based a little north of the Vortex – regularly ran the café, another group organised regular cinema nights, and a number of former members of the *Wombles* – an anarchist collective active in London in the early 2000s that became a central focus for media coverage of anarchism – conducted a lot of the building maintenance and co-ordination. Gender and ethnicity were not especially noticeable divisions in this sense, with *social* groups playing the larger part in determining the assignment of roles. As such, these social groupings produced a division of labour within the Vortex which



transcended these traditional divisions. Even on the sub-group level, for example between roles in the café collective, there was little evidence to suggest that a certain demographic took 'back room' roles.

The HSC took a similar approach to the Vortex. One example was a group of three friends who came into the centre to hold radical film screenings every week. The most skilled and enthusiastic cook was a white, male punk. However, since the collective was far smaller and undertook fewer events and projects than the Vortex, the HSC exhibited this trend on a smaller-scale basis and most participants played a number of roles in the running of the centre. As Charlotte, an activist from the HSC noted, "[w]e simply did what we felt qualified to do" (email interview, 9/4/2009).

There was also inter-group mobility of individuals dabbling with different tasks and collectives within the social centres, and finding their favourite role. Similarly, many individuals switched their priorities according to the best use of their time, along the lines of the centre's collective needs at that particular point in its life. As such, work was divided on the grounds of skill, necessity, sociality and interest, rather than activists falling into traditional roles according to demographic differences such as gender. The space produced by these various divisions of labour was somewhat chaotic and fluid with sub-collectives acting as nodes to which participants would gravitate according to factors of taste, time, inclination or social affinity, and with memberships that could either remain stable, or fluctuate over time.

The subdivisions between the roles played by activists and the spaces they occupy suggest, again, that the structuring of autonomous forms of organisation often reflects the social networks through which organisation takes place. Work, then, is a highly social endeavour in social centres and subtly points towards the flexible, varied and socialised forms of work that Kropotkin (1968 [1913]) outlined in envisioning a post-revolutionary reorganisation of production, discussed briefly in chapter two. An examination of the nature and experience of work in the social centres

provides a good lens through which to consider these unspoken prefigurative practices. A passage in my field diary notes that

[serving people at the Vortex café] felt a little like work, to be honest. It was energy-intensive, there were 'customers' and 'workers', and the 'customers' expected a service in exchange for their money. But the 'customers' sometimes hopped behind the bar and helped serve, while the 'workers' had a fag, and they tended to pay more than we asked, and you could take a break more or less whenever you wanted... Each person did their little bit – as much or as little as they felt they could or wanted... [and were] not dominated by the clock (fieldnotes, 23/1/2007)

Working at a social centre is full of contradictory tensions. There is a clear spatial division between 'workers' and 'customers', yet this boundary is easily and regularly transgressed. The quoted passage does not really do justice to the flux of bodies between these two seemingly distinct poles. At the HSC, some events included significant participation from attendees, with the expectation that everyone present would, for example, serve their own food, wash up their own dishes and tidy up after themselves. For the most part, this policy was successful. Similarly, occasional 'open mic' music nights that took place at both centres required broad audience participation in a very concrete sense. Attendees also voluntarily brought their own food, drinks, films, leaflets, pictures, and so on, without having been asked and with the expectation that they would be shared by all.

The production of this distinctly mutual space represents a sharp break from even the formalised examples of mutual aid elsewhere, such as LETS or consumer co-operatives. Here, the economy is neither a standard capitalist one, nor a non-monetary obligatory exchange economy; rather, it is a *gift* economy, premised on the mutual acceptance that by giving, voluntarily, one does not necessarily expect anything in return (Godbout, 1998; cf. Lee, 1996). As Mauss (2002 [1954]) argues, the significance of a gift lies in its

association or emotional value for the giver, rather than necessarily with its 'objective' (e.g. financial) value. Likewise, the significance of the way in which 'work' is enacted in social centres is due to its relationship to the individual's act of giving their time and energies towards the creation and operation of a social centre.

The distribution of objects and services is therefore uneven at times, but the dynamics are structured by acceptance – and even celebration – of this fact, as part of a prefigurative material economy premised on the centrality of the gift. Moreover, by encouraging participation in most elements of events, social centres attempt to create a space that does not base itself on passive consumption of a finished product, and that encourages further participation within the collective itself. It is an element of the careful and selective blurring of the boundaries between internal and external actors and dynamics that has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, and suggests that this boundary-blurring is a central tool of the social centre project. It is a tool that operates as a gateway to encourage other radical practices and relations to take place.

Rather than the "tyranny of the clock" (Woodcock, ND [1944]), the flexibility afforded to social centre activists regarding their working time and intensity makes for some interesting observations regarding anarchist approaches to time. The widely-held (and not entirely untrue) belief that anarchists are always late and badly organised notwithstanding, this temporal flexibility further suggests a prefigurative blurring of 'worker' and 'consumer'. However, although a direct affront to the nature of classically structured time in Fordist production regimes, the flexibility with regards intensity and length of time is peculiarly reminiscent of recent developments in certain sectors of the capitalist knowledge economy (O'Carroll, 2005; 2008). O'Carroll argues that time in the new media sector has become "fuzzy", punctuated with bursts of intensity which often involve working long hours or through designated break times, as well as periods where workers use work time and resources for personal activities. As such, a rejection of classically-

structured time is not necessarily always positive *per se*, and must be viewed in relation to the spaces and activities to which it is applied.

These temporal dynamics and uneven everyday rhythms provide opportunities for both highly effective collective work regimes and notable abuses of power to take place. For example, permanent residents at the HSC were often able to spend long periods of time doing little or nothing productive while non-residents worked, but they were also able to rally very effectively at short notice to accomplish often-difficult tasks. Thus, the fuzzy time of social centres is linked to this ambiguous and blurred demarcation of production and consumption.

### **Urban scavenging and the emotions of gift economies**

The internal workspaces of social centre activity are therefore deeply imbued with prefigurative everyday practices. However, outside the walls of centres are also efforts to develop prefigurative politics. The position of social centres as economically liminal – operating neither entirely within nor outside of capitalist economic processes – is reinforced through their creative scavenging and re-use of food, materials and resources – or “tat,” as it is referred to – that others leave behind. “Skipping,”<sup>39</sup> the art of searching in rubbish bins, road-sides and skips for food and tat, has been a staple of anarchist, hippie and punk subcultures for decades, and was a central means of finding materials and food for both the Vortex and HSC. Early on in both projects, a ‘wanted’ list was drafted, including various pieces of tat to be skipped or otherwise acquired, such as roofing felt, chairs, kitchen equipment, carpet, tools and so on. Jeff Ferrell’s auto-ethnographic study of urban scrounging (2006: 192) concludes rather poetically by asserting that

[t]o scrounge, then, is to in some way desert time, money, control—and one's own identity... It is to develop an existential

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<sup>39</sup> In North America, where this practice is arguably more common among anarchists, it is commonly called “Dumpster-Diving”.

orientation that gently subverts the temporal foundations of consumer culture. After all, riding the slow, rhythmic currents of their own lives, scroungers find, amid all that consumer trash, an existential calm that others can't.

On the contrary, perhaps because of the targeted nature of social centre activists' scavenging outings, the time-spaces occupied by social centre activists on a skipping mission operate on an extremely specific and tactically-chosen plane. For example, skipping for food must be timed well; late enough to allow market traders or shop workers to have left the site, but early enough that rubbish collectors do not get there first. Trips to find bulkier or heavier materials must also be planned carefully, with the appropriate logistical support, and usually executed at night. Underground cartographies are carved out of the urban landscape that intersect with these temporalities of skipping and scrounging, creating a regularly repeated spatio-temporality of semi-legal re-use. This does, as Ferrell suggests, at once subvert the wasteful logic of capitalist production and consumption, while also fulfilling practical material needs that social centres could not otherwise afford.

Closely related to prefiguration, the political principle of autonomy is a crucial means of moving beyond 'making do'. In this respect, it is an important differentiator from de Certeau (1984), to "structure and articulate" the radical "practices and aims" (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 730) of centres. By undertaking projects such as skill-sharing workshops, training on campaigning skills and facilitating local campaigning groups, social centres like HSC and the Vortex seek not only to 'make do', but also to demonstrate the utility and benefits of noncapitalist and non-hierarchical forms of relating and organising. We can therefore reassert the fact that autonomy is a means of deploying certain prefigurative ways of operating, rather than an end in itself. This dynamic relation between the means and ends of prefigurative practices in social centres is discussed in abstract terms in chapter two but, here, we can see it in practice. Autonomous practices such as skipping and self-education partially circumvent

capitalistic forms of relating to the environment and others in it. These in themselves can be radical political acts, but they also facilitate the future development of social centres and other concrete projects. “Means and ends” are therefore “irreducible parts of the same process” (Franks, 2006: 99).

As an addendum to the practices of skipping, “fixing up” the space is a large part of a social centre project, especially in the early stages. Fixing up not only involves cosmetic renovation and interior design, but also tasks such as mending plumbing and electrics that require specialist skills and tools. The broad social and political networks of which social centres are a part are utilised as pools for resources and skills that can be passed voluntarily between individuals, spaces and contexts. For example, through my contacts with the IWW, I was able to enlist fellow IWW members to help re-roof parts of the HSC and plumb a sink into one of its bathrooms. This practice of mutual aid is once again closely related to the gift economics that are found embedded within these networks, directly and concretely prefiguring alternative future economic spaces and relations.

This gift economy is an opportunity to share such specialised skills as plumbing or carpentry in ways that provide alternatives to the state- and capital-oriented systems of formal education. Distribution of such skills and knowledges further reinforces Paolo Virno’s (Virno, 2001; Eden, 2006) autonomist re-working of Marx’s idea of the ‘general intellect’ as a pool of popular knowledge that is appropriated by capital. In this case, loose activist networks, facilitated through autonomous spaces such as social centres, are able to re-appropriate elements of the general intellect for the use of communitarian and anti-capitalist projects.

Of course, this prefiguration is not so simple in practice, and centres’ appropriation of the general intellect was always entwined with the working lives of the activists involved since it was at work where many activists learned their skills. This generated an ambiguous positionality between reappropriation of skills from wage labour and the contribution of skills to it.

Moreover, partly due to the time spent at work, the toll that running a social centre takes on people's everyday lives can lead to tensions within the group and the "burnout" of individuals who cannot cope with the physical and psychological pressure under which they are placed. Harriet notes that

if you ask me how [the Vortex] has changed my life is that it's made me very realistic... [I]f you're running that kind of operation it absolutely wears you out, and I cannot envisage being involved for more than six months... And then all the self-reflection that goes on, on a political level; it can be heart-breaking. (Harriet interview, 15/8/2008)

On the other hand, Charlotte (email interview, 9/4/2009) speaks favourably of the camaraderie that physical and emotional exhaustion at the HSC created:

I had nowhere else to go (I gave up my last squat when I joined the [HSC] occupation)... [The collective] didn't form by us, but by the material conditions of staying in the building that eventually brought (some of) us together... It's in those moments of crisis that your limits are really tested, that you really see where you stand, and that you find real affinity with someone else.

Running a social centre is therefore an emotionally-charged experience with extreme highs and lows. Harriet went on to liken her experience to "a massive relationship". The failures of many social centres to sufficiently look after the physical and psychological wellbeing of their activists has often been ignored, although some (e.g. Gastone, 2008) have begun taking seriously the question of burnout and emotional sustainability. Interestingly, in an instance where a highly active participant at the Vortex damaged her back and required specialist treatment, the following point was minuted at a meeting:

There was a proposal to use some of the social centre funds to pay for an osteopath to help Katy's back, who said thank you,

but she would put the money back into the social centre pot if anyone gave it to her. (Ex-Vortex OSC, 2007d)

Although the collective offered to support the medical needs of a key activist, that activist refused to take collective money. On the one hand, this represents a sense of selflessness and altruism from this activist, and on the other, the same from the rest of the collective. Local-scale support mechanisms such as financial support for those with medical needs might be suited to the prefigurative strategies of social centres, particularly in parts of the world that have no nationalised healthcare, but neither the Vortex nor the HSC considered this as a specific project to be run.

The question of physical and psychological support raises all sorts of moral questions concerning the sustainability of such temporally and organisationally intense projects. Burnout is directly connected to everyday life, insofar as it is through the everyday practices of activism that the conditions for burnout develop. This also connects wellbeing to the way in which the everyday tends to operate along the lines of difficult and often boring activities. Throughout this chapter, it is particularly noticeable that it is in the social, mental, logistical and material details where we find the most interesting prefigurative practices, as well as the most complex and fundamental dilemmas. Issues such as skill-sharing and learning, decision-making practices, networking, conflict mediation, donation of resources (tools, time, transport, and so on), organisational continuity, developing a collective identity, negotiating different social dynamics – these all contribute to the everyday fabric of social centres, and shape their complex prefigurative geographies.

The economy of prefiguration is an ambiguous one that embodies some of the best and worst elements of anarchist/ic politics. It may appear evasive to claim that this complexity and difficulty is simply part of a prefigurative framework, but it appears that, certainly for the two social centres studied, contradictory dynamics are inherent in the process of forging a prefigurative politics (cf. Graeber, 2009). In seeking to move beyond a De Certeauan



approach of “making do” in spite of capital and state, social centres seek to institute forms of relating and acting that search for alternative forms of social life. This means that prefigurative politics is necessarily at the root of all elements of anarchist/ic politics, making its isolation as a separate theme for analysis particularly difficult. Bringing prefiguration back into ‘contact’ with the other two research questions, I now turn to conclude the chapter with an extended synthesis of the major themes and arguments explored throughout the chapter.

## **SOCIAL CENTRES AND RADICAL POLITICS IN PLACE**

In a slightly extended conclusion to this chapter, I take a step back and consider what the findings of this chapter mean to the social centre project of forging an anarchist/ic, everyday community politics. When considering the possibilities for radical politics in place, the forging of particular broad class identities is a major factor in how groups can mobilise diverse social and cultural identities. As Harvey (1993b: 41) reminds us,

[i]t is hard to discuss the politics of identity, multiculturalism, ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ in abstraction from material circumstances and from political project.

In other words, the way we understand difference and diversity as political categories is inseparable from the political and economic conditions in which people find themselves. I have argued in the early sections of this chapter that this assertion is correct. The difficulties faced by both the Vortex and HSC in developing a place-based, confrontational politics lie partly in their efforts to include and exclude on the basis of the “material circumstances” to which Harvey alludes.

The bundles of networks enacted and sustained through both the HSC and Vortex – some rooted in their particular neighbourhoods, and others stretching across London or beyond – show how place-based politics are

never exclusively locked into a particular place. Massey's (1993) 'progressive politics of place' emphasises the interconnected nature of place as a tool for progressive political practices and perspectives. Places, she argues, are necessarily connected to other places and scales around the globe through social, cultural and economic links. If this is the case, then place is not a singular notion, and shatters right-wing views of the local as uniform and that the right to place lies exclusively with the 'indigenous' population. Massey tends to focus on theorising the politics *of* place – the way we can conceptualise place as a political phenomenon – rather than politics *in* place – how groups seek to mobilise place-based grievances and initiatives. At several points in the chapter, I have returned to Featherstone's (2005) relational approach to militant particularisms as a possible vehicle for understanding how place-based politics functions between places and times. Although I argue that this concept is very useful for understanding place-based politics, I also contend that it is necessary to interrogate the way in which relations are not always linear or predictable. Individuals' experiences of a certain project can lead to them "selectively" (Williams, 1977) translating certain knowledges or experiences between times and spaces, rather than simply transferring them in a linear fashion.

However, as we have seen, the difficulties involved in balancing place-based and class-based politics are plentiful and sometimes conditioned by seemingly unrelated factors out of centres' control. This unpredictability is further compounded by the informal and selective modes of knowledge and skill transfer used among social centre activists, leading to problems with passing good practice between centres and projects. Similarly, the mobilisation of social networks, rather than 'reaching out' to local residents, endangers centres to ghettoisation and failure to connect to the communities in which they are located. Generating an effective radical politics in place, then, requires more than just careful embedding into the local political fabric. Failure to transfer this placing into meaningful action, and to learn from past successes and mistakes, significantly limits the extent to which the ideas on which a centre is premised are taken seriously as a recognised part of the local political fabric. There is a real danger of

inadvertently reproducing stereotypes – of anarchists and squatters, in particular – that social centres are specifically designed to dispel.

As such, the experience of social centre activism gives us a glimpse of possible means of developing an everyday, anarchist/ic community politics. However, its unique place as located in the everyday lives of a range of people requires careful and constant negotiation – of identity, tactics, membership and aesthetics – in order to demonstrate, in a sense, the applicability of their politics to the everyday experiences and desires of others. One way in which they have attempted to do this is by striving to demonstrate how their *organisational* practices can act as examples of how anarchist principles are not only workable and effective but also – in some small way – emancipatory in everyday situations. The way in which groups organise themselves and make decisions are major means of exhibiting a certain approach to political action and, in so doing, can serve as means of communicating the tangible benefits of that form of politics to others. This requires paying careful attention to the terrains of capital on which social centres are located and, as we have seen, both the HSC and the Vortex sought to closely hug the contours of local political and economic dynamics in their particular areas. As the situation changed – for example with the discovery that Starbucks was considering opening a store in the Vortex building – the collective shaped its practices and priorities not only to combat this threat to their territorial integrity but also to use the situation to develop radical political critiques and practices in a diverse neighbourhood. Such flexibility and close adherence to political context is a potential benefit of the self-managed forms of organisation enacted by social centres.

This leads to an important assertion that has been made by libertarian-leaning Marxists such as Lefebvre (2002 [1968]), and anarchists like Heckert (2005) and Ward (1976; 2000): that grassroots revolutionary politics must recognise the centrality of everyday life in the constitution of the political. Indeed, the great strength of anarchist/ic or self-managed political perspectives and practices is that they can bend with the undulations and rhythms of the everyday and are not bound by the theoretical or

organisational rigidity of more Party-oriented schools of socialism. Everyday life produces a “terrain of struggle” (Routledge, 1996b) that is ideally suited to prefigurative political perspectives since, if it is in the everyday practices of, and relations between, people where political subjectivity is formed, then a prefigurative form of politics that concentrates on the spectacular will struggle to make concrete gains without direct relevance to the everyday experience. Rather than pandering to existing norms and values that may be counterproductive to a radical prefigurative politics, I have shown social centres to selectively identify and emphasise those already-existing elements of community – such as self-help, mutual aid, solidarity and creativity – to which they can ascribe significance as part of a radical programme.

Conversely, an emphasis on everyday life does not necessarily mean that social centres are always effective. As we have seen, even small organisational problems can affect outcomes and significantly reduce effectiveness. Indeed, even the material space of a centre, the social relations between core activists, and even just good or bad luck are factors in the relative success of a social centre project. Past experiences, likewise, affect how or if codes of good or bad practice are translated from one centre to the next. The power of prefigurative politics, then, brings with it a certain element of fragility. As a model for community or neighbourhood-based anarchist/ic organising, however, there can be no doubt that social centres have potential, and have had positive impacts in some small ways. While the social centres studied here did not achieve a great deal of concrete changes in their localities, their significance lies in this potential, and the many forms of prefigurative and autonomous organisation and action – often not easily ‘visible’ through their outward appearance and campaigns – that were enacted in their everyday practices.

By rooting themselves in place-based class politics, social centres can be seen as having potential to connect disparate processes and injustices by initiating or participating in local struggles to which people could relate because of their everyday experience of them. Similarly, then, considering

social centres as prefigurative spaces steers us away from the idea (e.g. Bey, 1991; Notes from Nowhere, 2003a) that making spectacular ruptures and subversions of the everyday are necessarily positive or desirable. The power of the everyday lies primarily in its *everydayness*, its messiness, ordinariness and mundane-ness, while its vulnerability to subversion and spectacle is more of a *tool* that can be used to support the bigger project of tapping into the rhythms of everyday life and channelling them in new directions.

The anarchist emphasis on freedom and experimentation, I contend, has therefore been widely misinterpreted as an argument in support of heroic gestures and wild, chaotic spectacles. Rather, it should be taken as a call to experiment with the very base of everyday practice, and autonomous spaces such as social centres provide resources and specific local conditions from which to undertake this experimentation in 'real life'. Social centres are important, not so much as autonomous and prefigurative spaces separated from the capitalism 'surrounding' them, but as tools for facilitating the creation of autonomous and prefigurative spatialities and relations *within* these terrains of capitalist life. This distinction is crucial in understanding social centres' geographical and political functions, as means as well as ends.

The next chapter considers social centres alongside the IWW, comparatively exploring differences and commonalities between the two, establishing these commonalities and differences firmly in relation to the ideas and literatures discussed in previous chapters. It draws together and explores the observations and analyses in this chapter and chapter four. In particular, the next chapter builds upon key themes – namely everyday life, spatial strategy and prefiguration – and considers more specifically the ways in which social centres and the IWW seek to build genuinely prefigurative everyday spaces.

# VI

## IN IT TO WIN IT?

### EXPLORING AND CONTRASTING EVERYDAY ANARCHIST/IC ORGANISATION

*The film was on the Handsworth and Broadwater Farm riots in the early 1980s. The projector wasn't working properly, which made it rather grainy and distorted, but it actually completed the feel of the whole room. A bunch of crusties in a large, dirty room with a strange sense of decaying grandeur, watching a grainy film about riots badly projected onto a makeshift screen made up of a white sheet draped across a cracked and peeling wall. It was poetic in so many ways, but also depressing too, knowing how much untapped potential this space has for really exciting political engagement. Seeing those riots on the screen made me feel sad and angry about how the Hackney Social Centre had turned out, and made me realise how important communities coming together can be; how powerful they can be; how dignified they can be, through whatever means they use. I had to ask myself "where did we go wrong?" and I didn't know where to start. (Fieldnotes, 18/3/2008)*

This chapter builds upon chapters four and five by bringing the two case studies together in order to comparatively analyse their everyday, prefigurative spatial strategies, drawing out points of continuity and difference in their approaches, and developing the key arguments of the thesis. Like previous chapters, I interrogate the practices of the IWW and

social centres specifically with reference to how they attempt to build an everyday politics in their respective spaces of activity – namely, the workplace and the community. I discuss the similarities and differences between the groups studied, and unravel what is distinctive and interesting in their political geographies; what questions they raise for academic and activist debates; how they have sought to negotiate their problems and tensions; and what they can tell us about the enactment of radical politics in general. In doing so, this chapter focuses on the key research questions that run through both case studies and have relevance to geographical questions on political organisation and radical space, and anarchist thought and action. Through this, the chapter also explores the relations between the ‘tidy’ spaces of theory and the rather more complex spaces of practice.

Beginning with the first research question concerning efforts to develop a politics of everyday life, I explore autonomous practices as *everyday* practices, understanding autonomy in broad terms as a socio-spatial mode of engagement. This section considers the everyday from the perspective of how autonomous practices contribute to a politics of everyday life. I use a discussion of the processes of recuperation and ghettoisation to explore the geographies and tensions involved in autonomous strategy as an everyday phenomenon, and how social centres and the IWW sought to remedy these problems in the everyday institution of certain forms of organising and (inter)acting. This forms the basis of a discussion that seeks to fuse autonomous geographies to theoretical work on everyday life.

The following section discusses the groups’ spatial strategies, specifically discussing the role of scale, place and territory in relation to the second research question. Through this discussion, I develop the argument that everyday life is central to understanding and enacting effective political practices. This section builds upon previous discussions of autonomy by examining the ways in which different forms of autonomous organisation affect the geographies of political action. In particular, I problematise the binary between networked and formal organisation, and the way anarchist/ic self-management refuses such constraints.

Finally, addressing the third research question, I interrogate the prefigurative geographies of the groups studied, and how prefigurative politics create particular spatialities that can help us understand, and potentially change, the world. I argue that prefiguration is both ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’ in different ways, creating tensions and ambiguities that can help us re-imagine the relationship between utopian ideas and everyday practices and experiences.

## **EVERYDAY AUTONOMOUS GEOGRAPHIES**

### **Between dropping out and selling out: autonomy as an everyday practice**

This section develops arguments and discussions on everyday life, the first research question of the thesis, particularly in relation to how groups manifest an *autonomous* politics of everyday life. Autonomy is a practice that underpins the crucial idea of prefiguration, rooted in a fusion of means and ends. We have seen how autonomy can be traced through the constellations of interactions between individuals as well as through the spatial strategies of groups. The tension that it embodies – between individual freedom and collective organisation – makes autonomous space complex, unpredictable and always contested and developing over time. As Chatterton (2005: 547) notes, “autonomy simultaneously refuses and proposes, destroys and creates”. Thus the way we understand autonomy as a geographical and a political phenomenon must acknowledge the way in which it is rooted in oppositions, and therefore also particular spatial strategies that reflect these conflicts. This is exhibited strongly in the empirical research, where both social centres and the IWW established their praxes as explicitly confrontational.



Autonomy is also a distinctly everyday strategy; an approach that institutes prefigurative forms of politics into the way we live and interact. So far, this thesis has identified autonomy as linked to prefiguration rather than everyday life, but in chapters four and five it has become clear that the prefigurative practices of the IWW and social centres are necessarily rooted in the everyday through autonomous practices. Thus, in order to understand the transformative power of an anarchist/ic, prefigurative politics of everyday life, it is necessary to comparatively consider the case studies in terms of their different enactments of a politics of everyday life, and the way autonomy is manifested empirically in, and related theoretically to it.

Pickerill and Chatterton (2006) characterise autonomy as *interstitial*, operating on an everyday basis in the space between capital and noncapital; between this world and future ones. The everyday spatial strategies enacted by both groups studied deliberately and consciously trace the contours of capital, while also proposing and enacting alternative forms of organisation that reject but do not seek to separate themselves entirely from capitalism. Social centres seek to seize discrete spaces in order to enact their autonomous strategies, whereas the IWW produces spaces and spatialities within spaces designed for labour. Autonomy's strength lies precisely in its appropriation or transformation of everyday capitalist spaces by those circulating within or through them. This, however, comes with dangers. We have seen how autonomous spaces and practices are fragile; their self-organised internal cultures and contested, permeable borderlands can produce unstable political, social and organisational spaces. This is especially clear among social centres, whose fragile physical borders exemplify the vulnerability of autonomous space to both internal dysfunction and external penetration. It raises the issue of integrity: if autonomous spaces are most effective when located within the very processes of capitalist social and economic reproduction that they seek to destroy, then by situating themselves in such spaces, radical groups are highly susceptible to co-optation. Following the original Italian autonomists – especially Panzieri – Cleaver (1979: 53) notes that

[n]ot only is the [capitalist] division of labour seen as a hierarchical division of *power* to weaken the [working] class... but also... the working class is seen to struggle against these divisions, politically recomposing the power relations in their interests... If autonomous workers' power forces reorganisation and changes in capital that develop it, then capital cannot be understood as an outside force, independent of the working class.

Reading the subtext of this passage suggests that while autonomous praxis produces spaces imbued with transformative possibility, these spaces also face the threat of being used as means of reinventing capitalist processes in new ways. This is because capitalist processes are inherently tied to the time, effort, imagination and skill – the general intellect (Virno, 2001) – of those who reproduce capital every day. Jacque Camatte (1995: 154) makes this position explicit by arguing that “capital is a form that always inflates itself on an alien content” – in other words, on that which originates outside of, or even in opposition to, itself – which is often expressed through the vitality of working class self-activity subsumed into capital through processes of recuperation.

As IWW history most clearly reminds us (e.g. Smith, 1916; Chaplin, 1971), radical groups are highly susceptible to repression from capital and the state. This is clearly an important concern. However, investigating direct repression does less to help us understand the distinctive geographies of the IWW and social centres than other, more subtle ways in which radical groups can be destroyed or compromised. As anarchist (Dixon, 2008), autonomist (Cleaver, 1979; Virno, 2002) and libertarian Marxist (Debord, 1995 [1967]) thinkers and activists are keenly aware, the tendency of capital and the state to recuperate radical thought and action into the politically ‘safe’ spaces of institutional power and capital accumulation is a significant danger to the ongoing success of radical prefigurative projects. This is an especially significant issue when considering a return to engaging everyday spaces on their own terms as residual (Lefebvre, 2002 [1961]). If the everyday is a residue of commonality that structures relations and

experiences, then everyday life becomes, as the anarchists argue, a key focal point for the perpetuation or intensification of social control:

[N]early every facet of life in modern society has by now been colonised by hierarchy and alienation — family life, sexuality, education, culture, knowledge, communication, health care, transportation, etc. Everywhere the dominant social institutions impose on people an organisation of their daily lives that is external to them... The poverty, the meaninglessness and the alienation of everyday life in the modern world are not accidental by-products of an otherwise sound social system. They are the inevitable and primary products of a system which... consists of a relatively coherent structure of self-reinforcing social relations of compulsion, hierarchical authority and commodity-exchange. (Columbia Anarchist League, 1989: no pagination)

This statement is highly reminiscent of previous discussions of anarchist approaches to autonomy which emphasise the ability to self-constitute as a key element of autonomous agency. In turn, an everyday strategy necessarily requires a careful balance between remaining oriented towards material, concrete goals, and becoming appropriated into capitalist, representative and/or hierarchical relations within institutions of power. Conversely, it requires a careful balance between proposing and practicing revolutionary politics, and becoming isolated from those outside of a particular politico-cultural 'ghetto'. Groups' efforts to self-constitute and self-organise are therefore delicate practices that can easily become problematic. As discussed in chapter five, the Hackney Social Centre's reliance on existing social and activist networks encouraged the process of ghettoisation to take place.

In order to understand the issue of recuperation and ghettoisation further, it is beneficial to return briefly to the literature on the general intellect and recuperation. For post-autonomists like Paolo Virno (2001; cf. Eden, 2006), the general intellect is the ever-developing, self-organising totality of human creativity, imagination and knowledge. It is not only embedded in the

material (such as the knowledge of how to build and operate machinery, and by proxy also the machinery itself), but also in the social, cultural and discursive fields of production. Importantly for a discussion of everyday life, it inhabits the everyday interactions, conversations, ideas, jokes, (sub)cultures, writings, and so on, of everyone at all times and in all places (Virno, 2001). This “mass intellectuality” is somewhat paradoxical: it is a product of co-operative non-capitalist activity and creativity, but also the basis of capitalism’s power to reproduce and reinvent itself. Ideas, concepts and cultural symbols can be extracted from the general intellect in order to be repackaged and sold back to those who created it, just like any other commodity.

The Situationist International was also particularly interested in these processes. Debord in particular analysed recuperation – that is, the process of capital appropriating into itself the content of radical ideas, including their outward cultural qualities such as slogans and aesthetics – from the perspective of *the spectacle*. The spectacle, “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (Debord, 1994 [1967]: 12), acts as a vehicle for capital and its powerful ideologues to project an idealised vision of everyday life that is premised upon consumption, atomisation and conformity.

Processes of commodification and recuperation, for anarchists, are also mediated and facilitated by the state. While the state encourages and creates incentives for commodification – through business tax schemes, copyright law, and so on – it also ensures that sentiments of revolt remain sufficiently contained. As Flood (1998; cf. Price, 2007) notes, in order to minimise the chances of widespread revolt, “in advanced capitalism the state is used to regulate the level of exploitation of the workforce through various labour laws.” Anarchists thus perceive the state and capital to operate as a complete system of both recuperation and regulation (e.g. Morris, 2009), with the state simultaneously encouraging commodification of the general intellect, and regulating the effects of capitalism in order to

minimise the chances of struggle proliferating. As noted in chapter two, this is what Vaneigem (2003 [1967]) termed “decompression”.

Recuperation is an ever-present danger among social centres and the IWW, and a range of factors affect their ability to withstand recuperation and develop autonomous spaces that can facilitate prefigurative politics. In order to explore the relationship between everyday life and autonomy, the remainder of this section is dedicated largely to this question.

Given the priorities and targets of the IWW and social centres, if they are to fulfil their aims, ongoing engagement with state and capitalist actors such as landlords, employers and the police is inevitable. Similarly, as radical groups, they carry with them a certain amount of inertia in favour of becoming inward-looking theoretical or sub-cultural cliques. The line that must be walked by radical groups engaging with broad-based workplace and community politics, between becoming recuperated into the mainstream or ghettoised into insignificance, has a constant presence. Early in the life of the HSC, which became increasingly ghettoised over time, I hinted at this possible danger in my fieldnotes:

It was recognised that there was no social centre if we just cater for the anarchist ghetto, but also that there's a chance of becoming reformist or less combative if we become a 'service' to neighbouring communities. I think there was also an underlying fear of the unknown in the debate [at the collective meeting]. I mentioned how well the Vortex had made a positive impact in its local area, but another person chipped in that the Vortex was different because it was in a “relatively middle class” area. I think some people are making too many big assumptions [on this subject] without any real evidence. (fieldnotes 25/2/2008)

One notable example of the groups studied negotiating this balance between recuperation and ghettoisation was the IWW's process of certification with the British state as a registered union. In one of its first

large organising efforts, the IWW organised among workers at a number of factories in North-East England, in 2001. However, since the union was not registered, the employer was able to crush the campaign and use legal loopholes to justify this course of action. As a result, it was narrowly decided that the union should register with the state in order to protect itself and its members in the future. However, registration<sup>40</sup> imposed on the IWW various Thatcherite laws designed to control and minimise the power of unions, such as outlawing secondary picketing and 'closed shops'. It was thus up to IWW activists to learn to negotiate their positionality within these complex webs of legal constraints while remaining true to its militant and revolutionary principles.

With their usually greater experience, dual-card members took the lead in developing strategies to take advantage of the legal protections of registration without becoming incorporated into the individualised and partnership-oriented industrial relations that the law is designed to enforce. Some members created fact sheets (e.g. IWW-BIROC, 2008b) on aspects of industrial relations, while others drafted unofficial manuals partly based on techniques for bypassing such laws (e.g. Anon, 2008b; Anon., 2009b). Members mobilised sympathetic connections in other unions and law firms to build a better understanding of the law, while they continued to organise at workplaces using much the same techniques as they had done previously. Whereas registration closed off some avenues for overt or official IWW action, it also encouraged activists to conjure up creative ways of bypassing some legal barriers<sup>41</sup>, and the confidence gained from knowing that the incidents in the 2001 factory campaigns would not be repeated was widely perceived as a motivation to organise more aggressively rather than hold back. Therefore registration, as a state strategy specifically designed to recuperate autonomous workers' action, was a danger and limiting factor for the IWW, but was also partly transformed into an opportunity for developing

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<sup>40</sup> A great irony of this process for the IWW is that it is to certify that the union is independent of any employer. The idea that the IWW, of all unions, would have to prove to the government that it was not controlled by a business was the source of wry amusement among the membership.

<sup>41</sup> It must be stressed that these efforts to bypass industrial relations law were not officially endorsed by the union; rather, they were enacted among informal networks of activists.

more nuanced strategies and tactics. This, however, is an ongoing negotiation to which the IWW at all scales of organisation in the UK must continuously attend, as one IWW activist noted:

The debates around the issues of a union such as the IWW or COBAS<sup>42</sup> or syndicalist or revolutionary-type unions becoming integrated into the mechanism of exploitation or whatever have been around a very long time... The reality, I would suggest, is that there are in all permanent economic bodies of working class 'representation', the potential for this integration (along with bureaucratisation, routinism etc) but people who have decided to work for the establishment and growth of the IWW have considered this and decided that despite these dangers, the IWW is something which is worth developing and defending.

And, I would think that in order to maintain the direct action based, revolutionary, anti-bureaucratic nature of the IWW (or any other similar union) then these considerations would be ones we would have to return to from time to time. (Anon., email to UK IWW email list, 13/5/2010)

One general way in which both the IWW and social centres responded to threats of recuperation was to enshrine within their identities, structures and practices a sense of confrontation. Through their membership criteria and exclusions, as we have seen, the groups cultivated a *culture* of solidarity towards members and allies, and combativeness towards perceived enemies, specifically through everyday bordering practices. In doing so, they nurtured a sense of antagonism and distrust of capitalist and state actors that sought to maintain a militant and radical line while still engaging with them. As one section of an unofficial workplace organising manual associated with a group of IWW activists (Anon., 2008b: 19) explains,

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<sup>42</sup> COBAS is an Italian 'base union' that operates in many respects like dual-card forms of IWW activism, within the grassroots of mainstream unions.

[A]ny worker contemplating direct action on the job – bypassing the legal system and hitting the boss where they are weakest – should be fully aware of labour law, how it is applied, and how it may be used against labour activists. At the same time, workers must realise that the struggle between the bosses and the workers is not a badminton match – it is war. Under these circumstances, workers must use what works, whether the bosses (and their courts) like it or not.

The institutionalisation of antagonistic relationships with ‘the class enemy’ through practical means and propaganda reinforces the sense of collective identity within the IWW while also recognising that in order to succeed it is important to understand and work in relation to legal constraints within the spaces of the workplace. Similarly, in their discussions of different responses to a court hearing concerning eviction of the space, Vortex activists attempted to ‘play the system’:

We also spoke at length about the eviction. The court date has been set... and there was a debate around who should go. It was suggested that we should put forwards a display of strength, and amass as many people as we could to pack out the public viewing area... It would show a certain amount of muscle, and popular support, but also wouldn't really affect the outcome (which is almost certainly going to be a possession order). A member of the parent and baby group suggested that women and children were particularly useful in this respect, rather than a load of rough-and-ready squatter men. Everyone knew the verdict would probably be against us, but that we should somehow show up the legal process for what it was: a tool of the ruling classes. (fieldnotes 17/1/2007)

The question, here, surrounded how power is constituted and enacted in a legal setting. Vortex activists were not treating the legal process as balanced or fair, preferring to understand it as a potential opportunity to



expose the legal process as farce and strengthen popular support by expressing unity and solidarity.

The development of procedures and organisational structures can also have a powerful effect on the way in which a group retains – or fails to retain – its autonomous principles in everyday practice. This was most clearly illustrated in the Vortex’s adoption of security procedures that explicitly referenced the police and bailiffs as threats to the corporeal and physical safety of the building and its occupants (Appendix 1). In an organisation such as the IWW, with its close adherence to formal constitutional and procedural practices, the enshrinement of radical approaches to activism is often embodied in these spaces of (self-)legislation. Examples of this include the following:

No member of the Industrial Workers of the World shall be an officer<sup>43</sup> of a trade or craft union or political party (IWW, 2009: 5).

No agreement made by any component part of the IWW shall provide for a check-off of union dues by an employer, or obligate the members of the union to do work that would aid in breaking any strike (*ibid.*: 23).

No organiser for the IWW while on the platform for this organisation shall advocate any political party platform (*ibid.*).

Enforcement of these policies, despite formal disciplinary and grievance procedures, usually takes place through the socio-cultural bonds between IWW members. Violation of these radical principles results in isolation and widespread condemnation, and return to favour in the union usually only results from apologies and practical demonstrations of commitment to both the union and the principles on which it stands. The creation of such an

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<sup>43</sup> In this case, “officer” refers to an individual in an executive position and receiving a salary for doing so. An administrator for a union may join the IWW, for example, but the National Secretary of that union may not.

internal culture of personal accountability, although operating unevenly between people and places due to its somewhat informal application, has been a major element of the IWW's internal culture throughout its life, and can create internal IWW spaces that cohere with the union's broader spatial and political strategy. Moreover, it can be read as a mobilisation of the residual nature of everyday life in the articulation and practice of 'justice' undertaken through *relations*. The below old-time cartoon depicting an IWW prisoner is regularly used in internal IWW bulletins and communications to encourage solidarity and a sense of mutual aid and sacrifice. It is also a parody of the famous "Uncle Sam Wants YOU" army recruitment posters, further emphasising an antagonistic mode of class solidarity in direct opposition to ruling classes in government and business.



Fig. XV: IWW poster detail, early 1920s

Alongside such internal propaganda and self-discipline, there lies a far stronger means of balancing recuperation and ghettoisation that is based firmly in the spatial strategy of social centres and the IWW. As discussed above, autonomy is most effective when enacted as an everyday strategy through spaces that are located in the interstices between capitalist and noncapitalist relations. This engaged withdrawal requires a politics of everyday life that refuses both total exclusion and total incorporation. By providing what some might call a “third space” (e.g. Routledge, 1996a) that is partially external but interwoven in the fabric of the capitalist everyday, groups such as the IWW and social centres *may* be able to ‘view’ the world from a critical distance, and retain a radical approach that remains grounded in local everyday conditions of existence:

[A]utonomous and collective sociality aims to step beyond both the ‘bad, devious subject’ and the ‘good, conformist subject’ towards the ‘non-subject’ who thinks and acts outside the parameters of the current capitalist system... It is a declaration, not of being ‘complimentary’ or ‘subordinate’ to capitalism, but of the right to develop workable alternatives. (Chatterton, 2005: 558)

Autonomous spatial strategy develops directly *in relation to* capitalism – through critique and reappropriation – while also operating beyond its sphere of control, or aspiring to do so. In order to maintain this engaged withdrawal, groups must remain embedded within the everyday conditions experienced by those to whom they orient their political agendas. It is not only a political principle, but also a practical need to develop perspectives and alternatives that are applicable to real-life issues and concerns. This development of practicable alternatives, of course, feeds into the prefigurative strategies of the groups, and reinforces the political significance and – crucially – the practical efficacy of such strategies for simply making people’s lives more liveable, enjoyable or free (cf. Weaver, 2006; for similar historical debates see Anarkismo, 2007). Thus, the

everyday *threat* of recuperation requires an everyday *response* – in the shape of the collective habituation of autonomy. Autonomy may prise apart gaps in the capitalist everyday in order to allow prefigurative politics to be practiced.

We can thus see recuperation – and, indeed, ghettoisation – as not the ‘end’ of radical politics, but as signifying a need for *renewal*. The recognition that recuperation is taking place within a group, movement or initiative calls for us to shift our strategies in new directions and conceive of political action in new ways. Enacted as a total withdrawal from capital, autonomy loses its revolutionary possibility; enacted as a total immersion in capital, autonomy becomes a producer of new forms of accumulation and social control. New forms or configurations of praxis, therefore,

do not fall from the sky like pennies from heaven but more often than not are built from reconfiguring the compositions of existing collective imaginaries that have become ossified, or finding ways to reclaim the subversive traces still embedded within imaginaries that have been turned to other uses. (Shukaitis, forthcoming: 10)

### **Relations and space: towards an autonomous politics of everyday life**

Autonomous space is therefore intimately entwined with practices and experiences of everyday life, and failure – through recuperation, ghettoisation, or simply errors or poor judgement – can be understood as a force for driving a rejuvenation of imagination in our development of an everyday anarchist/ic politics. This subsection seeks to expand upon discussions above by introducing and exploring the role of relations in the geographical construction of everyday autonomous practice. The centrality of everyday practices has been evident throughout chapters four and five, exemplified most clearly in the ways social centres tapped into the everyday rhythms, politics and cultures of the places in which they operated. However, the creation or appropriation of everyday space as a discernible,

bounded entity for the development of autonomy is not always a necessary part of an autonomous strategy. Autonomy can be understood as something that creates myriad spatialities that are produced through certain patterns of interactions and relations. These spatialities can take the form of discrete spaces that are *a priori* conceived as autonomous by participants, such as social centres. Autonomous spatialities can also be produced by the *a posteriori* forging of self-managed relations and practices through spaces such as workplaces that do not originate or define themselves by those autonomous relations. The space in which autonomous relations are conceived is therefore a major factor in how those relations are enacted in practice. In turn, the enactment of such relations is rooted in a keen awareness of how everyday, residual experiences and practices socially produce the space within which autonomous practices take place.

Since autonomy is premised on power relations, and therefore being somewhat negotiable – both with one’s own moral and political conscience (Wolff, 1998 [1970]) and in relation to others (Pickerill, 2007) – the idea of ‘autonomous space’ can be a rather ambiguous and elusive concept. As Pickerill (*ibid.*: 2673) notes, “[i]f autonomy is a power relation and quest for ‘freedom’, it can be a difficult concept to pinpoint in practice”. Autonomous space orients itself against capital, but cannot separate itself from it, since it is always produced in relation to capital, feeding off its characteristics and development (cf. Žižek, 2000), which are in turn developed directly out of our everyday self-activity.

Beyond this reciprocal relationship with capitalism, the anarchist critique of authority considers the authoritarian structures that reinforce and regulate capitalism to be produced and reproduced through the everyday practices of people (e.g. Columbia Anarchist League, 1989; Malatesta, 1995 [1891]; Gordon, 2005). In the previous sub-section, I argued that the recuperation of grassroots or subaltern politics is undertaken through their everyday incorporation into matrices of institutional power structures. The institution of autonomous practices into the everyday functioning of groups allows not only the possibility of prefigurative practices to flourish but acts as a defence

mechanism against recuperation. Thus, much like capital, authority is a social relation that is both produced and destroyed by acting in certain ways in everyday life.

In a Lefebvorean sense, since capital's colonisation of space is totalising but never total, autonomous practices seek out the inevitable cracks in the everyday reproduction of capital, in order to exaggerate them and use them as tools for struggle. An autonomous space, such as a social centre, may be used to facilitate these practices, but the creation of broader autonomous spatialities – of interpersonal networks that permeate the boundaries of different kinds of space, as in IWW dual-card unionism – does not necessarily require these discrete, bounded spaces for everyday practice.

However, even if we reject the notion that all autonomous *spatialities* must be contained within discrete autonomous *spaces*, spatial differentiation between different groups and individuals remains an important element of autonomous strategy. In particular, previous chapters show how practices of bordering (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen, 2002) can be important for the efficacy of such a strategy. Everyday bordering practices, far from producing homogeneous space (singular), regulate and facilitate permeation and cross-fertilisation between spaces (plural), precisely through acts of inclusion and exclusion. Thus autonomy is partly facilitated by creating such selectively permeable membranes between spaces, creating a constellation of negotiations, connections *and divisions* that reinforce and fuse autonomous spatialities, rather than fragmenting them. These bordering practices can be seen as strongly relating to the forging of particular social *relations*, as discussed in previous chapters, neither in favour of 'reform' nor the perpetuation of the status quo. Paraphrasing the IWW, a Vortex activist notes that

we push people to imagine and build these new, these alternatives to what the state and capital offers. But in the shell of the old; in the shell of what already exists... Really it's the relationship that people have with their local resources, and

whatever, that matters, as opposed to just what you call that relationship. (Adam interview, 26/10/2008)

In contrast to right-libertarian notions that emphasise autonomy of the individual, autonomy can be understood as a mode of engagement that is framed by everyday social and material relations between people. Autonomy, in the anarchist sense, respects the idea of humanity as a fragmented, uneven, yet ultimately also *social* entity that can be changed, not through legislative forces or individual lifestyle choices but through the everyday relations and interactions of individuals as parts of multiple, overlapping and interdependent social systems. The anarchist rejection of individualistic notions of autonomy further reinforces the close relationship between autonomy and geography, since, in Lefebvre's (1991 [1974]) terms, space is *socially produced*, as part of everyday relations with others. This opens up the terrains of autonomous spatialities as facilitators of alternative relations, practices and structures. Space has been used by both social centres and the IWW as a practical tool for the creation and proliferation of prefigurative forms of everyday relations. One example of this is the Vortex café, which I have shown facilitates the enactment of a form of work regime that operates according to practices of mutual aid and gift economics. Although there are arguably fewer clear examples in the IWW, making space for "good and welfare" at branch meetings institutionally encourages practices of mutual aid and skill-sharing between members.

The dual-card tradition in the IWW is particularly relevant to autonomy as an everyday phenomenon. Given how autonomy is processual, always developing and shifting with the contours of capital itself, autonomous spatial configurations can and should be considered within a temporal framework if we are to better understand the way in which autonomous organisational identities are produced. As a practice based around shifts in the fortunes of struggle, dual-card unionism can be seen as having become an autonomous strategy developed over time and closely mirroring the changing fortunes of multiple scales of working class organisation – the specific workplace, local and industrial patterns of unionisation, and even

global shifts in union power and membership. As such, a key benefit of autonomous organising lies in its capacity to adapt over time. Since autonomous spatialities need not conform to any particular pre-given spatial strategy, and since they trace the contours of capital through everyday praxis, autonomous politics can become highly adaptive across spaces and times. As mentioned previously, this is also precisely the quality through which radical groups have the capacity to minimise their chances of recuperation or ghettoisation.

The tension between ghettoisation and recuperation is a necessary part of prefigurative politics in general, and autonomy in particular. It forces activists and groups to remain aware of the changing circumstances in which they find themselves. Autonomy is thus an admission that the world is changing and praxis is contextual, combined with the recognition that, if organised in a particular way, this change and context can be used to the advantage of those in struggle. It produces a processual socio-spatial imaginary that institutes itself within the matrices of everyday life, and therefore at the heart of capital and authority.

By defining autonomous practices and spatialities as particularly *everyday* phenomena, the first section of this chapter has sought to unite the literatures and concepts surrounding autonomy and everyday life through the empirical findings of this research. Everyday life as a residual and changing set of relations – structuring experiences and subjectivities through the commonalities and differences produced through this residue – has a powerful resonance for the practice of autonomy, and therefore for the institution and proliferation of prefigurative politics. This topic is expanded in the final substantive section of the chapter. It was clear in chapters four and five that these practices among social centres and the IWW constituted broader horizontally-organised *strategies* that sought to produce spaces and spatialities of potentially emancipatory politics. It is to these spatial strategies that this chapter now turns.



## **ANARCHIST/IC SPATIAL STRATEGY: PLACING MULTIPLE SPATIALITIES**

While autonomy as a principle has powerful resonance with regards to what revolution means, it also impacts on how we go about making it happen in our everyday praxis. This section considers the spatial strategies of the IWW and social centres, interrogating what their autonomous approaches to organisation can tell us about the geographies of contentious politics. Of particular importance is the extent to which both groups enacted a place-based politics, as inextricably linked to their commitment to engaging in everyday politics. The IWW's emphasis on local autonomy and branch control rooted the union in particular localities while co-ordinating across the globe. Social centres create a more explicitly local politics, with a centre embedding itself in a particular place to engage with and address specific place-based issues, and only very loosely networking with other centres when deemed necessary. These two different enactments of place-based praxis – of global co-ordination between places, and predominantly independent place-based activity – are enactments of fundamentally similar political principles. This forces us to think about the power of, and relations between, different spatial concepts – such as place, scale, networks and territory – in shaping and mobilising political subjectivities and collectivities. The following sub-section focuses on the complex relationship between territory and place in social centres and the IWW, and what territorial understandings can tell us about the role of place-based autonomous politics in a seemingly omnipotent global capitalist economy.

### **'Re-territorialising' politics in place**

Place is the central spatial locus for organising among both social centres and the IWW. Both attach profound importance to the specificity and immanence of place for the articulation and mobilisation of both values and goals. In the previous two chapters, I have focussed primarily on Featherstone's (2005; 2008) idea of relational militant particularisms, which

centres on the importance of politics *in* (and between) places, alongside Massey's (1993) attempts to theorise a politics *of* place through a "progressive sense of place". However, in the previous chapters I chose to focus on the power that the specificities of place can offer actors in contentious politics. In this sub-section, I look at the significance of place from another angle, considering the role of the spatial practices enacted in place, and what they mean to the way we understand place-based politics. Drawing from arguments in chapters four and five concerning bordering, I argue that thinking about place *territorially* can help to ameliorate or reconfigure the relationship between place and class politics, developing an approach that is relational between places, and antagonistic yet plural within them. Furthermore, I contend that the forms of territorialisation enacted by social centres and the IWW challenge fundamental assumptions about existing statist and capitalist calculative discourses of territory.

In the previous section, I noted that autonomous space can either be produced as a discrete space with distinct borders, or within already-existing spaces as an autonomous current. Despite this differentiation, in order to maintain such an autonomous strategy, there must be some form of demarcation. Even in the case of the latter – where autonomy is conceived as developed through relations within broader pre-existing spaces such as workplaces or trade unions – at particular moments such as demonstrations, occupations, pickets or other forms of direct action, the group undertaking an autonomous strategy must make some sort of claim to a space, if only briefly. During days of action for the Showroom Cinema and NBS campaigns, the IWW utilised a range of physical (e.g. picket lines) and communicative (e.g. telephone and email blockades) tactics to exert control over certain spaces and gain leverage for their demands. This claim-making is related to social centres' claiming of space through their appropriation of disused buildings. It drives us to consider the more *territorial* elements of IWW and social centre activities, especially in relation to place, arguably the central spatial concept in this research.

Massey (1993) conceptualises place as a non-homogeneous site in which multi-scalar processes and local practices intersect. In doing so, she attempts to theorise place as something that affirms local identities and perceptions while recognising it as heterogeneous and changing, thus avoiding exclusory right-wing or conservative perspectives on the primacy of the local. Talking of her local community, Massey (1993: 66-67) notes that

[I]t is (or ought to be) impossible even to begin thinking about Kilburn High Road without bringing into play half the world... I certainly could not begin to, nor would I want to, define it by drawing its enclosed boundaries.

In many respects, the sense of place that the IWW and social centres foster is precisely as Massey suggests. As the Hackney Social Centre leaflet, quoted in the previous chapter, noted, global processes of capital accumulation and circulation are played out within localities. As such, it is the job of radicals to connect repossessions and gentrification at the local scale directly to the dynamics of (often transnational, but sometimes place-based) capital accumulation. Moreover, this sense of interconnected place resonates with Amin's (2002) idea of "micro-publics" – sites of interaction and interdependence in which people of different backgrounds can learn to break down assumed patterns of behaviour towards one another – as means of developing liberal and plural urbanities between mutually-hostile groups. It reinforces the argument that place-based, everyday actions and interactions can foster collectivist approaches in diverse areas by proposing meaningful forms of encounter as means of overcoming (in Amin's work, ethnic) boundaries.

The bordering and territorial practices of the groups studied, however, appear to stand in contrast to the pluralist world-view that Amin, and Massey to a lesser extent, seem to evoke. Much of Amin's analysis is challenging, rightly criticising both White and non-White elites for manipulating and dividing working class communities to maintain control over them. However, his political project is one that emphasises classically

liberal values of multiculturalism and an understanding of class as a largely socio-cultural distinction that can be all-but-overcome through these techniques of micro-public interactions. His argument for diversity and inclusion, then, appears to be in contrast to the class-based exclusions deemed necessary among social centres and the IWW. The territorial and bordering practices of social centres and the IWW also appear to contradict Massey's assertion of place as a site of intersections: if places are sites of intersections (of comings-together), then exclusionary practices such as bordering are hard to reconcile with a progressive sense of place.

What this suggests, I contend, is not that Amin or Massey are 'wrong' as such, but that micro-publics and a progressive sense of place can be articulated and organised through a variety of spatial strategies. Place-based anarchist/ic initiatives have significance as forms of politics that partly rely on territorial and bordering tactics, but which counter the reactive and often racist reconfigurations of political identity and territory of the far right<sup>44</sup>. In the remainder of this sub-section, I argue that such territorial and bordered initiatives also provide opportunities for forging micro-public encounters between strangers as part of grassroots community-making strategies between neighbours and workmates. The anarchist/ic territorial approach, rather than seeking forms of (liberal) multicultural or (neo-fascist) ethnocentric identity as ends in themselves, seeks to build affirmative, diverse and self-produced class identities as part of a processual fusion of means and ends.

Some contemporary geopolitical writing has argued that the globalising of politics and political identities through broader processes of economic and communicative globalisation has resulted in a 'deterritorialisation' of politics. As Ó Tuathail (1998: 82) notes, "[deterritorialisation] evokes the challenges posed to the status of territory... by planetary communication networks and

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<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, a small but increasing number of new right followers are embracing the ideas of 'national anarchism' (Sunshine, 2008), a blend of neo-fascist racial separatism and anarchistic communalist principles. This perspective can be seen as an attempt to fuse anti-capitalist territorialisation and neo-fascist territorialisation by conflating community politics of mutual aid with ethnocentric politics of self-preservation.

globalising tendencies". Although globalised forms of capitalism sometimes conjure a sense of localism through their marketing strategies, the experience of global processes in places and among people who are (or feel) disconnected or excluded from such flows can strive to affirm socio-cultural or other senses of place and territory. While, on one hand, international politics is sped up and globalised by near-instantaneous communications systems and an economy that requires global organisation, there is an opposite trend of 're-territorialisation', as those unable to participate in such global political practices seek ways of coping with their geopolitical disenfranchisement and often become increasingly defensive of local cultures and norms. Deterritorialisation is thus perceived to produce anxieties, uncertainties and confused identities; producing subjects of a global system over which people have no control, to which they cannot relate in any traditional sense, and which dominates their everyday lives nonetheless. Papastergiadis (2000: 17), in the context of migration, explains that

deterritorialisation has decoupled previous links between space, stability and reproduction; it has situated the notion of community in multiple locations; it has split loyalties and fractured the practices that secure understanding and knowledge within the family and social unit.

Re-territorialisation responds to this dynamic in ways that are not always, or even usually, progressive. The act of clinging desperately to that which we know and feel comfortable with has often become an act of shunning others and giving the (far-) right fertile breeding grounds for their policies of ethnocentrism, jingoism and conservative social and cultural values.

Elden (2005) critiques scholars of deterritorialisation for what he perceives to be a dangerously simplistic understanding of both globalisation and territory. Rather than seeing it as an opening-up of spatial understandings and a reconfiguration of political subjectivity, Elden notes how notions of territory in globalisation discourses are inherently linked to an

Enlightenment, calculative and quantifiable understanding of space that in fact closes down political possibility. As a result, he argues that deterritorialisation and, indeed, re-territorialisation are based on a fundamentally dubious ontology. The territory that Elden critiques is that of capitalist, statist geopolitics, and globalisation scholars – even critical or radical ones – risk reproducing it wholesale.

So where does this debate leave the role of bordering and territory in the place-based spatial strategies explored in this research? The place-based territorial practices of social centres in particular – but also the IWW to a lesser extent – can help us make sense of their spatial strategies and the nature of anarchist/ic spatial strategy in general. The grounding of social centre political identities in material, territorial spaces and discourses (the building, the community, and so on) that are internally contestable and contested, along with equally contested practices of bordering, can be understood as an attempt to re-territorialise political engagement along radical or progressive lines.

What differentiates their re-territorialisation from the capitalist and statist deterritorialisation against which they are contrasted is their ontological conception of territory that does not conform to the kind of territory critiqued by Elden (2005). Territory, for social centres and the IWW, can be understood as a *terrain of struggle* (cf. Routledge, 1996b), in which a multitude of social, economic and cultural dynamics, subjectivities and identities intersect and shape the political terrain of the place in which they are located. This understanding of territory in place can help us unpack the debates around place and de/re-territorialisation by re-framing territory as a political terrain of intersections over which opposing interests struggle in place(s). Following Elden's criticisms, this understanding of territory exists not for ownership of calculable space for the extraction of surplus value, but for collective control of everyday spatiality itself. Through their participatory identity formation and contestable borderlands, the bordering practices of the IWW and social centres can be argued to exhibit a territoriality that rejects calculation and (exclusive, individual) ownership *per se*. Instead,

territory is defined and bounded only by those enclosures that are strategically necessary to fulfil particular needs, such as self-defence, political leverage, and collective identity formation.

In this sense, there is a case to be heard for this form of territorial politics as a radical alternative to the re-territorialisation proposed by right-wing and economic protectionist perspectives that affirm the 'legitimacy' of the enclosures of capital, the nation and state, and propose impermeable borders for bodies or cultural values and practices. Territory, for the subjects of this research, is generated as much by diverse relations and intersections across space as it is by specificity or particularity in place. Thinking through place-based struggles as partly expressed through territorial practices also allows us to recognise how the intersections upon which places are 'built' are structured through antagonistic political relations, which are then manifested through competing territorial claims to space. This means that global (deterritorialised) capitalist processes are inherently linked to place-based ((re-)territorialised) militant particularisms. The key difference between the place-based politics of the (far-) right, and those enacted by social centres and the IWW, is that the former ascribes to the calculative, statist and capitalist definitions of territory critiqued by Elden (2005), since their politics rests on not only an adherence to calculative Westphalian systems of territory but actually seeks to *strengthen* such an approach. The latter, on the contrary, seek to enact a territorial politics that is rooted in the forms of bordering, enclosure and exclusion that are concomitant with an everyday, autonomous spatial strategy.

The re-working of place-based struggles as partly being territorial conflicts over the means of shaping terrains of struggle can also contribute to Featherstone's (2005) relational approach. I argued in the previous chapter that relational dynamics are not always linear or predictable. Using a territorial frame helps us to recognise that struggles over broader processes (such as capital accumulation, gentrification, unemployment, and so on) that are similar across space are manifested differently in place. The differences in spatial strategies and tactics between social centres and the IWW show

how the specificities of place affect the nature of political practices therein, as manifested through different forms of territorial politics. This means that relational dynamics between places (and times) will always be shaped according to differing ‘topographies’ of the terrains on which they rest. For example, although the Vortex was able to source a coffee machine from the evicted Square social centre, this did not necessarily mean that it, or the café, was utilised and framed politically in the same way or on the same terms. Likewise, differing terrains of struggle between mid-20<sup>th</sup> century USA and the contemporary UK led to differing applications of dual-card IWW activism. In essence, the way in which forces and processes intersect to produce place-based terrains of struggle opens up or closes down different possibilities of how space is claimed.

As such, not only can relational connections be forged in a selective and *ad hoc* manner, but also the same relational dynamic can result in different manifestations of itself in practice because of the particularities of different terrains of struggle. The re-territorialisation enacted by social centres and the IWW is a form of place-framing (Martin, 2003) that seeks to mobilise a progressive sense of place (Massey, 1993), while retaining a fundamental emphasis on the antagonistic “material circumstances” and “political project” (Harvey, 1993b: 41) of a group in place. In other words, framing place-based politics as structured through the intersections of inter-place (relational), and place-specific (socio-cultural, for example) dynamics can give us the tools to analyse and develop politics in place that are “progressive” in Massey’s sense of the term, yet also make space for explicitly antagonistic forms of struggle. This can contribute to the project of forging radical, confrontational politics in and between places, as proposed by Featherstone.

This assertion reinforces the centrality of place in the constitution of political action, and emphasises how *territorially-framed* terrains of struggle can be used to help develop antagonistic *place-based* forms of politics through a multiplicity of spatial strategies. The practices of social centres in particular,



but also the IWW, therefore provide possible spatial mechanisms for facilitating the creation of autonomous class politics in place.

### **Everyday scales of autonomous movement-building**

The ways in which activists connected with one another within and between places is clearly important in understanding anarchist/ic spatial strategy. I now turn to develop ideas in the sub-section above in order to discuss the way in which scale can be understood as a relational, everyday phenomenon. In order to walk the line between 'selling out' and 'dropping out', one must develop spatial strategies of connection that are grounded in, and reproduced through, everyday experiences and practices. In envisioning this, it is clear that such strategies are largely grounded at local scales, in the everyday (inter)actions of individuals, and therefore their ability to become generalised at a wider scale is potentially compromised.

Much debate has ensued about how a practice of 'scale-jumping' might be envisioned from local or place-based political imaginaries and scales of engagement (e.g. Harvey, 1996; Walsh, 2000; Glassman, 2002; McCarthy, 2005). Some (e.g. Featherstone, 2005; Routledge *et al.*, 2007; Routledge, 2008) have emphasised the relational construction of inter-local solidarities that develop into more global constellations, speaking directly or indirectly to the strategies of global networks within the broader 'movement of movements' at the height of anti-capitalism. Their relational perspective is of particular relevance to this research, since they tend to begin from place-based militant particularisms that are highly specific to their context, as discussed in the previous sub-section.

However, it is also important to interrogate whether jumping scale is necessarily the most desirable option at all. In the following paragraphs, I note that the scale-jumping debate tends not to focus sufficiently on the ways in which everyday life shapes the scales of political engagement. Instead, based on evidence from the empirical research in this thesis, I argue that we must foreground everyday life in our treatment of scale in

contentious politics. As discussed in chapter two, Gibson-Graham (2002; 2003) and others (e.g. De Filippis, 2001; Mackenzie, 2006) have argued in favour of a politics of the local, rejecting the desirability or efficacy of 'upward' scalar movement. Gibson-Graham critiques the power of the singular, monolithic discourse of globalised capitalism, and points to the diversity of local economic practices, many of which operate outside the traditional capitalist relations of production. Instead of fighting global capitalism with global resistance, she argues, we should look to local scale examples of noncapitalist economies to "resubjectivise" ourselves against the hegemonic and triumphalistic discourse of globalisation:

Globalisation appears to call for one form of politics – mobilisation and resistance on the global scale. But we believe there are other ways of practicing transformative politics – involving an opening to the local as a place of political creativity and innovation... The form of politics we are pursuing is not transmitted via mass organisation, but through language and a set of practices. (Gibson-Graham, 2002: 53)

On a related note, Cox (1998; cf. Glassman, 2002) notes how the scale at which we are dependent on certain material provisions is often different to the corresponding scale of political engagement. As such, the notion that scaling up somehow equals 'powering up' is a misnomer. Gibson-Graham even suggests that scaling *down* is the answer. Contrary to Gibson-Graham, this research shows how 'mass organisation' and multiple scales of engagement can be useful in the enactment of transformative politics. However, following Gibson-Graham's lead, I contend that the proliferation of radical practices need not only be considered in terms of extension and expansion in the scalar sense.

Success-as-outcome (end) and success-as-process (means) are virtually indistinguishable within an ideal-type anarchist praxis, since an anarchist approach to means and ends emphasises the inseparability of the two (Franks, 2006). This suggests that the way in which activists can relate

small-scale, everyday activities to broader contemporary socio-economic dynamics and their role in political struggle can also be understood in terms of the opening-up of new opportunities to broaden and deepen the terrains of struggle *in place*, without shifting between scales. Indeed, from Featherstone's relational perspective, it can be convincingly argued that the deepening of autonomous and prefigurative practices and relations in place can have profound effects on other places and times without a conscious effort to 'spread' elsewhere.

Much of the research contained in these pages centres on the ways in which everyday, usually place-based experiences, practices and relations play a pivotal role in shaping political imaginations and agencies. Earlier chapters on both social centres and the IWW show how both are seeking to develop similar forms of autonomous social relations between people at the grassroots. Surely, then, the long-term habituation of radical political praxis into the everyday must also be an important element in assessing the efficacy of groups and projects. Much of the recent shift of emphasis concerning what is 'valuable' activity among many anarchists, from spectacular global convergences towards mundane local outreach, seems to confirm the assertion that scale-jumping – or, at least, certain forms of scale-jumping – should not be fetishised as inherently 'better' than a deepening of emancipatory practices embedded in places. Thus, efficacy in generalising radical prefigurative practices and relations *across* space is not the only way in which we can understand the geography of success. If the anarchist project is to be realised in a way that can genuinely challenge the global power of capital and (supra-)national forms of governance, it must be *extensively* generalised across local and regional contexts, but deepening anarchist/ic organisation and relations *intensively* must also be emphasised as a major factor in the ongoing revolutionising of everyday life.

Nevertheless, fetishisation of the local is as dangerous as fetishisation of the global. Rather than fall into this trap, a more nuanced understanding can arise from the study of everyday political organising. As we have seen, the IWW in particular operates primarily through a synergy of traditional scalar,

formal organisational structures, and non-scalar network forms. Activists involved in the London construction workers branch, National Blood Service campaign and the Showroom Cinema dispute adopted strategies that mobilised networks of activists in place and across space through interpersonal connections, as well as through the formal scales of democratic and organisational structures of the union. This suggests that there is another way to look at the scale debate. This way sees the everyday contours of capital, intersected with the everyday contours of social practices, as the terrain on which scales of organising rest. The importance of the local is not that it is 'local' as such – conceived, perhaps, as the antithesis of the global *à la* Gibson-Graham – but that it is the primary terrain of everyday sociality, and therefore also the primary terrain of capital circulation and reproduction, social control and – crucially – emancipatory politics. The optimal scale of organising is therefore whatever scale correlates with these everyday processes. In this sense, Dyck (2005: 242) agrees that

attention to the scale of the everyday – in its various guises – is not merely an interest in the 'local' but a valuable methodological entrée to understanding processes operating at a variety of interlocking scales.

In terms of anarchist/ic politics, usually the “scale of the everyday” would tend to correlate with the local scale, since it is usually at this scale where grassroots political subjectivities and agencies are developed through ongoing place-based experiences and interactions. Of course, in some cases, radical groups may decide to jump scale in order to disrupt or leverage the everyday flows of certain external actors. IWW members at the Harlsbury NBS plant decided that jumping scale to the national level – to transpose their local struggle to a campaign covering the UK as a whole through IWW networks and formal structures such as the NBSAC – would be more effective in the long term, while also retaining a focus on the local scale of the workplace in their everyday organising. However, activists elsewhere approached media sources at a broader scale in order to raise

awareness of impending cuts since their everyday experience was not rooted in NBS workplaces themselves. To them, as supporters of the campaign external to the workplaces affected, the priority was to build pressure among those donating and receiving blood. These different scalar approaches were direct responses to the organisational geography of everyday Blood Service operations.

Thus, the way we frame politics as a lived, everyday phenomenon, and the emphasis on which we place different everyday, residual, practices and institutions as contributing to certain forms of politics, profoundly influences the spaces and scales of political engagement. Everyday life's refusal to conform to a single scale in all contexts – linked as it is to the multiscalar circulations and reproductions of capital, as well as multi-scale governance and the effects of diaspora and transnational communities – may allow radical projects to 'ride' these circulations, making ongoing, strategic choices according to those scales at which the target for organising (employer, property developer, loan shark, fascist organisation, landlord, and so on) is most vulnerable.

In the case of the social centres, their key political priorities were located at the scale of the neighbourhood, since their landlords and potential allies and participants likewise operated and circulated chiefly at this scale. Social centres tap into these everyday circulations and socialities when embedding themselves into certain places. For them, the local or neighbourhood scale is prioritised as the appropriate scalar focus for the development of radical forms of community politics.

Usually, the scale of everyday practice is local, but we must not preclude other scales where necessary. Operating at a workplace scale allowed Showroom cinema workers to organise as the *de facto* union, tracing the micro-level everyday interactions of workers to build membership and take action. In their efforts to pressurise management into recognising the union, activists from around the UK cut off management communications channels during a telephone and email 'blockade', while local IWW activists physically

turned away customers at the picket line outside the cinema. This multi-scalar action specifically targeted and severed the different scales of everyday circulation of capital and processes of communication and decision-making that were the life-blood of the business, thus wielding significant disruptive force without striking.

The question remains, however, as to how groups can jump scale where necessary. While the labour market conditions in the UK make union organisation at Starbucks pioneered by the IWW in the USA very difficult<sup>45</sup>, the transferral of knowledges, experiences and skills from the IWW Starbucks Workers Union in the USA to the UK has directly aided organisation efforts at care homes and printing shops. In turn, national-level campaigning concerning cuts to the National Blood Service in the UK has inspired the development of organising and campaigning strategies on a national level in the USA among truckers and bicycle couriers. Thus, the global exchange of knowledges is closely linked to everyday organisational practices.

While the activities of a social centre only directly affect the locality in which it is based, the tactics and strategies implemented in their campaigning can inspire, practically assist or stand as a warning to others elsewhere. As we have seen, through their networking practices during the life of a social centre, or in moving to other places or projects, social centre activists transfer their knowledges and experiences to other times and places. In this respect, the widespread lack of written documentation and autocritique of these experiences on paper or online within the UK social centre milieu is concerning. The informal, selective, and largely verbal transferral of traditions and knowledges between centres substantially reduces the potential for connections, debates and interchanges between centres operating in different times and places.

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<sup>45</sup> This difficulty lies primarily in the turnover of staff at Starbucks. In the USA and Canada, many Starbucks workers work for years at a time, whereas most UK-based Starbucks workers tend to stay for a few months, before moving to other stores, employment or education.

Alone, scalar approaches to understanding the geographies of the IWW and social centres cannot account for their autonomous constitution and development of spatial strategy. Conceptualising a “scale of the everyday” (Dyck, 2005), however, allows us to understand the limitations of both globalist and localist approaches to radical praxis. Neither the IWW nor social centres adhere exclusively to one particular scale or scalar dynamic – of scaling ‘up’ or ‘down’ – to effect political change in the spaces where they operate. Instead, a careful and immanent understanding of their targets’ everyday processes and the intersections of multiple social, cultural and political phenomena in place allows a multiscale approach that relies primarily on developing everyday “terrains” of struggle (Routledge, 1996b) in order to trace spatial dynamics in practice. The flexibility afforded to these groups through their autonomous self-organisation is clearly a central element of their deployment of this strategy. However, the way in which they do this is varied, bringing up questions concerning what these multiple spatial strategies mean to how we perceive and enact struggle. The next sub-section considers these questions.

### **Loose networks or formal structures? Both, please!**

Relational forces are dynamic and always in development, just as anarchist/ic prefigurative praxis refuses to define a singular, fixed revolution as an end-point. Although scholars have often understood networks to be the obvious organisational structure of this type of anti-authoritarian radical politics, based on relational growth between nodes in the network, the findings of this research suggest that formal organisational structures at a range of scales should not be precluded so hastily as means of furthering political goals. In many cases – most notably in the USA at Starbucks and among cycle couriers – local IWW organising has spread organically to different branches through relational dynamics, encouraged and facilitated by activists in those localities involved in various bodies of the union connecting via these formally constituted bodies. In this sense, relational networking can be facilitated through formal structures.

When considering relational politics, then, it is crucial to ensure that geographers do not assume that relationality necessarily thrives through a certain organisational form. Featherstone (2008) argues that the approach of socialist parties and Internationals in the past closed down opportunities for the formation of heterogeneous associations and solidarities. In response, he proposes that we should develop networked, relational forms of internationalism and eschew formally constituted global formations. However, this is more of an indictment of party hierarchies than of formal organisation, and global IWW structures are specifically designed to support and facilitate the kinds of heterogeneous (inter)local organising at the grassroots that Featherstone proposes. Moreover, this often operates as a hybrid system of both formal and networked organisation. Even among social centres, where much of the everyday organisation takes place informally and *ad hoc* within place-based networks, activities are still channelled through formal democratic structures in order to ensure a level of accountability.

The seemingly simple assertion that formal organisations can facilitate and work in unison with networks challenges a relatively major element of assumed knowledge about networks, especially concerning radical politics and social movements. As noted in chapter two, there appears to be a trend among radical social scientists to posit a simplistic division between (new, horizontal, good) networks and (old, vertical, bad) organisations. The basis of future research and activism is at stake in this division since, if we understand a particular form of organisation as inherently 'better' than another, we risk excluding possibilities for radical practices and relations that might otherwise flourish. Routledge *et al* (2008: 186-7) summarise this divide very clearly:

[I]n the more traditional movements (e.g. political parties, trade unions, etc), a 'verticalist' logic of modernity predominates, where organisations display hierarchical structures, with a recognised leadership...From a horizontalist perspective, a network model points to the need to generate spaces in which



people can interact to mutual benefit... [Networks] are conceived as being more fluid, decentralised and participatory, disavowing traditional roles of leadership and supporters.

Routledge *et al* in fact continue to outline a number of problems with networks, especially the fact that networks themselves often have distinct and negative unspoken hierarchies, but rarely in the literature do radical geographers investigate formal organisations as potential examples of decentralisation, participation and grassroots control (for a notable exception, see Chatterton, 2005). This thesis has analysed two such forms of organisation that, while facilitating and linking into networks, also operate through formal organisational structures at scales ranging from global to neighbourhood, and that are enacted specifically to facilitate liberatory praxis, relations and agency.

I do not wish to suggest that scholars do not believe that it is possible to create such spatial strategies, however. What is necessary is to pick up Nicholls' (2009) and Leitner *et al*'s (2008) call to understand different spatialities as always in interaction with one another. Clearly, one factor of success in political groups and social movements is the applicability of the organisational form to the context in which that organisation operates. The previous two chapters have discussed in depth how the open-ended flexibility that self-organised autonomous strategy allows makes adaptation to context all the more possible, even if it comes with difficulties and an ever-present level of fragility. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, the multiple spatialities utilised by the IWW and social centres in their political practices are ascribed a level of utility according to the extent to which they are applicable to the geography of their target. In turn, the organisational form utilised by a group must likewise be appropriate to the task at hand. Networks are excellent vehicles for mobilising a diverse range of dispersed, independent subjects around particular events or issues, while formal structures allow for organisational continuity and stability in cases where the collective body must be responsible for, and accountable to, the individuals or groups which it claims to look after. The autonomous principle of self-

management allows for a level of flexibility in this regard, whereby neither the IWW nor social centres are tied exclusively to a single mode of organisation, and therefore a single spatial strategy.

As an organisation with long-term goals and strategies, and one that must be highly aware of the precariousness of its members in their organising activities, the IWW utilises a formal organisational strategy that ensures accountability, stability and continuity. However, in many instances, IWW members also utilise networked forms of organisation alongside or independent of its formal structures in order to mobilise around particular grievances or goals and connect disparate struggles or individuals. Although their activities were the least successful of the IWW campaigns considered in this research, the London IWW construction workers branch did precisely this, with their use of formal IWW structures to support the development of a network of militants in the local industry. Likewise, social centres rely heavily on place-based social networks for their strength and resources, but also cannot function properly without some level of ongoing institutionalised practices to ensure security of the building and effective campaigning practices. Thus, the distinction between networked and formal structures needs to lie not in a simplistic divide between formalist-vertical and networked-horizontal logics of organising across space (a divide that, incidentally, also implies a linear progressivist view of history), but through a practical and tactical division between forms and spatialities of mobilisation that require a networking logic and those that require a formalist one. Indeed, groups such as the IWW and social centres engage in *both* of these logics in different contexts, at different scales, and for different purposes. In many cases, they enact both organisational logics simultaneously.

Following from this critique of existing approaches to the divide between networked and formal spatial strategy, an alternative means of understanding the politics of organisational structures lies simply in the recognition that organisation is a tool. It is a means of expressing and enacting certain political principles in certain everyday contexts. If we reconceptualise political organisation in the sense of applicability to context,

cross-fertilised with certain principles, we can begin to build an understanding of organisation that necessarily acknowledges the specificity of the political in different spaces and places and different terrains of struggle. In redrawing these lines, I hope to situate the IWW and social centres as just two of many examples of radical groups and initiatives that utilise a range of formal and networked organisational structures and logics. They retain the same political principles throughout, but these principles can be manifested in different ways. Both networked and formal organisational structures can be, for example, charged with direct democracy, but it is simply articulated and practiced differently. Organisation, after all, is only a “pattern of human relations” (Neilson and Rossiter, 2006: 397), and its purpose is to pattern human relations in a way that is effective at achieving its goals and that reflects the agreed principles of its participants.

The recognition of the differing ways in which radical principles can be applied to different organisational structures and practices leads us to *prefiguration*, a key theme in the thesis. The articulation and mobilisation of certain political principles, as we have seen, is far from straightforward. If prefigurative politics can be enacted in a number of different ways, then what are the challenges and opportunities for this form of politics in practice? The next section discusses precisely these tensions and possibilities in prefigurative organisations.

## **PREFIGURING FUTURE WORLDS**

We have seen how the radical left-libertarian organisational practices and structures of the IWW and social centres strive to produce spatialities that are conducive to prefiguring possible libertarian communist worlds in the present. This is the topic of the third research question, and this third substantive section of the chapter. IWW and social centres’ everyday implementation of particular spatial strategies also suggests an unorthodox approach that sheds new light on established debates in geography. This

final section considers the geography of prefiguration, and what it can tell us about such efforts to create a revolutionary politics of everyday life in practice. Prefigurative practice is an elusive subject, since it inhabits the micro-politics of interpersonal relations, macro-level global strategy, and all else between. By drawing together threads from other sections of this and other chapters, and briefly discussing the internal and external relations of the groups, I build an image of prefiguration that is powerful, unpredictable, rooted in the everyday, and always developing over time and across space.

### **The (im)possibility of prefiguration**

Throughout the thesis, I have emphasised prefiguration as a broad term, noting how the IWW and social centres have sought to enact a variety of practices that prefigure envisioned future worlds, sometimes according to differing understandings of what prefiguration involves. Throughout, it is clear that there is geographical and organisational unevenness between different elements and spaces of prefiguration among the groups studied. It is therefore worth critically considering the extent of prefiguration taking place within the groups, and what this means for the broader project of prefigurative politics.

The key differentiation between, say, intentional communities and the case studies of this research is that their respective forms of prefiguration are located differently. Whereas the former seek to create a relatively self-enclosed community politics as a small-scale example of living in a particular way (see Sargisson and Sargent, 2004), the latter deliberately embed themselves into existing spaces and matrices of power, politics and economy in order to develop projects that are purposefully connected to the capitalist and hierarchical political environment around them. These starkly differing spatial strategies illustrate the ways in which we cannot assume prefiguration of the same principles to be manifested in the same, or even similar, ways. Despite strong *political* similarities between the IWW and social centres, the two manifest their politics differently due to a range of factors based on their spaces of organising and cultural attachment to

certain political traditions. Indeed, as we have seen, even *within* particular groups there are differing understandings and enactments of prefiguration.

For example, the branch autonomy that is instituted into the IWW's organisation is perceived as a democratising measure designed to empower workers to self-organise without centralised direction. However, this local autonomy makes it very difficult to effectively co-ordinate between places. This was a key problem leading to the creation of the national Action Committee during the NBS campaign. In response, the NBS Action Committee became rather overbearing and sometimes pushed lay members too hard. As such, efforts to create a co-ordinated campaign to build workers' power in the NBS – itself a prefigurative strategy towards workers' self-management – created tensions between the Action Committee and the highly decentralised organisational structure of the union.

Another example is the IWW's system of industrial classification of members, which seeks to prefigure the organisational structures of a future global economy run by and for the workers, without bosses (see figure, below). This has received a great deal of criticism due to its stark industrial boundaries and generalisations that do not reflect the specificities of certain industries. For example the General, Legal and Financial Office Workers Industrial Union No. 650 incorporates charity workers, civil servants, financial workers, and other diverse workers whose industries, working practices and conditions are in fact very different. In seeking to enact a prefigurative politics through its industrial structure, the IWW is arguably negating its own project by seeking to impose upon all workers in all places a single framework for industrial organisation.



Fig. XVI: IWW Industrial Wheel, c. 1930.<sup>46 47</sup>

This uneven and sometimes contradictory nature of prefigurative practices in the IWW is mirrored by similar examples among social centres. The highly participatory and networked organisational structures of the Vortex and HSC, although premised on principles of direct participation and the creation of solidaristic forms of interaction, were vulnerable to clique control and often had poor lines of accountability. Chapter five outlined how some HSC activists in particular felt that a lack of structure was in itself a revolutionary, prefigurative act, in refusing solidified power structures and encouraging free association and grassroots interdependence. This

<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting the different emphases placed on the industries in the wheel. Manufacturing and extractive industries are prominent, while Transportation (500) and Public Service (600) are depicted as running through the others; as connecting and facilitating them.

<sup>47</sup> Each number represents a specific industry within the six broader 'departments' of Agriculture, Mining, Construction, Manufacture, Transport and Public Service. For example, the Shipbuilders Industrial Union No. 320, in the bottom right-hand quarter of the wheel, is the IWW union for workers in the shipbuilding industry.

inadvertently fuelled other problems within the HSC, and established a clear yet unspoken leadership among the permanent residents of the social centre. Similarly, as I have also noted previously, the informal, networked modes of knowledge and experience transferral between centres can – although emphasising decentralisation and grassroots knowledges – distort, undermine or impede other prefigurative principles such as voluntary skill-sharing, mutual aid and trust.

Thus, the groups studied, and no doubt others, are in a position where certain forms of prefiguration can in fact disrupt or negate prefigurative practices elsewhere in the same group. Indeed, Featherstone (2008: 35) makes the point that there are many “different outcomes that the coming together of multiple routes of political activity can produce”. The coming together of different subjectively- and selectively-translated knowledges to social centres is an excellent example of this.

Lefebvre (2002 [1968]) noted that, since everyday life incorporates a totality of relationships, attempts to change only a single aspect of it are deeply problematic. If we take this position, prefiguration seems to require a total refusal of the capitalist everyday, not in terms of somehow running away from it, but – much like the anarchists and autonomists – by the waging of total and constant war against all currents of capitalism running through it. This raises the question of when, how, or indeed *if* any group could ever be truly prefigurative, since some prefigurative practices appear to impede or contradict others. It appears from this research that it simply is not possible to create a ‘fully’ prefigurative project (whatever that may be), precisely because different prefigurative practices or structures influence one another in not always positive or predictable ways. This begs a further question, in light of the ‘impossibility’ of prefiguration, of how we ought to understand and operate within prefigurative frameworks, and how to relate to the particular conditions affecting what may or may not be ‘possible’. While neither the IWW nor social centres give us many concrete answers to how we might practically address this question, the findings of this research do provide some clues as to how we can make sense of it.

As has been discussed previously, revolutionary activity for anarchist/ic groups and individuals is necessarily a processual endeavour. It is generally recognised that ‘the’ revolution will never end, and that revolutionary movements must undertake a constant process of learning and adaptation over time and across space. Utopia is an ideal that will never quite be achieved, in much the same way that an exponential curve will never quite become exactly vertical or horizontal, and this is precisely what gives utopia its power. This rather ‘DIY’ philosophy of learning-by-doing and revolutionising everyday life through practice suggests that we must re-imagine what prefigurative politics is like. If we can never quite achieve that which we strive for, then how can we ever expect to achieve prefigurative politics anyway, let alone actual revolution? This superficially depressing question – the same question with which John Holloway (2002) ended his Autonomia-inspired *magnus opus* – can in fact open up the possible to myriad new political forms that are yet to be created. As the anarchist-influenced autonomist Stephen Shukaitis (2009: 208) argues, we must seek and emphasise

forms of organising focusing on relationality and social relations themselves..., and their importance, particularly for the constant renewal of the radical imagination.

Perhaps, then, this impossibility is in fact the whole point of prefigurative politics. Shukaitis echoes Lefebvre’s dialectic of the “possible-impossible” (see Elden, 2004) that operates as a dynamic tension between that which is ‘possible’ within a capitalist framework and the future world we wish to create which is deemed ‘impossible’ by the powers that be. This requires a political imagination that refuses spatio-temporally bounded understandings of the possible and to, literally, *demand the impossible*.

Nevertheless, geography mediates the impacts of prefigurative politics by closing down or opening up possibilities to develop truly emancipatory spaces and practices in a specific context. Thus, when thinking about



prefiguration and its (im)possibilities, we must also think about what is most appropriate for which context. This requires an intimate understanding of the spaces and places in which a group organises. For example, a branch of IWW members at a university in the Midlands organised a series of self-organised women's self defence classes after a number of violent attacks on women in the local area, seeking at once to reach out to non-IWW workers and develop a sense of collectivity, self-help and community among women at the workplace. These classes were successful precisely because of the local context of gendered violence. Likewise, the Vortex parent and baby group, discussed in chapter five, would not have had as much social and political relevance to people in Stoke Newington had it been an area with an average or below average proportion of young families. Their prefigurative effort – to develop a participatory, self-organised form of libertarian childcare – was structured by the social centre's local context, and the material spaces of the centre itself. Geography thus influences the efficacy of prefiguration, and the ways in which it can be implemented.

Relatedly, the development of prefigurative practices and strategies requires attention to the conditions and experiences of everyday life. Put simply, if people wish to live in a particular way – to prefigure a world they wish to see come into being – then they must integrate it into their everyday actions and interactions. When considering modes of organising that specifically seek to engage with others circulating in the same places and spaces as themselves, this integration with everyday life must also take place in relation to others, precisely as Shukaitis, above, suggests. Indeed, taking a collectivist, anarchist reading of autonomy, it is essential that everyday relations with others are foregrounded throughout. Emma Goldman (2004 [1917]: 13) makes this explicit:

As to methods: Anarchism is not, as some may suppose, a theory of the future to be realised through divine inspiration. It is a living force in the affairs of life, constantly creating new conditions.

Our everyday interactions with one another in the “affairs of life” are what drive social change. Lefebvre’s (2002 [1961]: 236) Marxist perspective confirms Goldman’s assertion, explicitly emphasising the importance of relations to broader revolutionary projects:

The relations between human beings – groups and individuals – are obviously part of praxis... Social groups, notably classes, are simultaneously productive forces and social forces.

Here, these anarchist and Marxist perspectives converge in agreement over the centrality of everyday relations to radical politics: *social and productive relations are where struggle and social transformation originate and are enacted*. The im/possible task of prefiguration – to accurately and successfully prefigure future non-capitalist, non-statist worlds in all aspects of everyday life – now becomes more possible with this revelation that prefiguration is located in relations.

If we understand prefiguration as a project to develop certain proto-revolutionary forms of social relations (usually located in or between places), then prefigurative politics can be articulated and manifested in a far wider range of forms and spaces than one might expect. The next section explores the development of such relations, through a short discussion of decision-making practices in social centres and the IWW, and how an understanding of the different forms of conflict can support the development of prefigurative politics.

### **Prefigurative relations**

Throughout this research there has been discussion of the way in which activists interact with each other and ‘external’ actors. One key area in which activists attempt to forge prefigurative relations is through their enactment of certain democratic practices, and these practices can shed light on efforts to develop prefigurative relations. Decision-making processes in the IWW and social centres are imbued deeply with their

various historical traditions, however, generating distinct forms of democracy. The IWW's long history in the labour movement involves a rather formalist democratic process, which is enshrined in the union's constitution and accepted norms. In some respects, it is a relatively standard majoritarian system, with clear procedures and lines of accountability and responsibility. In others, it involves more horizontalist practices such as encouraging 'minority reports' and seeking consensus where possible instead of moving to a vote automatically. Social centres, heavily influenced by environmental direct action and radical feminist traditions, operate through more flexible and consensus-based decision-making structures, emphasising individual freedom and remaining wary of all but the most basic institutional structures. Similarly, while the IWW's relatively steady, long-term temporal flow allows for long processes of accountability, formal voting and deliberation, the short-term, intense nature of many social centres requires a form of decision-making that is based on ongoing everyday needs and issues. The IWW usually has the luxury of time to formulate policy and strategy, whereas social centres often must act with a day's notice, or less.

These different contexts, and the distances over which the groups must operate, clearly configure relations differently between participants, and between the group and external actors. The corporeal, territorial immediacy of social centre activism requires activists to work very closely together in a confined time-space, often forging very strong bonds, or exacerbating already-existing tensions, between individuals. On the other hand, IWW members are often dispersed and have little regular face-to-face connection relative to social centre activism. Thus the spatiality of activism in the two groups necessarily influences how relations are forged and maintained. Differing forms of participation are also developed, according to divisions of labour within the groups and the personal priorities of individuals working on certain projects according to what they deem as the best use of their time.

However, the way these relations are structured appears very similar, as groups whose politics – and therefore also practices – are based upon

confrontational struggle between opposing interests. Both the IWW and social centres operate on this basis, refusing the legitimacy of their class opponents. Also, of course, there is disagreement between activists. As we have seen, the flexible and contestable borderlands of the groups create tensions that produce certain dynamics and identities that shift with changes of context and membership, closely following the contours of the spaces and places in which the groups are based. It means that conflict and disagreement are ever-present factors in the decision-making process. For the libertarian left, participatory and direct democracy is a benchmark for facilitating emancipatory and prefigurative space, and therefore has an especially profound centrality to prefigurative politics (Graeber, 2009).

While disagreement within political groups is inevitable, the nature of that disagreement is embroiled in a recognition of common goals and closely linked to co-operative practices that also involve disagreement and sometimes conflict. Chantal Mouffe (2000) makes a distinction between 'agonism' and 'antagonism' in democratic systems that helps us to understand how relations are constituted within radical, prefigurative groups. Agonistic conflict takes place between those who, although they disagree, share common ground and are prepared to accept the other's position as legitimate. Antagonism, on the other hand, is a disagreement between enemies who perceive the other's position as *illegitimate*. Seen in the context of discussions in earlier chapters concerning the significance of bordering and territory, this distinction can be understood as approximating to relations of difference between members or those eligible for membership (agonistic; including political allies and external groups and individuals whose politics are different but who would potentially work on common campaigns), and those ineligible for membership (antagonistic; including members of the ruling or bourgeois classes such as politicians, employers, landlords, high ranking civil servants, and so on). It paints a powerful picture of how (in this case, class) membership mediates relations between individuals on an organisational level. Although there will necessarily be differences of opinion between members of a certain social centre collective or IWW branch, there is a mutual recognition that these disagreements do

not represent fundamentally opposing interests; rather, they are moral, philosophical or – more frequently – tactical differences.

The interactions between the groups studied and external organisations and individuals have been explored in previous chapters. I have argued that their relations are fundamentally rooted in interpersonal connections that minimise the possibility of inter-organisational conflict, but also require very careful negotiation of positionality within broader radical and activist networks. Geographers have been increasingly careful to note that simple *encounters* are unable to enact the kinds of connections that are required for solidaristic or civic relations to flourish (see Amin, 2002; Valentine, 2008), but the ongoing social networking that takes place within workplaces, neighbourhoods or radical milieux, provides opportunities to develop more meaningful relations. Strategic mobilisation of interpersonal affinities in spite of potential group conflict can deploy the sort of informal and shifting solidarities that echo networked systems of solidarity (Cumbers *et al.*, 2008a) while retaining the benefits of formal organisational structures and the resources and stability that they bring with them. Nevertheless, negotiation of such complex terrains can be fraught with difficulties, as we have seen.

Mouffe and others, particularly Ernesto Laclau (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001), have developed a vision of democracy – a central element in the prefigurative politics of both social centres and the IWW – that “places the question of power and antagonism at its very centre” (Mouffe, 2000: 13), and therefore also *relations*. Mouffe argues that forms of democracy premised on the idea that competing interests can always find a consensus or middle ground are fundamentally flawed. The pluralist vision of a liberal democratic system that agglomerates all viewpoints into a single compromise shirks the fact that there are sometimes irreconcilable differences, as espoused by Marxists and anarchists alike. Instead, Mouffe proposes a form of “radical democracy” that embraces, makes space for and encourages (agonistic) conflict, rather than denying its existence whatsoever. She asserts that

[t]o make room for dissent and to foster the institutions in which it can be manifested is vital... An “agonistic” approach acknowledges the real nature of its frontiers and the forms of exclusion that they entail (2000: 17).

Geographers, too, have taken up this issue. Barnett (2004) and Featherstone (2008) both argue that Mouffe’s approach closes down the importance of solidarities and affinities to democratic practices. This is an important argument, although it is more closely related to Laclau and Mouffe’s far broader project of what they call “radical democracy” that systematises antagonism and agonism as the central elements of democracy. However, such debates are beyond the remit of this specific discussion. Featherstone (2004; 2007) also takes issue with Laclau and Mouffe’s (2001) characterisation of democracy and argues that their work fails to fully grasp the geography of antagonism. His view is that the spatial characteristics of conflict expose it as something that is always shifting and re-negotiating actors’ terms of engagement, and is therefore also partly constitutive of political identity. His analysis thus also finds merit in antagonism as well as agonism, referring to the earlier, more explicitly Marxist work of Laclau and Mouffe. He notes that

[r]ather than engaging with how antagonisms are constituted through political practices and are part of the ongoing constitution of political identities, [Mouffe wrongly] suggests that there are full identities to be produced that relations of antagonism make impossible... Thinking antagonisms spatially... allows them to be seen as dynamic, mobile, and as bearing on the ongoing formation of heterogeneous associations. (Featherstone, 2007: 295-296)

The notions of agonistic and antagonistic conflict are useful for discussions of prefigurative relations. They challenge us to think of conflict not as the outcome of a democratic system, but as an already-existing relation embedded within the political agency actively *producing* that system within

particular spatial contexts. The couplet of ant/agonism can therefore be seen as a way of framing conflict that emphasises the way agency is imbued with differing forms of conflict. It asks us to embrace conflict as an important dynamic within and between groups that can drive practices forward in new ways. Relations of ant/agonism can therefore be important elements of a prefigurative politics based on anarchist/ic principles, alongside more obvious practices of co-operation, solidarity and mutual aid.

The ant/agonistic democratic model that I draw from Laclau and Mouffe can be understood as one that is premised on the seemingly contradictory, but surprisingly complimentary, principles of self-empowerment, openness and conflict. Throughout, the central theme that draws these differing principles together is the development of certain forms of relations in differing contexts. This is exhibited in chapters four and five, in which IWW and social centre activists mobilised certain relations in particular ways according to the purposes of their agitation. IWW members utilised interpersonal relations and shared histories to circumvent possible inter-organisational conflicts, whereas social centre activists constructed networked relations through their ongoing interactions and skill-sharing practices. This also opens up the question of how democratic spaces of agonistic conflict, as seen in social centres and the IWW, relate to the broader antagonistic relations of which they are a part.

Conflict can seep and shift between the internal (agonistic) dynamics of a particular group or movement and its (antagonistic) relation to external political opponents (in various contexts, see for e.g. Giordano *et al.*, 2002; Creed, 2008; French, 2008; Gleditsch *et al.*, 2008). If we look back at the contested and shifting borders of the groups studied, it is possible to view the production and dynamics of internal democratic spaces as connected to the production and dynamics of external antagonism. For example, debates and conflicts within the IWW tended to be framed within the broader conditions of, and approaches to, struggle, and – conversely – ‘external’ conditions of society are approached partly in terms of their relation to how the IWW operates and organises itself internally (such as through its system

of numerical industrial classification). Different understandings of the nature of struggle, tradition, and the structural needs of the IWW led to different opinions concerning how the IWW ought to be organised to maximise its capacities among construction workers in London. Conversely, debates concerning the practices and principles of the IWW inclined the National Blood Service campaign towards particular forms and modes of struggle and action against NBS management.

This discussion of agency and conflict helps us to understand the spaces of decision-making in social centres and the IWW, and their place in a left-libertarian prefigurative organisation in general. Libertarian organisation, being contestable and participatory by design, produces spaces of and for this contestation through emphasising horizontal democratic processes and practices. This means that these spaces are an integral part of the democratic fabric of the group. Without them – without spaces to productively facilitate contestation as agonistic conflict – these groups would lose part of their appeal as libertarian structures to collectively develop prefigurative relations and practices. A lack of these spaces would also deeply affect the way in which struggle is understood and practiced, risking the potency of their capacities as progressive, re-territorialised spaces for the development of constituent agency. Thus some level of conflict is also another facet of the unending process of revolutionising everyday life as both means and ends. Anarchist/ic prefigurative democracy is not designed to present a perfect, ordered and complete image of itself. Indeed, as the previous section argued, this is in fact an impossible task. Instead, it challenges participants to become part of the process of honing democratic practices over time, always striving to remain self-critical and self-organised. It is inherently complex and at times volatile, but this vulnerability is generated out of a real attempt to generate participatory spaces and spatialities.

Agonistic and antagonistic conflict is sustained partly through practices of physical or other forms of bordering. The IWW undertook bordering practices through its rigorously-enforced and hotly-contested membership



criteria, while social centres also bordered through territorial demarcation and defence of the buildings in which they were housed. Coupled, crucially, with the creation of spaces of contestation around the borderlands of groups, bordering provides these radical projects with a base for creating self-affirming collective identities. These autonomously-produced collective identities propose to conform neither to (the established orthodoxy of) strict Marxist class theory nor to (the equally established orthodoxy of) the pluralist cross-class approach of liberalism. Instead, identity is produced through the multiple subjectivities of the membership and their contestation at the margins of the group, alongside a contextually-sensitive understanding of class relations in a specific place. Previous chapters have shown how both the IWW and social centres negotiate and re-negotiate the criteria for membership and participation and, in so doing, seek to build their membership according to how class politics is applied in the particular spaces in which they organise. This process of constant negotiation and contestation produces a complex, fragile organisation form, however, and can become volatile if not negotiated carefully. It also links with previous discussions of the benefits and drawbacks of bottom-up anarchist knowledge production and hints towards a profoundly anarchistic form of class analysis that remains militant and confrontational but is necessarily decentred and changing between times, places and subjectivities.

The significance of ant/agonistic spatial strategies, such as bordering, to the development of prefigurative relations is their emphasis on negotiation, practices of inclusion and exclusion, and the way in which agonism encourages certain understandings of interpersonal relationships to develop. In this sense, the internal contradictions of prefiguration are tensions that can be used to negotiate, renegotiate and develop such relations over time and across space. This is precisely why continuity over time – be it organisational continuity, spatial continuity, or continuity of knowledge transfer – is so important in the development of materially useful and politically radical prefigurative praxes. It is therefore not surprising that a major criticism of squatted social centres is their short lifespan, and their failure to build lasting relationships.

## Habituating radical politics, in spite of it all

In the face of “colonising” (Lefebvre, 2002 [1961]) dynamics of capitalism, permeating virtually all scales and spaces of the social factory, having to struggle with the internal contradictions of prefigurative praxis is a difficult task. However, under the right conditions, groups such as the IWW and social centres are able to operate, and sometimes thrive, in this hostile environment, and much of this rests on the everyday nature of prefiguration. Prefigurative structures and practices as necessarily everyday phenomena – residing in the everyday relations of individuals with others – are closely linked to the *habitation* of radical politics into individual and collective everyday lives. Regular exposure to, and participation in, a certain *modus operandi* inevitably conditions the individual towards reproducing that particular way of living, relating and acting. Regular activity within or exposure to groups and practices that seek to prefigure future worlds, likewise, generates a situation in which the individual is more likely to continue to reproduce such prefigurative practices in the future. This assertion is supported by participants in both the IWW and social centres. For example, a member of London IWW branch argued that

we don't have militant unions any more because... the Thatcher years smashed that tradition of doing things in a particular way. [The IWW] need[s] to start it up from scratch in everything we do. (Sid, personal email to author, 22/3/2008)

Sid's statement suggests that habituation of operating in certain ways encourages the reproduction of those modes of acting. In turn, he suggests, the only way to change the habituation of negative ways of doing things is to imbue a different approach into everything that the union does. Adam, a Vortex activist, also noted that

radicalisation is a very long process – if we could have been there for 2, 3, 4 years, then that would be something, you know, you have to become, to constantly have active and

conscious struggle it has to become a habit. If it just goes on for just a few months we can't expect it to become a regular site of struggle... transient social centres are just for transient people. (Adam interview, 26/10/2008)

These quotations speak to previous sections concerning the crucial role of continuity and the development of positive relations as part of a broader project of prefiguration. Habituating radical politics through everyday praxis can also build resilience to the spectacle's dominance of space and relations, and arguably aids resistance to recuperation. Transposing radical praxis from the spectacular to the everyday, as we have seen, makes social interactions more accessible to radical, co-operative forms of sociality. At least in theory, then, a politics of everyday life will always be more sustainable in this sense than a politics that is rooted chiefly in counter-spectacle. Spectacular actions, comprising of comings-together and politically-charged encounters can be important elements in forging and sustaining a broader everyday strategy, but such actions alone do not involve the continuity over time necessary for habituation of certain practices. This begs the question, however, as to the extent to which the HSC, Vortex and the IWW truly made an effort to habituate their prefigurative politics.

The Hackney Social Centre, with widespread – albeit often inadvertent – disorganisation, exclusivity and lack of effectiveness, failed to fulfil its potential for a number of reasons outlined in the previous chapter. However, in terms of the current question of habituation, HSC activists could not be seen as failing to habituate their practices. Virtually all people who passed through the HSC building or participated in its collective were already part of existing HSC activists' social or political networks, and many were virtually full-time activists without jobs who dedicated their lives to particular causes. Within their own social networks, they were very effective at mobilising people around the HSC as part of a radical way of life. On the other hand, the HSC also appeared to have a rapidly diminishing ability to engage with the local socio-political conditions that were so well identified by the

collective when the building was first occupied. The collective was ghettoised and, in a sense, activists at the HSC were in fact *over*-habituated into their activist roles, so much so that they became alienated from the everyday conditions and experiences of their surroundings.

Whatever the specific reasons for this ghettoisation – which were predominantly entangled within the structural problems of the collective – it raises important points. Although the habituation of solidarity and mutual aid – arguably the two key principles of anarchist praxis – *within* the collective and its associated social networks was widespread and highly socialised into everyday life, activists were crucially not well connected *beyond* these social and activist circles. This entrenchment of what some have called the “activist mentality” (e.g. Anon., 1999c) creates essentialist divisions between ‘activist’ and ‘public’ subjectivities and spatialities, and is part of a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusivity and ghettoisation that is hard to break. As Chatterton (2006: 269-270) explains, “presupposing the rigidity of social roles, of us and them, expert and bystander, blinds us to the possibilities of common ground which surrounds us”. Although *exclusions* undertaken by groups can be productive in developing radical confrontational collective identities, *exclusivity* precludes connection between activists and the “others” with whom they might otherwise find common ground.

Thus the form of everyday habituation practised by radical prefigurative groups must be oriented towards autonomy in its anarchist sense, rejecting isolationist forms of autonomy in favour of the practice and promotion of collective self-organisation beyond the boundaries of the collective itself. This strategy is certainly not easy, and I have briefly shown in chapter five how emotional sustainability in particular is a problem with any such project. Despite a framework that is based on equity between means and ends, the danger of ‘burnout’ is sadly and systematically ignored in many cases, bringing into question how an agonistic system might practically deal with questions of emotional wellbeing. However this is a question for elsewhere. The crucial issue for the purposes of this research is the way prefigurative politics are inherently linked to the way everyday space is conceived and

shaped. Prefiguration does not rest upon the 'purest' form of politics, but on a willingness to develop spatialities that nurture the production of everyday relations based on a certain set of principles in relation to a particular context.

This at once calls into question the role of political organisation itself, and reinforces the anarchist rejection of the Party as an ideological vanguard (e.g. McKay, ND; Anon., 2001; Schnews, 2001; Price, 2007; cf. Brinton, 2004 [1970]). Purity of political principles, especially when prescribed through centralised and hierarchical structures, is blind to the geographical unevenness of everyday life altogether. Moreover, it is not always possible for the desired 'purity' of political practices of a project to be achieved, since the spatial configurations – such as an emphasis on outreach beyond the collective, or the development of contestable borderlands around it – that are necessary or preferable for the development of prefigurative relations can serve to close down or warp possibilities. Put simply, the geography of political groups affects their ability to enact their principles in practice.

Also, for a prefigurative group or initiative, the organisation and articulation of certain relations *within* the group is only part of habituation, as is the development of relations outside of the group. As we have seen, interior and exterior are in fact largely co-constitutive, and shape and influence one another. This co-constitutive interior and exterior of prefigurative organisation challenges us to view politics as a holistic enterprise, with the different spaces, principles and properties of a group inherently interdependent with one another. As we have seen, a 'weak link' could limit the whole system.

Habituation of prefigurative politics also, then, rests on the interplay between theory and practice. The neat, ordered spaces of theory give way to complex and unpredictable spaces of practice and, in so doing, inform future theorisation. This co-constitution of theory and practice makes the geographies of such efforts all the more important. Spatialisation of theory – the process of putting ideas into practice and thus spatialising them in reality

– leads from certain theoretical frameworks *and to new/refined ones*. The everyday as a key terrain for political enactment is thus also foregrounded as the terrain for practising theory and, in turn, theorising through practice. In a sense, it is an ethnographic undertaking, centring on everyday experiences, habits and anomalies. Gordon (2007: 36) illustrates this connection between theory and practice when he notes that, rather than awaiting the ‘glorious day’ in the distant future,

anarchists have come to transpose their notion of social revolution to the present-tense. Non-hierarchical, anarchic modes of interaction are... an ever-present potential of social interaction here and now – a revolution in everyday life.

The form of praxis enacted by the IWW and social centres is one that is developed specifically with this present-tense politics in mind. While it is a major overstatement to suggest that any of the groups studied succeeded in habituating radical politics into the spaces and practices of everyday life *in toto*, both social centres and the IWW proposed such a strategy and made serious attempts to enact it in some – if not most – areas of their activity. Through prefigurative praxis, these anarchist/ic initiatives attempt to lock radical principles to direct experiences of working and community life. The spaces produced by this are messy, full of tensions that bring with them complicating and challenging dynamics that interact in unexpected ways and can restrict or open up the possibilities of social change. This mess is all part of the journey.

## **BUILDING EVERYDAY SPACES OF ANARCHY**

I now turn to conclude this chapter and bring together the key arguments made. The main thrust of much of this research is that prefigurative left-libertarian praxis, for it to have a chance of ‘success’, in whatever sense of the word, must acknowledge and operate in relation to the existing everyday conditions of its specific context. Indeed, this is also the case with any form

of grassroots politics. While this is an important argument itself, in a radical prefigurative organisation this strategy of placing takes on a deeper meaning that generates certain spatialities that are particular to such forms of organisation. The 'radical-ness' of the groups studied lies not in the revolutionary demands of their campaigns – most campaigns had few, if any, explicitly revolutionary demands – nor even the radical potency of their propaganda – much of their literature concerned relatively mundane, material issues and usually only hinted towards anti-capitalist principles in passing – but largely in the ways in which participants self-organised and related among themselves and with others on an everyday basis.

Investigation of these groups can serve as case studies of radical responses to their particular, politically inhospitable environments. In turn, they also stand as examples of how small, radical groups can impact upon and actively shape the terrains of struggle in place. They shed light on the ways in which such small, obscure and seemingly-insignificant projects can survive – sometimes even thrive – by constructing themselves in ways that navigate the interdependent relations between 'immaterial', ideological visions and material, lived conditions of everyday life. They can be understood as microcosms of actually-existing autonomous politics, making their ethnographic study unusual and insightful for academics, and useful for activists themselves, who rarely have the luxury to reflect on their actions in such detail.

This quality of being 'actually-existing' – of occupying and operating within lived, mundane, everyday space – locates social centres and the IWW in a "possible-impossible" fusion of revolutionary theory and everyday practice. Both approaches studied – in different ways and spaces – attempt to synergise utopian principles with everyday, material concerns. The distinctiveness of such an approach lies in its refusal of determining what are 'possible' or 'impossible' means or ends, and in its affinity with the formation of autonomous geographies that likewise refuse the constraints of established modes of political action and organisation.

Anarchist/ic groups, initiatives and projects cannot be assessed solely through their success or failure to achieve specific goals, since those goals are merely means towards an end – utopia – that will forever elude us, precisely because utopia itself can likewise only ever be a means. The anarchist/ic spatialities of success are thus also myriad and shifting; with contested borderlands connecting and disconnecting people between different times and places; DIY organisational structures and everyday practices developing subaltern cartographies constructed through the manoeuvre of social connections; and strategies of autonomy constantly self-organising in new ways to influence and adapt to the changing landscape of multi-scalar economic and political processes. Unlike the neat and bounded spaces of a great deal of political ideology, where success is measured through the achievement of a specific ideal-type (singularly entitled “Communism”, “liberalism”, “fascism”, “social democracy”, and so on), anarchism is at best sceptical towards the notion of end-points *per se*. Anarchism thus becomes a reversal of these theories: the anarchist/ic groups studied show how even prefiguration – a key benchmark of anarchist and left-libertarian praxis – is never quite achievable. Instead, it is a mechanism of constant reassessment and reinvention of revolutionary possibility in practice (e.g. Gordon, 2005; Shukaitis, 2009).

This is not to suggest that anarchists and left-libertarians do not or should not set, seek and achieve concrete and tangible goals, but that those goals are understood as stepping stones for the furtherance of autonomous everyday social and political organisation. For example, while the IWW Blood Service campaign never had any revolutionary goals, focussing as it did on preventing cuts and job losses, building IWW membership, worker militancy, and democratising the service. These seemingly ‘reformist’ goals were part of a broader programme to build, piece by piece, pockets of revolutionary possibility *through the development of prefigurative relations*. Similarly, the successful campaign to prevent Starbucks from opening in the Vortex building was not really about Starbucks (after its eviction, the building was instead bought by *Nando’s*, a chain of Portuguese restaurants); rather,



it was an effort to unite the diverse community and establish antagonistic praxis as a legitimate mode of political engagement.

Thus, the way we view praxis and its purposes profoundly affects the evidence of 'success' or 'failure' that we look for. Although the IWW and social centres prioritise concrete and material transformation, their actions have an underlying sense of symbolism that reflects their utopian principles, refusing to be defined entirely by their tangible effects. Many of the campaigns of the social centres and IWW are defensive in nature, and in some respects this can detract from the radical imagination and invention that they exhibit in their internal functioning. However, the differing contexts and priorities for each group mean that the question of whether the projects are worthwhile should be linked to a nuanced understanding of the conditions in which they find themselves (or can create out of those existing conditions). Furthermore, by foregrounding the creation of certain social relations as a central element in enacting prefigurative politics, as argued in the previous section, it must also be recognised that autonomous self-activity can be manifested in a range of ways other than simply not enacting defensive campaigns. It is in the relations developed through practices of self-management, direct democracy and mutual aid, among others, where we find prefigurative politics. The target of prefigurative praxis (the employer, the landlord, the patriarch, the autocrat, etc.) is primarily a locus around which self-organised prefigurative practices and relations may crystallise, proliferate and hopefully live on long beyond the short life of a campaign or initiative.

In the concluding chapter, I seek to add substance to the assertion that there is something geographically and politically significant about participation in, and the study of, the kinds of groups that I have examined through this research. I also reiterate the various empirical, theoretical and methodological arguments made throughout the thesis, outline possibilities for further research on the geographies of anarchist and left-libertarian organisation, and discuss implications for the academic and activist debates in which I have engaged.

# VII

## EVERYDAY ANARCHIES: GEOGRAPHIES OF PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

*Only days of revolution... allow everyday life to pursue history and perhaps briefly to catch up with it. Such days occur when people will not and cannot go on living as they did before. (Lefebvre, 2002 [1961]: 3)*

*I want to create new social forms, because those that actually exist are too miserable, too narrow, the meagre remainders of a great time. But it would be madness to want to eliminate the few forms of governance that remain. We need form, not formlessness. We need tradition, not lack of discipline. (Landauer, 1909: no pagination)*

### TOWARDS A (RE)NEW(ED) ANARCHISM

The intimate relationship between everyday life and radical politics has been a constant focus of this research. Lefebvre's words appear to speak to a world that is bereft of hope for transforming the everyday through anything short of the total destruction of capitalism. However, this requires that appropriate structures, and the development of "new social forms", as Landauer suggests, should be central pivots of anarchist praxis in the here-and-now. Importantly, it is something that also involves developing new structures and relations simultaneously alongside, within and against existing institutions in different contexts. The tension between a total, permanent political strategy that seeks to address all aspects of everyday life, and an acknowledgement that any political strategy seeking to achieve

this must do so always in relation to existing conditions is a powerful dynamic within anarchist/ic praxis. This, in a sense, is the main thrust of this research. Through long-term ethnographic fieldwork with two key actors on the British libertarian left, I have analysed their everyday spatial strategies in a variety of contexts focussing on community and workplace organisation. An analysis of the everyday practice and negotiation of these spatial strategies has revealed important insights into the ongoing development of radical transformative praxis and the future development of various areas of geographic thought. This final chapter brings together the various threads of the research, considers the extent to which the research fulfilled its aims, and proposes areas for future research.

The point of departure for the thesis was the decline of the variously entitled anti-capitalist, anti-/alter-globalisation or global justice movement of movements. Its spectre looms over the projects studied in this thesis as both inspiration and warning. The groups studied owe much of their creativity and flexibility to this earlier movement, and there remains a magnetism about the spectacular politics of street parties, blockades, squat raves and summit demonstrations. They showed that politics could be fun and exciting in the apparently hopeless aftermath of the brutal neoliberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s. However, the failures of the movement are clear: ghettoisation, a distinct lack of power to affect material conditions, and the movement's eventual stagnation. Graffiti in Seattle during the 1999 WTO summit – “we are winning” – now seems embarrassingly optimistic a decade later to those involved in the upsurge who have witnessed its faltering.

The question posed in the introductory chapter was “what next?” How do you ‘move on’ after decline, and where to? Throughout, I have argued that a return to the transformative potential of everyday life is an important shift that has begun to take place, and that it is underpinned by an increasingly serious approach to radical political organising around concrete, material issues. A global economic crisis erupting in late 2008 brought with it new opportunities for the radical left, as well as challenges (Alternative Libertaire

*et al.*, 2008). For the first time in decades, the anarchist critique of the twin forces of capital and state appears to have concrete relevance to a wide section of society. In the UK, as with much of Europe, the far right has also been buoyed by this recession, preying on working class demands for employment, housing and community in an increasingly fragmented and uncertain de-territorialised world. The activities of social centres and the IWW are two of the more prominent ways in which the UK libertarian left has strived to address these material needs and combat reactionary responses to crisis through a return to everyday life as the basis of political action.

In this research I have sought to expose some of the ways in which anarchists have responded to the perceived failings of previous tactics, and have discussed the complex negotiations and tensions involved in developing prefigurative everyday spatialities. Throughout the research, I have been keen to ensure that the groups studied are not portrayed as homogeneous models of 'pure' anarchist praxis. As I discussed in chapters one and two, while they are both influenced heavily – or even predominantly – by anarchism, social centres and the IWW incorporate a range of radical left traditions that play out through their everyday discourses, strategies and practices. In this respect, the significance of these particular groups is the ways in which they seek to re-cast the strict parameters of ideological politics in the interest of developing political forms that aim to have direct relevance to the interests and aspirations of a broad cross-section of society. Their efforts – of workplace and community organising – are structured both by their different traditions of activism and social change and by the spaces in which they operate. A key connection between them lies in the way they seek to enact a form of anarchist/ic politics that is reminiscent of the popular working class anarchism of the inter-war period, while still drawing influence from a variety of post-war movements and tendencies. The spaces and spatialities produced are imbued with overlapping and interacting political networks that demand of us a politics of practice that is not completely exclusive to any single 'ism'.

Relatedly, this research contributes to the modest but growing interest in anarchist and libertarian Marxist thought in geography. In doing so, I have sought to develop a theoretical and conceptual framework that draws from schools of thought that are often neglected in geography, often misconstrued as mutually exclusive or even antagonistic toward one another, and, yet, can throw new light on established geographical issues. Building upon existing work (e.g. Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006), I have argued that an emphasis on autonomy – as a collective, grassroots, self-managed phenomenon – can help us understand the geographies of prefigurative and other forms of radical politics. Attention to self-organisation or *autogestion* is necessary because it emphasises the transformative agency and creativity of people or, as Shukaitis and Graeber (2007) call it, our “constituent imagination”.

The exploration of anarchist and libertarian Marxist perspectives in geography as both the subject and method of enquiry is not only an approach with much potential, but it has also been demonstrated throughout this thesis that such approaches make important contributions to geographical endeavour. Established anarchist and libertarian-leaning scholars such as Heynen (2008) and Chatterton (2005) have made important progress in recent years, incorporating anti-authoritarian thought and practice into the study of a range of issues from political ecology to urban regeneration. A new generation of left-libertarian geographers is also beginning to emerge (e.g. Clough, 2009; Wakefield, 2009; Springer, forthcoming 2010), building upon existing work and extending it in new and interesting ways.

Recognising the need for both theoretical and empirical work in this area, this research has grappled with both the theory and the practice of anarchist geography. I have argued at various points that anarchist approaches can benefit geography in three primary ways. First, it is beneficial in developing an alternative critical discourse of political struggle, rejecting or modifying existing discourses of “resistance” and (neo-)Gramscian notions of hegemony. By repositioning the working class (broadly defined) as the

subject of history, rather than capital or other forms of 'dominating' power, it generates an affirmative and empowering anti-vanguardist framework of struggle. Second, and related to changing discourses around struggle, an anarchist approach offers geography a radically different political *imagination*, in which practice, struggle and revolution are one and the same, whereby everyday life becomes a vehicle for creating a multitude of revolutions in the way we create, interact and organise. Third, the study of anarchist/ic politics in practice brings with it a range of new or reformulated questions and debates concerning authority, organisation, 'success' and everyday life in political organisation, particularly surrounding the key principle prefiguration and its relationship with autonomy and *autogestion*. There are therefore many other areas to which an anarchist approach in geography might apply itself further, most obviously including critical geographies of the state, class and power.

In this concluding chapter, I first consider the contributions that this research has made to the study of everyday life, and how the groups have sought to develop a politics of everyday life in their respective spaces of activity. In the second section, I move on to spatial strategy, focussing on the distinctive contributions of this research to established debates about the role of place, scale and networks in contentious politics. In the final substantive section of the chapter, I explore the third research question concerning how the case studies seek to enact a prefigurative politics, including a short discussion of the contribution made by this research to the field of militant research agendas as part of my own prefigurative praxis. Throughout, I identify areas for future exploration and analysis that are opened up by this research. Over the course of this thesis, I have increasingly uncovered the ways in which the research questions are in a number of ways overlapping and interacting. As such, although the following sections focus on the questions individually, they also make conscious links to the other questions considered.

## EVERYDAY AUTONOMOUS SPATIALITIES

The first research question identified at the beginning of the thesis sought to explore the IWW and social centres as making efforts to develop a politics of everyday life. The extent to which they have achieved this is questionable. A major element of this is simply due to tactical or other organisational problems enacted by the groups. In studies of the HSC and IWW construction workers, in particular, failure to achieve goals or to grasp opportunities for positive organising has in many respects been as fruitful an avenue of study as successes elsewhere. These ‘nearly’ moments – where groups seek but fail to make impacts – are significant in political organisation and mobilisation, and clearly demonstrate the enduring importance of learning from mistakes, problems and frustrations.

The groups’ problems are also partly related to the nature of everyday life itself. A clearly discernible politics of everyday life, although central to anarchists, autonomists, Lefebvrians and Situationists alike, remains rather elusive, with ambiguities and complexities that result in everyday political practices being unpredictable and fragile. This research has shown such a politics to be rooted in spatio-temporally situated knowledges and experiences that are often hard to grasp precisely because of the often unspoken or taken-for-granted quality of the everyday. A politics of everyday life must therefore acknowledge and embrace the everyday as deeply embodied and immanent, yet also hard to pin down as a tangible phenomenon, by emphasising the role of social relations in shaping (and therefore potentially changing) our everyday lives. Likewise, since everyday life is such an immanent – or even intimate – experience, such a politics cannot be distanced from its subject. This means that the forms of organisation discussed in this thesis are ideally suited to everyday praxis due to their grassroots, anti-authoritarian nature.

The agency of individuals and groups is produced and shaped on an everyday basis through daily practices. As the residuum from which capital

and the state draw their strength, Lefebvre and the Situationists agree that everyday life is at once the point at which exploitation and authority are enacted, and where our most potent hope for transformation is located. In each context, a differing self-organised manifestation of autonomy emerges, in an attempt to identify and exploit 'gaps' in capital's colonisation of everyday space. The autonomist and anarchist emphasis on the way we constitute and shape our political agencies and relations through everyday practices further establishes this constituent imagination as the centre of political creativity. This repositioning of the political subject serves to rework the dynamics of struggle and challenges us to perceive political praxis as an immanent, processual and dynamic endeavour, dictated by the ongoing actions and interactions of people (cf. Cumbers *et al.*, 2010). I have argued, through the empirical material, that autonomy is necessarily rooted in everyday experiences, practices and relations, and this is precisely why practices of "place-framing" (Martin, 2003) around everyday spaces such as communities and workplaces are so central to anarchist/ic politics.

I have also shown how practices of bordering, placing, scaling up/down and territorialisation are all important spatial mechanisms of conflict and organisation. These practices are especially significant because they are examples of self-organised *autogestion* and represent a political imagination that is based on an understanding of the 'institution' that is located in the immanent spaces of everyday practices; as a "pattern of human relations" (Neilson and Rossiter, 2006: 397), rather than a structure that exists independently of lived practice. This spatial self-construction and self-organisation of political conflict institutes a profoundly anti-authoritarian approach to organisation and collective identity and is linked closely to the constituent imagination that is produced on an everyday basis.

The practices of self-management, however, are fragile, as are the spatialities produced through them. The line that must be walked – between ghettoisation from the target audience of a group on the one hand, and recuperation into capitalist or state politics on the other – marks out autonomous strategies as potentially volatile. Premised on a principle of



“engaged withdrawal” (Virno, 1996: 196), autonomous groups’ enactments of both engagement and withdrawal come with challenges to their efficacy or survival. This issue asks us to analyse more closely the dynamics of recuperation and ghettoisation, not only to support the ongoing activity of radical groups and movements but also to contribute more substantially to work in geography on the organisation and strategy of social and political movements in general. It is, of course, not only radical groups that must resist pressures such as co-optation, assimilation, and isolation; it applies to all actors in the field of contentious politics. Attention to this issue has made a notable contribution to understanding the ways in which an everyday, autonomous politics can bring with it both difficulties and opportunities. The IWW’s decision to register with the state, for example, tied them to a legal framework that constricted the possibilities of organising and acting in some respects, but members reworked this situation into a means of strengthening and focussing IWW strategy.

The processual, “present-tense” (Gordon, 2005) constitution of anarchist/ic political spatialities differentiates anarchist/ic prefiguration from other forms of prefigurative politics such as religious prefiguration, and also helps us to better grasp the importance of the political geographies of everyday life. Groups’ treatment of everyday life as a pattern of immanent social relations and interactions provides glimpses of the power of political programmes that take the everyday and its geographies seriously. The careful negotiations that groups undertook – not always successfully – in order to adapt themselves to the everyday context in which they were organising, demonstrate the centrality of place-specific everyday socialities to the nature and efficacy of political projects. The habituation of certain patterns of sociality that encourage emancipatory relations to emerge is mediated by this context, meaning that power can function in ways that are not always expected or planned.

What is at stake in this research is the way we understand the spaces of political action, and in this research I have argued for, and analysed, visions of praxis tied closely to both utopian political thought and immanent

everyday practices, needs and experiences. I have demonstrated that, while it is far from straightforward, such a marriage of everyday life and utopia is both possible and to be encouraged. The unique spatialities that are produced through such an approach shape themselves to their context and are sustained through immanent and autonomous social relations within the often-hostile residuum of everyday life under capitalism. Autonomous spatial strategy is a quotidian and all-consuming struggle to prefigure future worlds located at once within, against and beyond capital and the state.

Everyday life thus sits at the centre of anarchist/ic praxis, and the various efforts to develop a politics of everyday life are crucial forms, not only of enacting anarchist/ic politics, but also of developing and refining them over time and across space. A singular anarchist politics of everyday life is therefore neither possible nor particularly desirable, and the efforts of the IWW and social centres reinforce the significance of everyday life to creating forms of radical politics that link the present and possible futures.

### **SPATIAL STRATEGY: BETWEEN NETWORKS, PLACES AND SCALES**

In this research, I have made a number of arguments around the second research question concerning the spatial strategies of anarchist/ic praxis. Leading from the previous section, I have argued that everyday spaces and socialities often play a powerful role in directing the sites and forms of engagement in contentious politics. Despite their relative immobility and rootedness to place, both the IWW and social centres show flexibility in their spatial strategies and ingenuity with regards to their interactions with allies and opponents alike. IWW activists mobilised interpersonal relationships with other individuals in order to activate a wide range of political allies while circumventing possible inter-organisational rivalries. In another example, the Vortex was able to quickly change its focus towards agitation against Starbucks at very short notice. This was used by the Vortex to develop

positive relations with others, and draw support from the diverse local communities.

The experiences of the IWW in particular have shown how groups can navigate the linkages between everyday, place-based politics, and wider scales, mobilising through a variety of spatialities to address place-based issues. Moreover, the grassroots networking logics often undertaken in tandem with scalar and place-based forms of mobilisation further demonstrate that place acts as a locus on which a range of spatial strategies can focus. More than simply affirming Nicholls' (2009) call to recognise and analyse the relations between different spatialities such as place, networks and scale, this research shows how autonomous forms of organisation can facilitate spatial strategies that deliberately utilise a range of spatialities to achieve their political goals. The benefit of enacting autonomous strategies is that autonomous groups often have the flexibility and grassroots control to identify and mobilise around specific spaces irrespective of the institutional or bureaucratic boundaries that may constrict the spatial strategies of more conventional political groups. Moreover, the flexibility afforded to autonomous groups allows them to mobilise through a range of spatialities at once in order to maximise their usually rather meagre resources.

This interplay between place-based and scalar strategies in the IWW is contrasted with the careful crafting of place-based political identities among social centres at the local scale. The importance of place rests not so much on its role in shaping political identities, which is well documented elsewhere (e.g. Keith and Pile, 1993; McDowell, 1999), but on how groups attempt to mobilise through it, and I have deployed the same argument with the concept of community as a mobilising tool used by social centres. Place acts as a "way of knowing" the world (Cresswell, 2004); a medium and tool for mobilisation, rather than a 'container' of social or cultural 'forces'. Social centres sought to articulate certain visions of community and place through the selective re-working of place-based political values and experiences. A "progressive (Massey, 1993) sense of place, for them, is a crucial means of

relating the specificities of everyday experiences to their 'universal' political principles such as anti-capitalism, direct democracy and mutual aid.

This understanding of place also gives further validity to the assertion that scale-jumping is not always necessary or desirable. In IWW workplace branches, as well as social centres, groups often place emphasis on *deepening* radical practices *in place*, rather than necessarily striving to translate practices and relations *across space* to other places. The strengthening of certain practices over time in a certain place calls for a recognition that the habituation of place-based praxis takes place primarily through relations, and is an important spatial strategy to pursue independently or in concert with a scale-jumping approach. Indeed, in a form of politics that seeks the reconfiguration of everyday social relations, habituation of particular practices in place is not simply a valid strategy; it is a fundamental goal to strive for, even if it is ultimately unattainable in its entirety. It is not static, however, and a recognition that place-based politics shift with changing social terrains requires constant reinvention and adaptation.

One way in which the groups studied have attempted to enact this place-based habituation is by the production of autonomous spaces and spatialities. In the case of social centres, they are able to produce spaces by the claiming of space, whereas IWW practices tend to concentrate on producing their spaces of alternative unionism through existing spaces of production. Social centres' establishment of territorial control of a space can be read, I have argued, as an implicit rejection of capitalist and statist discourses of territory that rest on extractive reification of territory as part of the process of capital valorisation. Instead, it is used as a means of deepening and proliferating radical praxis in place. This use and definition of territory at once provides a possible alternative to the quantifiable, colonialistic understanding of territory critiqued by Elden (2005) and contributes towards a substantial response to reactionary forms of place-based reterritorialisation against which Massey (1993) warns. The practices of the groups studied are therefore examples of how territorial and

progressive place-based politics may be integrated as a response to globalising dynamics without resorting to reactionary claims.

The strategy that is produced from social centre and IWW reterritorialisation – and the bordering practices that go with it – is necessarily an antagonistic one that often contrasts with more liberal pluralist views of the political. Both the IWW and social centres understand their relation to their opponents as one of direct confrontation, usually articulated through various constellations of class-based struggle. This does not, however, mean that the only manifestation of class struggle is direct confrontation. This research has shown that it takes place through a range of practices; from confrontation, to subversion, reappropriation and reworking. While agonistic forms of internal decision-making within groups have been shown to be productive in the autonomous self-production of collective identities, the *antagonistic* approach towards opponents also reinforces this collective sense of self. Among social centres and the IWW, tension and seepage between internal and external spaces of conflict fuels the development of self-organised collective identities and institutionalises certain ways of acting and relating.

Another spatial strategy often associated with prefigurative, autonomous politics is the network. The networks developed in IWW and social centre activity are made up of connections charged with social relations – be they shared histories, friendships, everyday workplace encounters, or others – that strengthen and proliferate those networks. As such, networks exhibit both quantitative (the number and extent of connections) and qualitative (the social meaning and significance of connections) characteristics, and these different features have different parts to play in networks' dynamics. The relations that made up IWW and social centre networks were not always unitary, and not always transmitted in a uniform or predictable way. Inter-organisational disagreements between the IWW and other groups needed to be mediated and minimised through networking on an interpersonal level that circumvented most of the divisive elements of these differences. Moreover, as discussed in chapter five, the “selective” (Williams, 1977) transferral of knowledges and experiences between social centres led to

problems with developing and instituting codes of good practice because activists tended to represent their experiences in ways that were shaped by a wide range of factors, including interpersonal rivalries, spatio-temporal contexts and simple miscommunications.

As a result of the unpredictable and not-always-linear dynamics of relational connections, it is necessary to re-examine a key concept deployed in this research. Featherstone's (2005; 2008) relational construction of militant particularisms is an important means of understanding the relational dynamics between struggles rooted in, and oriented towards the specificities of, certain places. In particular, just as Featherstone (2008: 18) emphasises the disruption of "local and global, particular and universal," I have shown how social centres and the IWW seek to integrate everyday, place-based grievances and initiatives with "universal" political principles. This collapsing of the particular-universal dichotomy that relationality produces is exhibited most clearly in social centres' attempts to embed themselves in place, while also prefiguring much broader communistic principles through their campaigns, democratic processes and work ethics.

However, Graeber (2009) has argued that although the prefigurative politics of anarchist/ic groups is a powerful political statement, it makes for a rather complex and sometimes ambiguous political image because a group's ideology is articulated chiefly through its *practices*. If relations across space do not always operate in a linear or predictable way – as exemplified in selective knowledge transfer among social centre activists – then they can confuse or distort the connections through which militant particularisms relationally link across space (and time). Due to the complex intersections of social, cultural and economic relations within and between places, the same relational dynamic may not manifest itself in the same way in two different spatio-temporalities. This research has shown that relational dynamics can be powerful means of articulating, mobilising around, and connecting place-based particularisms to produce new forms of subaltern or emancipatory relations, yet their creativeness means that they can also be haphazard and unpredictable.

Despite constructions of a rather simplistic tacit dichotomy in much critical geography between networks (horizontal, contemporary, good) and formal organisation (vertical, old-fashioned, bad), this research has significance as an investigation of two very different radical groups whose spatial strategies utilise both networked and formal organisational logics. Both groups also use both logics as means of instituting and encouraging non-hierarchical structures and practices in their everyday operation. The importance of this research is not only that it problematises such a false dichotomy, but also that it demonstrates how the two forms intermingle at an everyday level. The intermingling of different organisational logics and structures is an area that geographers researching social movements are ideally placed to grapple with, and can shed further light on the complex spatialities of movement organisation and power. In this research I demonstrate that mobilisation around place in particular can be undertaken via a number of spatialities, particularly when doing so through decentralised and self-organised strategies.

As Hetherington and Law (2000: 128) argue, although networks are important ways of seeing the world, “we need to avoid attaching ourselves too strongly to particular metaphors” if those metaphors become inadvertently used to mask difference and alterity. The interaction between networked and other forms of organisation that I have explored in this research, however, suggests not so much a “fragmentary” (Routledge, 2000: 31) geography of political organisation, than simply one in which a range of organisational logics coexist. In autonomous initiatives, self-organisation can sometimes be a means of ongoing experimentation and refinement of different modes of operation, or else at other times it can be a practice in which certain organisational forms become orthodox through the establishment of particular cultures and traditions. In the IWW and both social centres, we have seen both sides to this tension, and groups have flexibly and imaginatively adapted to new contexts in some cases, and have clung to established ways of doing things in others.

Finally, I have argued that social centres and the IWW institute their spatial strategies through the forging of certain social relations. Throughout the research, we have seen how the development of such relations takes place largely through social networking logics that are enacted, reproduced and developed in people's everyday interactions, and are often reinforced or facilitated through formal or institutional organisational structures. Mobilisation, similarly, takes place through this combination of networks and institutional structures, operating in concert in some cases, and separately in others. This suggests that certain forms of spatial strategy are necessary for autonomous politics to function and grow in particular contexts.

The spatial strategies enacted by the IWW and social centres are diverse and often fragile, but produce political forms that embrace diversity and broad-based forms of activism, while enacting antagonistic class politics. These strategies are not able to achieve concrete results, but are also imbued with a political charge that transcends the local and global; space and place; particular and universal. This political charge is *prefiguration*, and it is made possible by the autonomous, self-organised strategies of the groups which produce spaces conducive for social, cultural and political struggles to develop alternative relations. It is to this final question that we now turn.

## **PREFIGURATION: CREATING UNKNOWN FUTURES IN THE PRESENT**

The third and final research question asks how groups enact and negotiate a prefigurative politics in practice, and many of the spatial strategies of the IWW and social centres can be traced directly to the prefigurative approach underpinning them. The relationship between theory and practice – although manifested differently according to context – is strong in prefigurative organisations. Nevertheless, we cannot assume that the same future will be prefigured in the same ways, and the emphasis within autonomous strategy on always organising in relation to the social, cultural and economic



dynamics in a certain place opens up the political imagination to myriad possible new forms and spatialities of prefigurative praxis. Although we can draw conclusions about how this research can inform broader academic debates, we must also remain aware of the distinctiveness of the groups and their politics. These are not simply case studies of grassroots community and workplace organising; we must respect the radical politics that shape them. If this research has taught us anything, it is that anarchist and left-libertarian strategies are more than 'relevant' or 'legitimate' objects of academic study; they deploy spatial strategies directly derived from utopian principles, yet have potential to achieve concrete, material outcomes. These initiatives show how closely related utopian futures and organisation around the means of everyday survival really can be.

Much of the distinctiveness of the IWW and social centres lies in their everyday enactments of prefigurative, autonomous spatial strategy. The findings of this research thus further develop analyses of autonomy in practice that have made some headway among radical geographers in recent years. Drawing on the geographical work of Brown, Chatterton, Hodgkinson and Pickerill, this research situates itself as complimentary to their explorations. Autonomy is theorised as necessarily processual, collective and self-organised, rejecting other forms of political praxis from the established left and right alike.

As Chatterton (2005) is at pains to emphasise, autonomous struggle does not simply reside in antagonistic or co-operative relations with others, since it is also partly a struggle with ourselves. In seeking to forge autonomous relations and spatialities, individuals face struggles against exclusions, hierarchies and oppressions that they have been conditioned to reproduce in everyday life. We have seen how both social centres and the IWW have fought to refuse such reproduction of capitalist and authoritarian dynamics through the ongoing reworking of structural and inter-personal internal processes. Pickerill and Chatterton's (2006) theorisation of autonomy as refusing a worldview that categorises things into 'autonomous' and 'not autonomous' confirms the empirical findings in this research that show how

autonomous praxis creates spatialities that are fundamentally premised on forging broad-based relations within and beyond any discrete autonomous spaces that may be in existence. As in any prefigurative endeavour, the perfect end-point is never attainable, and there are no clear boundaries between autonomy and its others; instead, this journey of refinement through struggle itself becomes a major focus for such politics.

One area where this research has arguably diverged from some existing texts on autonomous geographies is in the rejection of discourses of 'resistance', which I have argued implies a form of reactive struggle against an omnipotent and proactive enemy, as opposed to one premised on offensive struggle through people's autonomous self-activity and agency. Drawing from autonomist texts that emphasise the ontological primacy of working-class agency and the importance of the 'general intellect' for the reproduction of capital by everyone, I have argued, like Clough (2009), that geographers ought to deploy the term 'resistance' with great care, or else do away with it altogether.

In the empirical research of this project I have shown how, although a number of the campaigns and events discussed in this thesis have been defensive in nature, a major element of the groups' *modus operandi* is self-organisation and creation independent of the supposed 'invisible hand' of capital. As I have argued, much of what is revolutionary about the initiatives studied is not the specific goals of their campaigns; rather, it lies in their attempts to self-constitute radical, prefigurative everyday relations and structures. The impetus for this form of self-organised radical praxis is often independent of external conditions and all too easily overlooked in favour of the more tangible strategies and goals of particular campaigns. As such, the idea that such campaigns are simply defensive ignores the myriad self-organised prefigurative connections, solidarities, affinities and practices of direct action and *autogestion* enacted through them.

Critiques of the discourse of resistance and the foregrounding of grassroots agency is a fruitful avenue for future theorisation and empirical investigation.

Already, geographers have begun to explore this issue. Cumbers *et al.* (2008b) differentiate between 'abstract labour' as a process of capital accumulation, and the self-active, "constituent" (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007) agency of labour as an everyday performance of certain activities. They reconceptualise economic processes as constituted primarily by capital's constant "flight from labour" (Cumbers *et al.*, 2008b: 372) and, in so doing, attribute profound transformative agency to labour (in its broadest sense). In this thesis, I have argued, similarly, that we cannot simply look at the defensive or outwardly 'reformist' demands of particular campaigns to find evidence of prefigurative politics in action, but must explore deeper into the everyday forms of relating and self-organising that operate beneath and through this superficial level of political practice.

It is through these myriad *relations* that prefigurative politics emerges. A distinctive contribution made by this research that foregrounds relations is my effort to create a solidarity research methodology that is imbued with the dual principles of solidarity and mutual aid. This makes subtle yet significant arguments concerning the framing and conduct of research that can allow an alternative liberatory form of research militancy to emerge and that problematises central debates in radical scholarship. In particular, the forging of solidaristic relations between the researcher and research participants has been used to push beyond existing approaches to reflexivity, relevance and 'giving back'. By *offering* back, I reconceptualise politically-engaged research, moving beyond an implicit reproduction of capitalistic exchange values, towards a gift economy based on mutual aid and collective forms of reflexivity and praxis. Likewise, I have argued that neither participatory nor more 'distanced' forms of research are inherently more radical than the other, suggesting that it is through the bonds and relations of solidarity forged in the research process where we can locate truly radical research practice. As noted in chapter three, the ability to support struggles "to read themselves" (Colectivo Situaciones, 2003: no pagination) is a crucial factor in the development of a militant research agenda, and it is through the mutual aid enacted in this research that I have made steps towards developing such an approach in geography. I have

therefore sought to institute prefigurative relations within the research design and practice itself, as well as simply studying prefigurative politics from afar.

The ability to prefigure an alternative society through research practice itself leads to another key contribution of this research. Due to its location in the enactment of social relations, a prefigurative framework potentially opens up new spaces for praxis that might otherwise be overlooked. Whereas many radicals already participate in organisations such as unions and tenants' associations, less obviously political spaces of everyday practice such as book clubs, religious institutions, sports clubs and even more outwardly 'functional' spaces such as antenatal classes may provide alternative spaces for the reconfiguration of social relations in their own ways. The Vortex's parent and baby collective is one such example from this research in which participants charged a relatively 'non-political' project with deeply anarchist/ic forms of prefigurative relations and practices. Since everyday life is imbued with capitalist and statist dynamics, discourses, spectacles and structures, this social factory – even if it is not as totalising as the autonomists would have us believe – must be confronted in all spaces where there is opportunity to transform relations. Nevertheless, this does not involve a 'catch-all', universal strategy; on the contrary, it requires careful adaptation to specific contexts.

Prefigurative politics thus brings with it opportunities and challenges, and is at once an exciting processual means of refining revolutionary strategy, and a difficult, fragile means of political organisation and articulation of principles. It is always becoming, developing and reworking itself in ways that can serve to either reduce or augment the capacity or functionality of a group in different contexts. As we have seen, much of this pivots on groups' spatial characteristics and practices as factors in organising. Autonomous praxis, rooted in a prefigurative framework, is a lived theorisation in which participants constitute and reconstitute themselves in different ways over time and across space. It challenges us to think through the causality between theory and practice in not-always-linear ways.

The rethinking that prefigurative politics provokes has aided the development of a nuanced understanding of the geographies of anarchist/ic political praxis within the IWW and social centres. Prefigurative practices ask us to critically interrogate established understandings of political geographies in terms of how we perceive political space and action. They generate a form of counter-cartography; an understanding of space that is spectral, planting one foot in this society and the other in the next (or potentially, a plurality of 'nexts'). By analysing the everyday prefigurative practices of the groups studied, I have noted how groups attempt to fuse radical utopian principles with the direct experiences and conditions of everyday life. It is clear that everyday spaces and experiences structure the modalities of prefigurative practice. Prefiguration produces spatially complex terrains of struggle that are fuelled and given potency precisely by this tension between immediate, material demands and desires for total emancipation.

By creating such tensions between lived experience and transformative ideals, prefigurative politics is also a powerful embodiment of Lefebvre's possible-impossible dialectic. The 'impossibility' of these politics – of prefigurative practices never being able to become a fully prefigurative system – further emphasises the role of space in the enactment of radical everyday politics. This research shows how the spatial configurations of struggle can cause some prefigurative practices to stifle or negate others. Importantly, although few actual IWW or social centre projects are explicitly steeped in revolutionary goals, it is largely in the practices and structures of organisation where groups generate new political possibilities. These practices can never achieve that which they strive for but, in striving, they may uncover new configurations of political practice or organisation along the way. This journey of discovery is the central element of prefiguration, and roots autonomous practices in a non-linear spatio-temporality that is unpredictable, fragile, but sometimes highly fruitful.

## **PREFIGURATIVE SPATIAL STRATEGIES AND EVERYDAY REVOLUTIONS IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST**

It is often said that anarchists live in a world of dreams to come, and do not see the things which happen today. We see them only too well, and in their true colours, and that is what makes us carry the hatchet into the forest of prejudices that besets us. (Kropotkin, 2002 [1906]: 135)

There is no doubt that social centres and the IWW are small, imperfect, and make a relatively tiny impact on the nature and dynamics of contemporary society. Nevertheless, this research shows how their emergence and practices can tell us important stories about the geographies of revolutionary praxis specifically, and political action more generally. They show how anarchist and left-libertarian praxis develops its own spatial configurations, rejecting institutional constrictions in favour of a highly adaptable spatial strategy that traces the contours of everyday experience, while simultaneously creating structures and spatialities that seek to prefigure future worlds in the present. Analysis of the groups' everyday spatial strategies also unearths awkward questions regarding thought in geography around central geographical issues including the political role of networks, place and scale, and opens up avenues for future research.

This research contributes to, and extends in depth, the growing interest in geography from left-libertarian perspectives. It reconnects explicitly with the anarchist tradition in geography, and further establishes anarchist and libertarian Marxist approaches as relevant and insightful in the wider discipline. Affirming the centrality of everyday autonomous spatial strategy throughout, the research also establishes a basic framework for further empirical and theoretical work from this perspective. I have argued that schools of thought and practice such as anarchism, Autonomia and other perspectives on the libertarian left have great potency and relevance to contemporary geographical thought and political action.

I have argued in favour of modifying or rejecting a number of existing categories and discourses in geography. Most crucially, this thesis moves away from reactive imaginaries of 'resistance', conceiving struggles as dictated by the invisible hand of capital, chased by a vanguard of 'resisters'. Instead, I recognise struggle as generated directly out of the self-active agency of those in struggle, rather than a singular, hegemonic global capitalist order that must be resisted by the committed few on behalf of the majority. The everyday forms of reworking, subverting and reappropriating displayed by the IWW and social centres demonstrate that struggle can be – and is – something undertaken as an organic and immanent part of daily life. This autonomous agency in influencing the terrain of struggle is also demonstrated through the unconventional spatial strategies enacted and relations forged in the groups' activities.

Crucially, the research explicates the ways in which politics with concrete, material goals can also operate with a transformative political imagination that disrupts the possible-impossible binary. Building new worlds in the shell of the old, while difficult, messy and sometimes frustrating, can also be practicable and often effective. In their own small, flawed ways, the Vortex, Hackney Social Centre and IWW demonstrate that we can conceive and enact an anarchist/ic politics that has direct relevance to basic issues of daily survival and wellbeing (cf. Heynen, 2006). In a world dominated by a socio-economic system of governance that is unstable and woefully inefficient in some ways, yet incredibly adaptive and resilient in others, it is in the efforts of small groups such as these where we find spaces of hope for the development of alternative relations and practices. These spaces are not the neat, controlled spaces of a vanguard Party, but participatory and exploratory spaces that respect and embrace everyday life, despite (or perhaps because of) its complexity and ambiguity. Racked with tensions, contradictions and difficulties, these groups are far from the romantic, monolithic and heroic images of old; instead, revolutionary moments inhabit the immanent, "micro-public" (Amin, 2002) encounters and socialities of everyday organisation and praxis. It is precisely in the spaces of mundane practice where we find the most powerful sources for their transformation.

# VIII

## Appendices

### **APPENDIX 1: BUILDING MANAGEMENT FOR PUBLIC EVENTS/BENEFITS AT THE SOCIAL CENTRE**

**Drafted and adopted January 2006 by The Square Occupied Social Centre; adopted with amendments January 2007 by the Ex-Vortex Occupied Social Centre**

This is by no means an exhaustive or comprehensive list. It is, though, the agreed policy of the Social Centre Collective at the present time. Anyone who wishes to add or amend the policy can do so by coming to the social centre's meeting to discuss the situation and have any changes agreed by the group.

#### ***What to do with problem people***

The social centre does not tolerate any form of oppressive behaviour; this means racist, sexist, homophobic etc. attitudes towards others. Abusive, intimidating, aggressive or violent behaviour will also not be tolerated. Anybody engaging in such activity will be asked to amend their behaviour accordingly; if they persist they will be asked to leave.

Anybody who puts the building or people in the building at risk with their behaviour will be asked to leave. Anybody who deliberately disrupts the safe running of the social centre will be asked to leave.

If a situation arises when problem people have to be dealt with it should be done calmly, but firmly, with enough people as is necessary to diffuse the situation. Anybody who feels uncomfortable dealing with the problem people should speak to someone on the door who will be designated mediator.



Problem behaviour should not be allowed to persist or go unchallenged in the social centre.

Gender equality in conflict resolution is essential.

### ***Drugs and our drugs policy***

The social centre does not tolerate the selling or consumption of illegal drugs in the social centre. This reflects a political decision not a moral one.

It puts the security of the building at risk. The police use, and have done so in the past, the excuse of drugs in the building to raid political spaces as a means of closing them down. It is essential the integrity of the building is not compromised if we are to remain open. People should be made aware of why this policy is in place when asked to stop.

Notices regarding our drugs policy and the reasons it is in place should be made prominent throughout the building.

People's judgement should be used when instituting this policy, but regardless of what constitutes 'drugs' and their relative legality, 'no drugs' remains the policy of the social centre.

### ***Security***

There should be a minimum of 5 crew during large public events/benefits. (Less for smaller events). This includes 3 people on the door as well as 2 'roaming' to ensure fire exits are clear, stairs and passageways are not blocked, rooms are not over-filled, equipment is safe, etc.

Communication between all crew is essential (including bar and café people). Ensure everybody knows what is happening by keeping people informed and updated regularly during the evening.

Security of the building is the responsibility of everyone who uses the building. This is a collective process, not just the job of a few select individuals.

### ***Health and safety***

There should be at least one trained health and safety person (basic first aid) available during public events. Preferably two, if it is a large event. These people should make themselves known and available to the rest of the crew on the night.

A trained medic team can act as health and safety during large events but must be contacted beforehand for confirmation.

### ***Fire safety***

There should be a designated fire person for each event. This person can be part of the existing crew. What is important is that everyone working at the social centre is aware of all the fire exits, the positions of all the fire extinguishers and how to evacuate people safely from the building in case of fire. Fire checks should be made regularly.

### ***The door***

All public events are based on donation only. Event organisers can set a reasonable 'suggested donation' price but no-one should be refused entry if they don't have the capacity to pay. The collective has agreed that marking or stamping people as they enter (or as they leave, to gain re-entry) is unnecessary and anybody organising an event should be made aware of this. Anybody stamping people on the door will be asked to stop.

### ***Capacity***

People should be aware of the amount of people entering the building during an event. If they feel like the venue is too full they should employ the 'one in, one out' policy. It is up to the crew working to use their judgement if they feel there is a potential fire/safety risk due to over-capacity.

### ***Procedure at end of events***

All events should be advertised as finishing no later than 2am. This means no more admittance after this. Music should be switched off and bar closed by 2am. Everyone should be out of the social centre by 3am. These times are non-negotiable. Event organisers should be made aware of this policy before putting on an event.

All cans, bottles and debris should be cleared from all rooms before the end of the night. The floors should be swept and there should be a crew of people ready to mop the floors and clean the toilets after each event. If the café/kitchen is being used, that must be cleaned, including all dishes used, ready for use the following day.

Cleaning up afterwards is part of the event you are organising. If people do not leave the social centre as they found it (i.e. ready to use) then there will be a question of whether those people will be allowed to put on any further events.

### ***Advertising Events***

All events should be advertised as finishing at 2am or before. Bar prices should not be advertised on flyers/posters. This is for legal reasons.

### ***The Police***

The police have no automatic right of entry. It is essential that the police are not allowed entry into the building at any time, as this will compromise the building's safety as well as those inside. There should be at least one person working on the door who is aware of the law and feels comfortable in dealing with them.

Finally, the social centre does not support private business for private profit. Anyone wishing to put on an event or sell things must have full agreement from the social centre at a social centre meeting.

## **APPENDIX 2: FURTHER INFORMATION ON FIELDWORK**

### **Meetings attended**

Due to the regularity and often informality of many meetings attended (especially in the case of social centres) over the course of the fieldwork, it has not been possible to accurately record their dates and places.

### ***IWW***

Monthly London branch meetings  
Quarterly UK-wide delegates meetings  
Annual international IWW conventions  
Occasional London emergency or special interest meetings

### ***Social Centres***

Weekly collective meetings  
Occasional gatherings (e.g. at London Anarchist Bookfair)  
Regular *ad hoc* collective or sub-collective meetings

### **Semi-Structured or Unstructured Interviews Conducted**

### ***IWW***

Greg, New York USA, 16/8/2007  
Jacob, Cincinnati USA, 18/8/2007  
Daisy, Cincinnati USA, 19/8/2007  
Frank, Cincinnati USA, 19/8/2007  
Tim, Cincinnati USA, 19/8/2007  
Lucy, Chicago USA, 20/8/2007  
Paul, Detroit USA, 23/8/2007

Anon., Madison USA, 29/8/2007\*

### ***Social Centres***

Harriet, Vortex, 15/8/2008

Adam, Vortex, 26/10/2008

Anon., Vortex, 13/11/2008\*

Anon., Hackney Social Centre, 23/10/2008\*

Charlotte, Hackney Social Centre, 9/4/2009

\* These interviewees requested that their interviews be neither recorded nor directly quoted from.

### **Archives Visited**

#### ***IWW***

Franklin and Penelope Rosemont Collection of IWW Publications and Ephemera, Midwest Manuscript Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

IWW Archive, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit.

#### ***Social Centres***

None.

### **Positions Held (formal or informal)**

#### ***IWW***

London IWW Branch Secretary, May 2007 – May 2008.

Education Workers Industrial Secretary (UK), July 2008 – June 2009.  
Chair, Survey and Research Committee (International), January 2009 – Present.

***Social Centres***

Collective member, Vortex, January – April 2007.

Building Maintenance Collective member, Vortex, January – March 2007.

Café Collective member, Vortex, February – April 2007.

Collective member, Hackney Social Centre, February – April 2008.

# IX

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